

Compare the way in which 'double indemnity' and 'blade runner' essay



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

In 1944, shortly after the Second World War, a flood of American films could be found in France. The critics noticed many recurrent images throughout these B-movies, which were smaller films shown before the main feature.

The films became known as a genre: film noir.

Film noir is French for 'black films'. We tend to relate the colour black to death and pessimistic thoughts. This ties in with the negative theme of the films and the outlook of the characters.

The physical symbols that make up the genre of these films include mirrors, staircases, Venetian blinds, fire escapes, telephones and bright neon lights.

The camera shots are often dramatic and very angular, and among the scenes used are rain-lashed streets, fog-bound train stations and empty echoing buildings. The use of lighting is a very important feature of these films and contains very sharp contrasts of light and darkness. This is known as chiaroscuro lighting. The empty echoing building shows how alone the people in this world feel

## Plot Summaries

### Summary of 'Double Indemnity'

The story converges around top insurance salesman Walter Neff. The narrative is told by the use of male voice over (MVO) and flashback. Neff meets the seductive Phyllis Dietrichson and after a few meetings they confess their love for one another. Phyllis convinces him that they should kill her husband so they can share the double indemnity claim. Double indemnity is a clause in an insurance policy that doubles the payment in

cases of accidental death. Neff kills Mr. Dietrichson and throws his body onto the train tracks, whilst posing as him. This made it look as if Mr. Dietrichson died by falling off the train. Neff's boss, Barton Keyes, suspects that something is wrong.

Neff visits the Dietrichson household, and both himself and Phyllis are planning to shoot one another. Phyllis manages to shoot him first, but only in the leg. He shoots her twice and she is dead.

We then go back to Neff recording this story into his Dictaphone and see Keyes in the doorway. Neff tries to escape but collapses in a doorway (because of his wound) as Keyes telephones the police.

#### Summary of ' Blade Runner'

The film is a Neo-Noir, which is modern version of the traditional film noir. This narrative is not told by use of flashback, but as the story progresses with MVO. ' Blade Runner' centres on the mysterious Deckert. He is an ex-bladerunner; people who track down and retire (kill) the replicants. He is rehired by his old boss to track down and kill four replicants: Zhora, Roy, Leon and Pris. These replicants were made by Tyrrel and have been made with a four-year life span. He also made another replicant, Rachel, who does not actually know that she is a replicant because she had memories implanted into her brain. The replicants want to find a way to prevent their demise and go in search of a way to do this. Deckert kills Zhora, Roy and Rachel shoots Leon, then Roy dies at the end. Deckert and Rachel leave the city on a train.

## Characters

### Women

The femme fatale seduces men to get them to do what she wants. She may say that she is in love, but it is all a ruse for her benefit. Though the women in film noir are predominately these manipulative individuals, some also fall into the category of the nurturing mother figure. Nurturing mother figures truly love the man they say they are in love with and care for him deeply.

### What's In A Name?

In ' Double Indemnity', the femme fatale is Phyllis Dietrichson, although throughout the film she is referred to as Phyllis. A couple of times at the beginning, Neff calls her Mrs Dietrichson, but from then on she is called ' baby' or other cliché½s. The fact that she is known by different names reflects upon the idea that she is two-faced, and as Neff only begins calling her by different names after he has got to know her, this says that she is not what she may seem at first: she is not a caring wife.

Her first name, Phyllis is English and German and is the name of a minor character in Greek mythology who killed herself for love and was transformed into an almond tree; the Greek word ' phyllis' means foliage, so clearly her name doomed her from the start. Though Phyllis Dietrichson may not have killed herself for love, Neff kills her partially because he thought she loved him and she did not. Her name suggests her destiny at the end (being killed) right from the start. The fact that the Greek word ' phyllis' means

foliage also insinuates that she is actually rather weak, however strong she portrays herself to be.

Her surname I also believe is quite important. 'Dietrich' is German for 'picklock'. A picklock is someone who picks locks, and this ties in with her manipulating Neff into getting what she wants: her husband dead. Her name is German and at the time of production the Germans were still not (to put it politely) England's favourite people in the world. Therefore upon hearing her surname, the English would associate her with the Germans and have an evil perception of her before she even spoke.

The femme fatale in 'Blade Runner' is Rachel, a replicant. But she is not as obviously the femme fatale as Phyllis; she has many qualities of the nurturing mother figure as well. She has no surname that we know of, same as all the other characters in this film. Her forename is a biblical name meaning 'ewe' in Hebrew. This was borne by the beloved wife of Jacob and mother of Joseph and of Benjamin, at whose birth she died. The fact that the name comes from the bible in a positive fashion already says that she is not entirely evil. It also means ewe and ewes are not thought of as evil, they are gentle animals. This is reflected in Rachel's personality throughout the film, as she is calm and gentle.

### Appearance

Rachel wears a figure-hugging dress that accentuates her shape. Her hair is done in the style of the fifties, when film noir was most popular. This reminds us that she is still a femme fatale, however much she may not act like it.

Phyllis also wears tight fitting clothes and is forever leaning into Walter. Her use of her sexuality is more obvious than Rachel's, and therefore she is more clearly the femme fatale.

Pris, one of the female replicants, wears a see-through plastic dress with just underwear underneath. Though she may be almost naked underneath, she is still not as vulnerable as you would expect an almost naked person to be. She, like all the other characters in film noirs, has an invisible barrier between her and the outside world and this is specifically obvious in 'Blade Runner'.

### Personality

The main difference between the two femme fatales is the manipulative side. Rachel does not seem to care as much about getting what she wants, and seems to rely on Deckert not so much to gain anything, but for emotional support. She is struggling against the idea that she is a replicant and refuses to believe it. She disowns the emotionless side (as all replicants are supposed to be devoid of all emotion) as if this is not something she wants to be. It is ironic that the replicants show more emotion than anyone in 'Blade Runner' or 'Double Indemnity'. Especially in comparison to Phyllis Dietrichson, who seems to not care about anything or anyone and is very materialistic. She wants money and is not bothered how she gets it.

Phyllis even tries to convince the audience that the whole business is of Neff's doing, when actually it was her that manipulated him into doing it.

The irony is shown yet again when in 'Blade Runner' the way they test to see if someone is a replicant is with an emotion test. The tester asks the person questions which would trigger emotion in a human.

## Men

The male leads are usually detective hero figures. He has a pessimistic outlook on life and faces the idea that he has no control over it, that fate has put him on a journey he cannot get off, with acquiescence. Though this could be said for nearly all the characters in film noir, it is particularly evident with this character as it is his story we are following.

## What's In A Name?

Unlike the female characters, the males' names' are of no real importance. The fact that there is no meaning to neither Deckert nor Walter symbolises how they are uncertain of who they are and the world they live in. It is also something to hide behind and we can see the two men shielding their face with the hat often.

It is also saying that the women are two faced, complicated and hiding something, as their names' have alternate meanings.

## Appearance

Though the times may be futuristic in 'Blade Runner', Deckert's outfit certainly is not. He wears the typical detective hero's costume, which consists of a long trench coat and a fedora hat. The coat can be seen loosely flowing around him and he has no control over it, like his life and fate. The

hat casts a shadow over his face, which represents his need to hide away from the evil in the world.

### Personality

Both Deckert and Walter are pessimistic to the bone and are portrayed as quite unsociable characters. Walter's love, however, never seems believable, whereas at the end of 'Blade Runner' when Rachel and Deckert are leaving on a train, he does seem to show genuine compassion for her.

Deckert (voice-over): Gaff had been there, and let her live. Four years, he figured. He was wrong. Tyrell had told me Rachael was special: no termination date. I didn't know how long we had together, who does?

Though they may seem different, Phyllis and Neff actually have something in common: their lack of love and trust for one another.

Deckert: Do you love me?

Rachel: I love you.

Deckert: Then trust me.

Rachel: I trust you

Deckard (voice-over): The report would be routine retirement of a replicant, which didn't make me feel any better about shooting a woman in the back. There it was again. Feeling, in myself. For her, for Rachael



Deckert does not kill because he likes it or for his own personal gain, he kills because it is his own job and he is represented as not having a choice in the matter. Film noirs are very misogynistic and this is reflected in who Deckert kills - only the female replicants. Rachel's femme fatale side is revealed when she shoots Leon, even if it was to defend Deckert from death.

Two other characters that are not as developed in 'Blade Runner' as Deckert are J. F. Sebastian and Dr. Eldon Tyrell. Tyrell is the creator of the replicants and J. F. Sebastian is an engineer and toy-maker. They both make things that imitate human life, but the reasons for which they do so are very different. Sebastian leads a very lonely life and his solution for loneliness is to literally make friends. This contrasts sharply with Tyrell's manufacture of replicants to suit more selfish needs. This is saying that even though there is evil in the world, there are always good people too. The goodness of Sebastian, for whom we sympathise, highlights the bad things in the other characters of the film.