# Film of Choice: Double Indemnity

The film that was seen for this paper is Billy Wilder’s Double Indemnity which was shown in 1944. Double Indemnity was staaarred by Fred McMurray and Barbara Stanwyck where the story, as the title suggests, is about getting double indemnity of an insurance coverage. The character of Walter Neff and Mrs. Phyllis Dietrichson were having an affair where they conspired to kill Mrs. Phyllis Dietrichson’s husband who happens to be Walter Neff’s client to receive a double indemnity of his insurance money. Such, the story revolved around the dark theme of conspiracy, sex, and murder which was conveyed and highlighted in the film through the use of the genre of noir.

Noir refers to the general ambiance which generally leans towards the dark side. Noir uses dimly lit light and disturbing music to emphasize the element of evil in a film suggesting that the characters of a film are evil and violent such as the characters of Walter Neff and Mrs. Phyllis Dietrichson who conspired to kill Mrs. Phyllis Dietrichson husband to get his insurance money. Noir’s use of contrasting lights light and shadows that is made dominant in Double Indemnity as the film is made in black and white which made the contrast more prominent. The most dominant aspect of cinematography of the film is overemphasized directional lighting intended to make dark shadows (Spicer , 2002) to hint the audience of the evil intention of Walter Neff and Mrs. Phyllis Dietrichson. The effective use of noir in depicting evil theme is evident in one particular scene in Double Indemnity after he killed Mr. Dietrichson. Upon his return into the building, the surrounding is very dark which provided the ambiance of evil that Walter has done. The montage of the dimly lit building with only the sconce lamp and the dim light from the office doorway after the murder scene provided the scant illumination that casted a huge shadow in the office which is emblematic of the extent of darkness that just has enveloped Walter. His face is also contrasted with an overemphasized shadow when turned on the lamp on his desk where he wrote his murderous deed. It also very noticeable that the succeeding scenes is dimly lit after the murder of Mr. Dietrichson suggesting the evil that now pervades the remaining characters as they try to cover the crime. The neurotic soundtrack in the film particularly Schubert’s Symphony No 8 in B minor, Unfinished also complemented the dim light in the scenes that provided an “eerie” feel in the movie which is characteristic of noir films.

The use of noir in film is so effective in conveying dark themes that even when advances in film making already has made it in high definition and in full color, film makers still deliberately use obvious noir of black and white in films. This is evident in the contemporary film of Frank Miller’s Sin City where it is rendered dominantly in black and white to emphasize the use of noir in rendering its shady characters (Miller, 2005). But unlike in its predecessor Double Indemnity where the murder is subtle that the culprits even attempted to cover it up, Sin City is excessive and vulgar in its murderous and violent scenes. Correspondingly, the use of noir is also very obvious as almost every scene is dark and contrasted either to dark and light or colored or monochrome. The use of noir can be said to be excessive because the film is deliberately rendered in black and white when colored film is already available in high definition. Other elements of noir are also added such as rainy scenes to add gloom to the film.

Probably, the provision of color in films added another dimension in contrasting characters as it is no longer limited to mere light and shadows but also to contrast color with a monochrome background to emphasize a character. In the work of Frank Miller, it is noticeable that the dress of the female characters is sometimes colored (more often red) in contrast to their monochrome background to emphasize their character (i.e. flirtatious or prostitute) which is consistent to the genre of noir of overemphasizing the contrasting colors which in this film, not only limited to darkness and light but also included colored objects against monochrome background.

## My Criteria for Quality in Film

1. A good movie begins with an interesting story so it is very important that a movie must have, before anything else, an engaging and tasteful script for it to be considered a good one.
2. A good movie must have a visually engaging cinematography so it would be better if it would follow certain style or genre such as noir.
3. A good script and visually engaging cinematography will be for naught if acting is bad so it is imperative that the script must be delivered with realistic acting.
4. There must also be a complementing sound that would emphasize some scenes in the character to make the film more immersive and interesting.
5. A good movie must have complementing props that would make the setting realistic.

## References

Frank Miller  (Director). (2005). Sin City [Motion picture]. United States: Miramax.

Spicer Andrew. Film Noir. Longman; 1 edition, 2002.

Wilder, B. (Director). (1944). Double indemnity. [Video file].