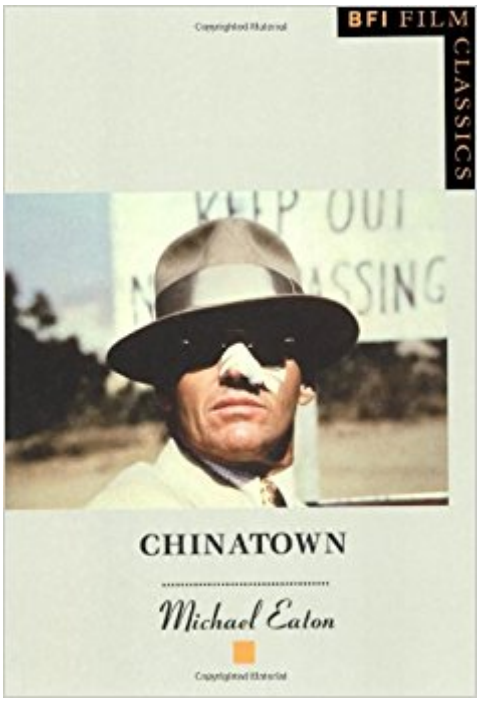
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Chinatown (BFI Film Classics)



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Synopsis

This study analyzes "Chinatown" in the context of the figure of the detective in literature and film from Sophocles to Edgar Allan Poe and Alfred Hitchcock. In the account of "Chinatown"'s narrative development Michael Eaton seeks to uncover both its relationship to the pessimism of American cinema in the 1970s and its veritably mythical structure.

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Customer Reviews

How did an avant-garde director, a script doctor with only one major screenplay to his credit, the producer of The Odd Couple and Love Story, and a lead performer despised by the Hollywood establishment come together to make one of the greatest and most enduring films of the 1970s? Chinatown, directed by Roman Polanski, written by Robert Towne, produced by Robert Evans, and starring Jack Nicholson, is a lush, mysterious, thrilling work whose influence still resonates in movies as different as L.A. Confidential and The Big Lebowski. This little book, part of a remarkable series published by the British Film Institute, guides you through Chinatown's production history. Author Michael Eaton also summarizes its complex plot and offers intriguing interpretations. Eaton is particularly interested in the symbolism of the movie's title, which he sees as having multiple meanings: it is a state of mind, an image of the world, even a metaphor for filmmaking itself. Breaking with critical tradition, he credits Evans--not Polanski, Towne, or Nicholson--as the major creative force behind the movie. Breaking with interpretative tradition, Eaton displays sympathy for Jake Gittes, the film's hero, characterizing him as a man trapped in a detective plot turned on its head, a world where "it is better not to act, much better not to know" the truth. --Raphael Shargel

This study analyzes "Chinatown" in the context of the figure of the detective in literature and film from Sophocles to Edgar Allan Poe and Alfred Hitchcock. In the account of "Chinatown"'s narrative development Michael Eaton seeks to uncover both its relationship to the pessimism of American cinema in the 1970s and its veritably mythical structure.

A perfect analysis of the best of the modern film noir classics, and an ideal companion to Nicholson’s greatest movie and performance. A book for the literate filmgoer who also appreciates academic excellence.

one of my favorite detective shows. Nicholson is great. There hasn’t been a good story like this in quite a while.

The BFI Series is a pleasure - this is one of the best.

The movie Chinatown spends very little time there. Only at the end, when the drama reaches its horrible but inevitable climax, does the action take us there. This little book, an average entry in the BFI series, explains why. Chinatown is not a physical place, but a metaphor. Unfortunately, it is a dark one, where it is better off not knowing anything and where attempts to help, with the best of intentions, invariably makes things worse.Whether Chinatown is a throwback to film noir of the era when it is set (the 1930s) is an open question, and one that the author explores. It certainly has many aspects that suggests that it is: the mysterious woman, the private eye not only thrown down the wrong track but used as a mechanism to perpetuate the wrongdoing at issue, and, last but not least, the incredible moral vacuity at the center of it all. This book touches upon these all and explores them a little in depth.The book also explores the actual story, as well. As the author points out, for such an important metropolis, and the heart of the film world at that, it is surprising how few films have addressed the history of Los Angeles outside of the discrete area of entertainment. Although shenanigans at the water company may not make for exciting reading on paper, put a little murder and incest into it, have a couple of big name stars appear, and the public will eat it up.The writing is inflected with a touch of the snobbery and reflexive leftism too often seen in this series (he uses the word `capitalistic’ pejoratively, a clear sign) but not enough to swallow the whole. In all, not a bad read.

After reading the BFI books on DOUBLE INDEMNITY (which spends most of its 66 pages detailing the careers of Wilder and Hammet) & CITIZEN KANE (which offers absolutely nothing new) this edition on CHINATOWN is head and shoulders above the aforementioned. Nicely written, informative and evocative of the film itself.

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