



In recognition of NAR's forthcoming *Gas Station Pulp* series, this *Crosscuts* highlights recent releases of retro crime noir.

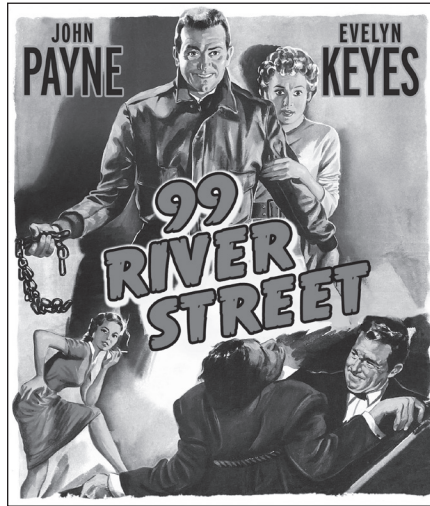
*Ace in the Hole* (1951), Criterion 2014, 111 mins, \$39.95 • “They’ll do it as fast as they can, but they got to do it right,” says huckster reporter Chuck Tatum (Kirk Douglas in a searing performance) in this cynical, hard-edged film courtesy of Billy Wilder. Right? For whom? Not for the man trapped in a collapsed mine; the engineers could get him out in 12–16 hours by shoring up the beams and going in, but Tatum convinces them to drill from the top, a process that’ll take 6–7 days and thus give Tatum 6–7 days of storytelling to sell to the public and write his way out of his misery in Albuquerque. Right means exploitation, cashing in. The sheriff seeking re-election does it right, projecting himself as a hero dedicated to rescuing the man; the trapped man’s wife (the brittle and brassy Jan Sterling) does it right too, allowing herself to be portrayed in Tatum’s stories as forever dutiful, while in actuality she’s earning enough money via her husband’s tragedy to get her own bus ticket out of town: her diner had never been more busy, filled up with carnival gawkers. Lurid, dark, this no-holds-exposed on the American media’s penchant for sensation packs a real wallop.

*The Red House* (1947), The Film Detective, 2016, 100 mins, \$14.95 • European art cinema meets American melo-thriller in this tasty noir written and directed by Delmer Daves. Allene Roberts makes her stunning film debut as the earnest and luminescent Meg, the adopted daughter of Pete and Ellen Morgan (Edward G. Robinson and Judith Anderson) who seeks out an obscured past. Like a fairy tale protagonist Meg is lured by the eerie sounds and “call” of the forest to a strange red house. Pete forbids Meg to explore the forest, the red house suggesting his tree of knowledge. But Meg disobeys, reconnecting with her origins. The past can never be fully repressed and as Meg rushes toward it and Pete away from it the two collide in an incendiary finish full of guilt and bizarre incestuous overtones.

## Crosscuts

BRIEF DVD REVIEWS

GRANT TRACEY



*Kansas City Confidential* (1952), The Film Detective, 2016, 99 mins, \$14.95 • Four masked robbers heist a cool million from an armored car, and Joe Rolfe (John Payne), an ex-con is falsely accused of the crime. The robbers’ getaway truck matches the one Rolfe delivers flowers in. Roughed up in a holding cell by overzealous cops, the disenfranchised Rolfe goes undercover, infiltrating the gang to recover the money. The catch: the leader of the gang (Preston Foster) is ex five-o and knows Rolfe is a phony. A second catch? His daughter (Coleen Gray) is in love with Rolfe. Phil Karlson’s direction is taut; photography of George E. Diskant moody and claustrophobic—the final scene in the boat’s belly is muscular and sweaty. Clearly a crime noir godfather to Tarantino’s *Reservoir Dogs*.

*The Vanishing* (1988), Criterion, 2014, 106 mins, \$29.95 • This tale of obsession plays like a neo-noir Greek Tragedy. Rex (Gene Bervoets), who is already dead but doesn’t know it yet, searches desperately for Saskia (the ebullient Johanna ter Steege) whom he lost on a sunny vacation trip three years ago. “It’s an homage, mon-

sieur,” he confesses to French television, filling his remaining days with over-determined, self-imposed ritual. Unable to live in the present, he’s unable to move forward. The posters he hangs about town asking for clues to Saskia’s disappearance, represent a dark void at the film’s center: Saskia’s portrait dominates the poster’s graphic design and Rex’s thoughts. The killer, a sociopath chemistry professor (Bernard-Pierre Donnadieu) sends postcards daring Rex to meet him. The two do meet, and Rex, like Orpheus, looks behind into the past, fulfilling a promise to not only see but to re-live.

*Manhunter* (1986), MGM, Shout Factory 2016, 120–124 mins, \$29.95 • “It’s just you and me now, sport. I’m gonna find you, goddamn it,” Will Graham (William Petersen) promises as he looks through a café window, but it’s his own image that looks back at him. Yes, this talented profiler is going to track down the serial killer known as the Tooth Fairy, but he also has to find a self lost in the ugly slipstream of a killer’s thoughts. Graham’s quest for truth is Pyrrhic, causing him to die a little each day as he inhabits Keats’s idea of negative capability, transforming into the killer’s imagined probabilities, a dangerous space that just may reveal the darker recesses of his own heart. Brooding, intense, creepy.

*99 River Street* (1953), Kino Lorber 2016, 83 mins, \$19.98 • Phil Karlson’s tough hitting noir opens with taxi-driver Ernie Driscoll (John Payne) watching a televised replay of a boxing match from three years ago when he vied for the heavyweight title. He yearns for an ir-retrievable past. His wife (Peggy Castle), disenchanted with Driscoll’s recent fortunes, finds promises of wealth in an affair with a low-level wiseguy (Brad Dexter). Driscoll, eventually framed for her murder, enters with the help of a stage actress (Evelyn Keyes) a dark, two-fisted demimonde in which one of the heavies calls everyone “kitty.” There Driscoll reaffirms his manhood and self-worth. The cabbie’s life ambition: to run a gas station! □