GERMAN EXPRESSIONISM AND FILM NOIR

Basic elements of a film: script, direction, camera, acting, music/sound, editing, lighting, costumes and make-up

German Expressionist Films (1920s-1930s)
Initially, highly symbolic and stylized non-realistic sets, sometimes geometric, filmed indoors
Dark human experiences–madness, betrayal, paranoia, obsession
Subjective point of view (inner moods, feelings, perceptions)
Moody
Extreme camera angles, which often suggest being watched
Repeated imagery of stairs, empty hallways and corridors
Harsh contrast of light and dark (chiaroscuro) reflect disturbed psyches and oppressive world
Shadows and silhouettes express anxiety, uncertainty, and mental instability
Structures jut horizontally and vertically to create stripes, angles and geometric forms
Blurs boundary between reality and dreams
Fatalism
Voice-overs common
Distortion created by make-up, camera angles, costumes, strange sets, actors’ body language
Influenced horror films, film noir, and Olivier’s Hamlet
Examples: The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari, Nosferatu, The Last laugh, Metropolis, M, The Golem

Metropolis (1927)  The Last Laugh (1924)  Nosferatu (1922)

Political background:
WWII ended in 1945, and the Cold War was in full swing. Individuals felt anxious, powerless, and threatened by an oppressive totalitarian USSR and the atomic bomb.

Film Noir (1940s-1950s)
Hostile, threatening world
Difficulty of determining truth or reality
Protagonist must solve a sensational crime, usually murder
The alluring, independent, usually dangerous woman is often a mystery, requiring solution
Sexuality a driving force
Expressionist distortion of protagonist’s perceptions, state of mind, obsessions, anxieties, desires
Hard-boiled, cynical, disillusioned characters
Strong sense of insecurity, betrayal, or being trapped, with an unhappy ending
Use of shadows and deep focus to express the protagonist’s isolation
Filmed in black and white, often at night
Extreme tracking shots
Voice overs
Examples: DOA, The Postman Always Rings Twice, Double Indemnity, Touch of Evil, Strangers on a Train, Maltese Falcon, Key Largo, The Big Sleep, The Third Man