Preface to the 2008 Edition

More Than Night was an unusually pleasurable book to write, and when I looked back at it after almost ten years in order to prepare a new edition, I was surprised at how little I wanted to change. I might have enjoyed writing at greater length about a larger number of films, but the scope of the book necessarily limited the opportunity to discuss many of my favorite pictures in detail. I chose instead to view noir from a series of seven broad vantage points, and in the process I pushed against the normal boundaries of the term, insisting that it can’t be neatly defined, that it isn’t exclusively American, and that the discourse surrounding it is largely a postmodern development. I continue to believe that this is the best way to understand film noir, but I must admit that in a few cases my approach required me to concentrate on the margins rather than the center of the noir category. I should perhaps emphasize that even though I’ve questioned the assumptions behind many earlier writings, I agree with all previous commentators that the beating heart of film noir can be located in Hollywood during the 1940s and 1950s. This was a period when the industry regularly turned out modest, relatively unsung thrillers, often produced according to formula and released without fanfare, that were nearly always worth seeing. Even today, some of the lesser known films of the type—to mention only two, Roy William Neill’s Black Angel (1946) and John Berry’s Tension (1949)—remain deeply satisfying exercises in style and storytelling. Such films are the truest kind of noir, and fortunately we have access to increasing
numbers of them on cable TV and DVD. I’ve listed a good many of their
titles in the pages that follow.

This new edition of More Than Night involves no radical changes in
the original text but enables me to correct several factual errors that have
been pointed out by friends and reviewers. It also enables me to write a
new chapter in which I expand on some basic issues, review some recent
literature, and discuss examples of film noir from the first decade of the
twenty-first century. For advice and help with this task I owe special
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of Chicago, who gave me the pleasure of introducing them to famous
examples of film noir and made numerous smart observations about the
films. I’m particularly grateful to these students for confirming my in-
stinctive feeling that noir continues to be a vital and relevant subject of
study.