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Anthony Mann

T-Men

T-Men (1947) is a film in the same documentary format as Henry Hathaway's *The House on 92nd Street* (1945) and *13 Rue Madeline* (1946). Please see a chart showing the history of the semi-documentary film. There is the same look at a government crime fighting institution as *House*, in this case the Secret Service, and the same emphasis on its labs and high tech skills. The scenes at the Secret Service also document that institution's crime fighting routine. There even is the same narrator to both films, the actor Reed Hadley (who left a fond impression for his starring role in one of my favorite movie serials, *Zorro's Fighting Legion*). There is also a lot of similarity in the criminal organizations both film's heroes track down. Both are ruthless high powered conspiracies; both epitomize ultimate evil. In *House*'s case, this is a bit more natural - the bad guys are Nazi spies. Their complex organization, with hidden identities, elaborate schemes of communication, and murderous efficiency at eliminating threats, seem like a natural extension of the spy tradition. In *T-Men*, this is a bit more of a stretch: the villains are a counterfeiting gang. Even the film notes that their methods are unusual for such a gang. We are used to seeing underworld gangs depicted a bit more romantically on screen, with energetic men having glamorous "careers" as gangsters, and complex codes of loyalty and "honor". By contrast in *T-Men*, the gangsters are constantly ready to murder anyone who seems like the slightest threat to them. They seem ruthless, overwhelmingly sinister, and without the slightest sense of loyalty among thieves - or even fun. The menace they present seems frighteningly convincing - most viewers realize that the romanticized portrayal of gangsters in other films is highly fictionalized, and the ruthlessness and lack of loyalty of the current bunch seems far more like most people's suspicions of how a gang really operates. However, it does make the movie a lot more grim than many gangster films.

Joining the Secret Service means taking part in an all male institution. The characters played by Dennis O'Keefe and Albert Ryder take on new identities, "Harrigan" and "Tony Gennaro", and these two men essentially function as a team. They room together, and share primary emotional loyalty to each other. Gennaro gives up his

wife, getting a "divorce" in the process, as the film points out, and Harrigan stops seeing the women he dates before he takes on his new identity. There is a relentless force in the film, dragging the heroes into a new and tragic existence.

Hathaway's films also tend to focus on ordinary people who want a normal life, but who are instead tragically pulled into a world of crime. This describes Victor Mature in *Kiss of Death*, and to a lesser degree Mark Stevens and Lucille Ball in *The Dark Corner*. This is a persistent approach in Mann's film noirs, too: see *Desperate*, *Raw Deal* and *Side Street*. Both Hathaway's and Mann's films have an aching, brooding quality. An "if only we could lead a normal life" wistfulness.

Mann's noir films seem influenced by Hathaway's in other ways, too. Hathaway's films, like Mann's, tend to have sadistic villains. One thinks especially of Richard Widmark's character pushing the little old lady down the stairs in Hathaway's *Kiss of Death*. One also notes the mobster played by Raymond Burr in Mann's *Raw Deal*, and his flaming violence anticipating Fritz Lang's in *The Big Heat* (1953). The mob's hit man in *T-Men* is Moxie (played by Charles McGraw). He is dressed to the teeth in elaborate suits. He has four chilling threat scenes with Harrigan.

During 1940, there was a short lived back-up feature called *T-Men* in the comic book *Target Comics*. It too dealt with a Treasury Agent who fought criminals, often by using scientific lab work. It is unclear what relation, if any, this series has to Mann's film. Please see the article on the T-Men comic book series for a detailed discussion.

Visual Style

The film's most notable achievement is its elaborate visual style. The style is mainly produced through composition and lighting. There is occasional camera movement in the film, but it is mainly used to link up different camera setups - the camera might pan from one composition to another, for example, as it does to show two corridors of the warehouse. Some scenes have a diagonal base to their composition. These include the shot in the Los Angeles Secret Service Office. Watching the desk recede into the background of the shot here is a fascinating exercise in perspective. Another group of scenes shows a deep, long corridor. These include the stacks at the Detroit Library, the corridors at the warehouse, and the frontal shot of a long table at the Secret Service. These shots tend to be very dark, and suggest some hidden mystery or menace is lurking. Another set of shots involve reflections in window glass. These include shots in a Secret Service Office, shots in store windows, and a scene in Club Trinidad which reflects light off a phone booth door. Another set of remarkable images are the lights diffused in the steam rooms - these are unlike anything else in film history. By the way, this seems to be the very first "murder in a steam room by turning up the pipes" ever - I've seen countless versions of this stolen on TV.

The Opening Montage

Another set of shots include large complex structures lit up at night. These include what looks like some sort of fence, during the initial murder of the informant that opens the film, and the well lit up ship at the beginning of the final sequence. The fence shot contains below a trapezoidally receding wall, reminiscent of many shots in *He Walked By Night*. But above, it contains a white diamond shaped lattice work that is most unusual. Mann pans over from here to a face-on photograph of a wall. This shot allows him to make rectilinear images that recall Mondrian. There are no angles in this shot; it is like a two dimensional image containing straight horizontal and vertical lines. In one corner of the screen is the only circle in the image, a lamp shining the light. This combination of rectilinear patterns and a small circle is an irresistible visual combination. One finds similar image in Ozu's *Floating Weeds* (1957), in which a red circle near the bottom center of the screen contrasts with many vertical gray lines of the architecture. Mann will also include closer, equally flat shot of the wall, that treats it as a nested series of L shapes.

Later, Mann includes perspective shots along this wall. These are in his full perspectival mode. In addition, there is a straight shadow on the ground directly perpendicular to it, reaching across the image; it anticipates a shot early in *He Walked By Night*, which contains the shadow of a lamp post across the image in a similar fashion. Both shadows are narrow, both are straight, and of constant thickness. Both seem to stretch from right to left across the screen. Both are directly perpendicular, which makes them nearly horizontal lines on screen. Mann loves such purely geometric constructs. Some of these angle shots also include the circular lamp post, once again the only circle in many straight line segments.

The early segments also include a series of shots introducing Charles McGraw. These show his head emerging from the darkness, then rotating around. He seems like a powerful mechanical object, such as a lighthouse or piston. This image creates a sense of machine like implacability to him, as if he were larger than life. He anticipates the robotic killers of James Cameron's later *Terminator* films, with a similar kind of all powerful machine like presence here.

He Walked By Night

Visual style is at its peak in *He Walked By Night* (1948). Many of the scenes have rectangles in their backgrounds, produced by door frames, windows, maps or wall regions. These are turned into trapezoids by being shot at off angles. They make very complex compositions. The screen tends to be shot with deep focus. Often the

far back region of the screen is brilliantly lit, while most of the foreground is in shadow: for example, we are in a dimly lit room, and in the background a trapezoidal door opens on another room, in which someone turns on a very bright light. One saw similar effects in *T-Men*, but here it is done more systematically throughout the entire film. There are also many purely geometric objects that are integrated with the compositions - an octagonal clock, or a round mirror. There is usually only one such object in the shot at any one time. It is prominently displayed, and its round or rounded contour forms a complex balance with all of the rectangle based trapezoids that form most of the composition. The object tends to be the focus of the shot. One feels that the large trapezoids are converging on one point or region, as at a focus, and the rounded object is at the center of that focus, and gives a point to the rest of the composition.

Mann's shots in the film tend to come in series. Each series has its own distinctive approach to composition and lighting. As in *T-Men*, these are the key elements of the film's visual style. Six series are important: 1) Overhead shots showing crowd scenes of police, occurring throughout the film. 2) Shots from a low angle of a few objects, making diagonal lines across the screen, with trapezoidal regions. These also occur throughout the film. 3) Outdoor still lifes of night scenes, occurring at the beginning of the movie. 4) Shots of the underground storm sewer tunnels, lit up by flashlights: mainly used in the finale. 5) Buildings with circularly topped arched doorways: occurring in the center of the film. 6) Slightly elevated shots showing the police talking to witnesses or suspects. Mann and Alton have a different visual style for each of these series. There is not one uniform "visual style" spread out over all the shots in the movie. Rather each series has its own distinctive approach. These series do have common elements - they are full of elaborate, often off center, highly geometric compositions in the Fritz Lang / film noir tradition, with elaborate light effects. Still, in many ways, each series of shots forms its own separate world. It is unclear how these series should be considered. Do they constitute a "formal system" of film making? The answer has to be yes: these possibilities are pursued in a systematic way. Within each series, are the similarities/differences between shots meant to be considered as formal variations of each other? Or should the individual shots be considered simply as "opportunities" created by the paradigm of the overall series: a skeleton approach that helps Mann and Alton develop individual shots? This is a much tougher question.

Series 1: Overhead Crowd Shots

A series of shots in the film are long shots of many policemen. These tend to be overhead, at an angle not quite 45 degrees, perhaps closer to 30; they show a large tableau of many active police, both uniformed and plain clothes. They can be investigating a crime scene, or at work at police headquarters. Lighting in such

scenes is made up of many separate regions. Some areas have swaths of bright light passing over them, usually reflecting on the badges of the uniformed cops, and gleaming off cars. Other areas are in shadow. The whole effect adds to the complex composition. These shots are visually very creative. The cops are rarely at rest in such scenes. The composition tends to be relatively stable, but many of the cops are in motion, and the effect is of a beehive of productive activity. In one shot, some police get into a car, and it slowly takes off, making its way through the crowd of police. These are some of the best and most complicated shots in American film history. They can be compared with Mizoguchi's overhead 45 degree traveling shots.

One scene in the Post Office is especially Mizoguchi like. The lower part of the shot contains the uniformed postmen, the upper, the ceiling, including many light fixtures and some posts. The upper part is especially beautiful. It is there purely to create such a gorgeous spectacle, one of the most beautiful things in the movie. The posts form part of an interesting geometrical pattern. This Post Office shot is the least typical of all the "crowd shots" of the film. It is both similar to the other crowd shots, and yet distinctly different. It constitutes a real variation within the formal system of Mann and Alton's film making. Some of the differences: it is more purely frontal than the other crowd shots, with less of an overhead angle. The bodies are all clustered into one rectangular region at the base of the shot, instead of being scattered throughout the frame. The ceiling is seen from a frontal, rectangular composition, instead of being spread out diagonally across the frame, as well. The characters are peaceful looking post men, instead of glaringly macho cops.

The Post Office seems to have the same kind of lighting fixtures as the police station. These fixtures are of a complex geometric shape, that plays a major role in the composition of all the interior crowd scenes in *Night*. One can see similarly shaped light fixtures in the prison visiting room near the opening of *Raw Deal*. This means that they were presumably provided consciously by the art director of both films: perhaps with the collaboration of Mann and Alton. It also suggests that the police rooms and post offices in *Night* are studio sets, not real life locations used for the filming - although Mann and Alton could have brought in their own fixtures to real life locations, however.

Mann often has his characters in elaborate body postures. Each actor in a large scene will have a different, quite expressive posture, which they tend to hold fixed. They move this posture only to get up and walk away; such an exit is sometimes used as an "epilogue" to a shot. The actors are often facing another person. the gestures often convey an attitude to this person, and show a little mini-drama of human interaction between them. These small dramas can relate to police routine, such as questioning a witness or grilling a suspect. These sorts of body postures are most conspicuous in the overhead crowd shots, but they also occur in the low angle series as well.

A shot in the police station is striking. Many of the suited police have removed their jackets, and are in shirt sleeves. Their white shirts are in bright light, and form a center of attention in the composition. They also form a contrast to the black police uniforms, the other most conspicuous kind of clothes in the shot. These men are the only shirt sleeved men in the film: at other times, the police tend to be fully dressed in jacket and hat. The shirt sleeves tend to give the officers the look of businessmen. All the shirt sleeved men are in fact sitting behind desks. Their postures tend to suggest that they are in charge. The uniformed cops tend to be standing ramrod straight up, while the men in suits tend to be in various bending postures in the shot. The suits tend to be fairly brownish looking, and not as conspicuous as either the men in white shirts or the black police uniforms.

A recurring structure in Mann compositions: a strong vertical line near the center of the frame. These include the pillar marking the lobby corner of the police station in *He Walked By Night*, and a lamp post a man clings to in *Side Street*.

These overhead crowd shots occur in other Mann films, such as *Border Incident*. One scene in *Railroaded* shows may people at different tables in a night club. Each person has their own unique body posture, focused on the other people at the same table with him. One can also see the use of numerous cars to make up a composition in other Mann films, such as *Side Street*, and in similar scenes using wagon trains at the beginning of *Bend of the River*.

Series 2: Low Angle Shots

These shots tend to indoors, shot from a very low angle. They show rectangular objects from an angle, making pronounced trapezoids on the screen. Diagonal lines tend to cross the screen in sweeping lines. Ceilings often appear in these shots, as well; the ceiling lines too make up part of the composition. These shots are also extremely geometric; they show great creativity and personal style. They are very different in effect from the "overhead crowd" shots. They tend to show only a few people and objects, and these in relative close up. Above all, their plastic qualities are impressive. The compositions are of considerable visual beauty.

Series 3: Beginning Night Exterior Shots

These scenes at the beginning focus on a different character from those introduced later, patrolman Rawlins. Unlike the later cops, he is in the black uniform of the police, not a civilian suit and tie. They are exterior shots at night. What is most noticeable about them right away is the extraordinary use of light. Light streams out of the street lamps' globes, bathing the entire scene in an unearthly illumination, like the glow of an alien craft in a science fiction film. It is most extraordinary. These effects are

only found in Alton's films, as far as I know. Along with this light, comes two other common features. One is back lit shots of trees, which form misty outlines in front of the image. The trees can also show similarly detailed shadows on buildings. The other feature is the shadow of street signs, telegraph poles, and the like. These form long straight lines on the ground, and are important element in the composition of the images. Another important element of these opening scenes: the buildings portrayed in them. These building exteriors tend to be seen either frontally, or along one side of the shot. When shown along the side, they tend to make elongated, trapezoidal figures, stretching diagonally along the screen. These trapezoids recall those of the "low angle interior" shots (Series #2) of the film. These buildings also include fences, which form similar patterns. The buildings are carefully modeled with different kinds of light. There are illuminated windows, corners shown up in blazes of light, and regions of deep darkness. These building shots are almost "still lifes", showing the geometric patterns that can be formed by different kinds of rectangles and trapezoids, each with its own kind of lighting effect.

One shot in the beginning includes one of Mann and Alton's rare pans. This pan is designed more to reveal the geometry of the situation to the viewer, then to exploit the visual properties of panning as a mise-en-scene device. Mann is trying to emphasize that two events are going on in regions that are at 90 degree angles to each other; he uses a pan to link up the two points of view. This underlines to the viewer the spatial relationship between the two regions.

Later on in the film, there will be a series of day time shots. These show the exteriors of police headquarters and other buildings around L.A., while the hero of the film does a lot of leg work trying to track down clues about the bad guy. Many of these shots are also elaborately composed "still lifes" of the buildings. They are somewhat similar in their pictorial splendor to the night time building still lifes of the opening, although their lighting is very different.

Series 4: Climactic Underground Shots

Just as the opening of the film has its own visually distinctive kind of style, so do the closing scenes take us into a new world visually. These are the famous scenes underground, in the storm drain system below L.A. This use of special opening and closing Acts to the film makes for a satisfying dramatic arc to the story. It separates out these important transition zones, that of the entrance in and exit out from the picture. They have the same function as the overture and finale of an opera or musical. These segments also have less focus on what are the central characters of the rest of the film. The main police characters do not appear yet in the opening, and in the finale, they tend to fall back into the police as a group.

The underground storm drains are introduced in the middle of the movie. These scenes do not linger; they are much simpler and briefer than the climax of the film. They do help establish the drains are part of the film's "reality". When the viewer sees them again at the end of the film, they are already a familiar, established part of the world of the film. There is no sudden need on the viewer's part to adjust to them as some sudden, jarring new reality. These middle film scenes also give us a simple taste of the elaborate lighting effects of the end of the film. They show us what an underground light can look like, while it illuminates part of the drains by a walking or running man. This, too, helps the viewer understand the images being portrayed. This middle scenes are fairly analytical and contemplative. The viewer is encouraged to sit back and absorb exposition on the underground drainage system, while the narrator explains facts about the system. These facts include the astonishing one that there are 700 miles of tunnels beneath L.A. These scenes echo the credit sequence of the film, which shows a map of Los Angeles. In both cases, the viewer is encouraged to think of L.A. as a huge grid.

The shots at the end of are terrific. They are among the most purely geometric of any shots in a fiction feature film. The tunnels are full of circles, trapezoids, and other pure geometric shapes. The lighting effects are also remarkable. Mann and Alton show a series of shots, exploring many different effects that can be produced by flashlights moving along walls, often held by men who are themselves running or walking. These climax in a tracking shot, one of the few in the entire film. This shot combines the motion of the light and the men with the motion of the camera. This tracking shot is very different in effect from most tracking shots in most films. The tracking is not part of a "camera eye", a visual point of view that is moving through a scene, exploring it in detail, and creating awesome visual patterns as it goes: this is the typical tracking shot of the great directors. Instead, the tracking here is closely integrated with the other visual effects of the scene. It is part of one, integrated visual pattern being created in the shot. This unified effect is built up out of all components, in which tracking, lighting and geometry of the sets all play an equal role.

Series 5: Circular Arch Shots

The exterior of police headquarters tends to show police cars going in and out of circularly arched entry ways. Later, when the film focuses on the electronics firm in the middle, the lobby of the firm is a large room with similar arched entry ways. It is very distinctive looking, geometrically. Mann and Alton do not use just one kind of shot to photograph all these scenes. Instead, the circular arches are used a visually repeating motif, making up an element in many different kinds of shots.

Series 6: Slightly Overhead Police Interrogation Shots

When the police are grilling a suspect, they tend to surround him. One officer approaches the suspect from each side. This is extremely intimidating looking, as it is intended to be. The police are also more formally dressed that the suspects and civilians, and have different, tougher looking body postures and ways of talking. These differences are often exaggerated to an extreme degree. For example, a witness early on is shown in bath robe and slippers. He is surrounded by cops in double breasted suits and hats, completely formally dressed. These shots tend to be taken from a slightly overhead angle. This takes in a good deal of the background environment. It also tends to show the police, suspects and witnesses full figure. The slightly elevated angle also tends to add a tone of comedy to the proceedings. It suggests that the suspect is to be taken less seriously than the police. The effect is of slightly looking down in derision on these people. It also emphasizes all the formal polish of the police.

A key scene in *Night* shows the police courteously interviewing a witness, a Hispanic lady who speaks no English. A well dressed, perfect acting Hispanic cop immediately steps forward, and begins translating perfectly. He has the same formal perfection of image and behavior that do all of the police in this film. This scene conveys an admirable image of racial harmony, integration and respect for minorities. Coming as it does in 1948, at the very start of the Civil Rights era, it should be seen as a pro-Civil Rights commentary. The film makers seem to be "Hollywood liberals", eager to promote a message of racial brotherhood. However, we know that in real life, the LAPD was a painfully racist institution in that era. One immediately thinks of the opening of *L.A. Confidential* (1997), in which the police savagely beat some Hispanic prisoners. This recent film is far more accurate in its portrayal of the LAPD, whereas the scenes in *He Walked By Night* are pure Hollywood fantasy. The scenes in *Night* do their creators proud as a statement of beliefs. But they fail completely as realism. Americans have a long, painful history of denial when it comes to racial problems. Even today, it is an axiom among the bigots of the far Right that racism does not exist, all the evidence from Texaco and elsewhere not withstanding.

Still, the film's idealism on Civil Rights issues should be applauded. Films exist not only to depict the real world around us, but to help us visualize a new, better future world. Images like these helped people imagine a new era, when all minorities would be treated with respect. *He Walked By Night* shows a world where minorities have the same job opportunities and social acceptance as every one else, where they are fully integrated into social institutions. Such films pave the way towards an idealistic future.

He Walked by Night and Other Films

Mann co-directed this film with Alfred Werker, but his style is much in evidence throughout. This movie is apparently the direct ancestor of Jack Webb's *Dragnet*

series. Webb has a role in the drama, which portrays the LAPD with documentary realism. The star of the film, however, is the much younger looking Scott Brady. Brady, in *Walked*, plays the grown up police hero of the film, with no indication that he is anything other than an experienced, in charge police detective. However, even here he goes under cover as a milk man in one key scene, his bright white uniform suggesting a virginal quality to the character, as well as a young knight effect. These scenes are carefully synchronized with a series of white buildings, a courtyard full of California dwellings. This allows the white uniform and the white buildings and porches all to be part of one common visual design. These scenes take place during the day, unlike the night scenes that tend to dominate much of the rest of the movie (it's a film noir!). The police heroes of scriptwriter John C. Higgins' *The Public Pays* (1936) also go undercover as milkmen, giving up their navy blue police uniforms for the white uniforms of milk cart drivers. This seems to be a personal Higgins tradition, repeated by him when he worked on the script of *He Walked By Night*.

He Walked By Night shows the tradition of Fritz Lang. There are many shots with mirrors or with unusual clocks, two Lang trademarks. There is much about radio transmission, recalling Lang works such as *Spies*. Just as in Lang's early sound films, the police use high technology to track down the killer: here ballistics, explosive labs, and a Hollerith machine sorting through punch cards filled with data. Lang's favorite device, the magic lantern, is used to project Indentikit sketches of the killer by the police. The crook is brought to the attention of the underworld, just as in *M*, only much more briefly here, and only at the police's request. Tunnel shots occur, as in Lang's *Spies*. Uniforms are as common as in Lang movies. Lang's trademark overhead, slightly elevated angle is much employed. Much of the film has an architectural quality, with scenes taking advantage of rooms' geometry for their main composition, as in Lang. Also as in Lang, camera movement is used sparingly.

The Crime Does Not Pay series

John C. Higgins, who wrote five of Mann's semi-documentary films, earlier worked for many years on the MGM series of short films known as *Crime Does Not Pay*. These were short subjects, less than a half hour long, which told tales of criminals being captured. These films were fully dramatized, fictional movies, with actors, sets and so on, and were similar to feature films except for their length. There do not seem to have been continuing characters or actors in the series; each film was a separate piece of independent storytelling. Mann did not direct any of these, but they do anticipate Higgins' later work with Mann. Higgins scripted episodes called *The Public Pays* (1936) and *For the Common Defense!* (1942) show many features of the semi-

documentary film movement to come. They not only anticipate the Higgins-Mann collaborations; they also have features suggesting the whole semi-documentary movement.

Here are some of the shared features, anticipating semi-documentary films: 1) *The Public Pays* and *For the Common Defense!* oscillate between scenes of the crooks perpetrating crimes, and the police officers trying to catch them. 2) Much emphasis is on the police heroes being members of real government institutions. We get an inside look at these police organizations' behavior. 3) These institutions have a military like flavor. 4) Uniforms are commonly worn by the good guys. 5) The narrator of the film claims at the opening that what we are about to see is a true story, although the names of the characters have been changed. Such true events will be common in Hathaway's pioneer semi-documentaries, and in the TV series *Dragnet*; they will be less common in the Mann films. (Roy Del Ruth's otherwise not very realistic or semi-doc like *Bureau of Missing Persons* (1932) also claims to be based on real stories in police files. The comic strip Radio Patrol (1934 - 1950) also was reportedly based on real files of the Boston Police.) 6) The films do not have a single hero. Instead, there is much emphasis on the powerful teamwork and shared trust between various police officers and agents. 7) The villains here are a gang. This gang is a bunch of serious, determined crooks, who are competent, cool and frightening. 8) The gang in *For the Common Defense!* is involved with counterfeiting, just like the gang in *T-Men.* 9) The gang in *For the Common Defense!* is Nazi-oriented, as in Hathaway's films.

In *The Public Pays*, both the gang and the police are operating undercover. The gang are impersonating legitimate businessmen at the beginning of the film. And their muscle division is impersonating a gym and its boxers. Much is made of this impersonation at the start of the movie. The gang wears good suits, rents office space in a snazzy building, has a pretentious business name, uses signed contracts, has a sales force that uses business language. It is very elaborate and developed. Later on, the police do some impersonation of their own. At no time, however, do police go undercover as crooks, or try to infiltrate the gang, as they will later do in *T-Men.* Instead, they take on "legitimate" professions different from their police work. Such "new profession" undercover assignments are typical of comic book and comic strip detective characters of the 1930's who took on undercover roles, such as in the comic strip Radio Patrol, and the comic book heroes Slam Bradley, Spy and Speed Saunders.

In *The Public Pays*, there is much emphasis on the need to gather evidence that will stand up in court. This centers on ballistic evidence, provided by the police crime lab. This anticipates the high tech lab work that will be featured in the semi-docs. Much of *The Public Pays* seems to be shot on real life industrial locations, showing trucks picking up supplies at loading docks (associated with the dairy businesses featured in the movie). This too anticipates the semi-docs to come.

For the Common Defense! does not have the location photography of the later semi-docs. Nor does it have the emphasis on high-tech lab work. However, much is made in the film of Chile's elaborate set of personal ID cards, including fingerprints and photographs; the American agent wishes we had a system like this in the United States! In this war time film, no one worries about civil liberties. *For the Common Defense!* is also more international than most semi-docs. It shows Good Neighbor cooperation between Chile, Columbia and the United States to defeat a ring of Nazi spies. Nor does the film have the elaborate visual style of the semi-docs and much other film noir.

The director of *For the Common Defense!* was Allan R. Kenward, an obscure Hollywood figure who had two writing credits and no other directorial assignments. You could not find a less well remembered figure; I bet his name would stump even the most omniscient experts on Hollywood film. His direction seems competent and pleasant, without showing much brilliance. The same can be said of Errol Taggart, the obscure director of *The Public Pays*.

I have always had an image of war time films as being filled with veteran actors who were too old to get drafted. This is not true of *For the Common Defense!* It is full of younger performers. Van Johnson is the noble American agent, Stephen McNally is his friendly contact on the Colombian police, and the film seems to be filled with dozens of young men all wearing the uniforms of the police of either Chile or Columbia. There is also a young man at the beginning who talks directly to the audience, and who identifies himself as the *Crime Does Not Pay* reporter. He is wearing the sort of sharp pinstriped suit that will be such a fixture of the noir era. Perhaps all of these young men made the film early in 1942, before they got drafted and went into the service. By contrast, most of the performers in *The Public Pays* seem a little bit older and more mature, than the juveniles in *For the Common Defense!*

Crime Does Not Pay usually opened with a young, good looking man, dolled up in a sharp suit, who identified himself as the MGM Crime Reporter. This guy seems to be different in almost every *Crime Does Not Pay* episode. His function seems to be to start the show off with a little movie star glamour.

Desperate

It is hard not to be annoyed with the hero of this film, and the way he runs off suspiciously instead of going to the police right away. His wife keeps telling him to go to the police, and it is hard not to agree with her. Seeing him act so dumbly can make

one not enjoy the first half of this film, especially on an initial viewing. However, the film looks much better on subsequent viewings, and becomes an absorbing experience.

There is a contrast in the film between the hero's relationships and those of the villain. The hero lives in a world filled with women, and most of his relationships are with them. He is completely wrapped up with his wife, and later on, their baby daughter. He also moves into the house of his wife's aunt. He reaffirms their marriage at the aunt's request, participating in a wedding ceremony she has requested. This is like moving into a world run by women. He is also friendly in an innocent way to his wife's girl friend, the nurse at the hospital where his daughter is born, and the nice lady upstairs who comes to borrow coffee cream. He also gets along fine with the aunt's husband and the insurance salesman, but all his other relationships with men in the film are troubled, especially with the policeman, sheriff, auto dealer and the bad guys.

By contrast, the villain lives in an all male world. His henchmen are all men, and their vivid character portraits add much to the film's color. The villain is obsessively attached to his young brother, and his devotion to this worthless punk is the main driving force of the tragedy in the film. This is one of two Raymond Burr portraits in Mann film noirs, the other being in *Raw Deal*. In both films, he plays a frighteningly intense mobster who frames and torments the hero. In both works, the hero is defined by a complex series of relationships to women. Both films have the hero and his women on the run, often through the countryside, before the final urban shoot outs.

There is a welcome vein of unforced humor flowing through the movie, that makes it a lot easier to take. I especially loved the scene with the bus driver, when the wife is going to have the baby.

Camera Movement

Only a few scenes in *Desperate* (1947) are filmed in an especially noir style. However, nearly all the scenes in the film show some sort of unusual, visually experimental technique. Mann was clearly feeling his oats and flexing his muscles here, trying out new things.

There is a long, sustained shot towards the beginning of the film, an experiment with long takes. The hero comes home bearing roses for his wife. The shot moves into a close-up of their kiss, with him holding the roses behind her head. Then it shows them moving around in the apartment, and finally leaving it when the phone rings. The shot only comes to an end when they move out into the hall. The sustained excitement of the long take matches the sustained romantic mood of the two young lovers. There is

a good deal of camera movement in this shot, mainly small reframings and motions around the apartment.

A more linear camera movement occurs in the wedding scene. There is a very dramatic sweep down the entire ceremony, at first showing the couple from behind, then gradually pulling around to the front of them. This is followed by a dramatic cut that shows them symmetrically facing the congregation.

The farm house kitchen set has an exterior region visible through the windows, where people can pull up cars and come into the house. First the hero does this, then later on the villains. This allows the shooting through windows that is so popular in Fritz Lang and the noir style. Mann combines this window shooting with camera movement. Typically, we see someone arrive through a window or door, then enter, then the camera moves back to show them walking around inside the kitchen. Mann combines these backward camera movements with pans, showing people moving inside.

In general, pans are fairly common in *Desperate*. They are used in a way that was common in such late 1940's directors as Cukor or Fleischer: they show people moving around within a set. Unlike these directors, Mann will sometimes pan back and forth, say from right to left, then back again from left to right. Mann tends to construct his camera movement scenes out of short segments: there might be a pan, then a stable shot set-up, a track, then a short pan again. Each segment will have its own mood, pace and dialogue. There usually is an abrupt change of mood between these segments. Each one contributes in its own way to the progress of the story. There is a sense of instability here: we are never set up in a fixed, predictable, stable world. There is always some unpredictable, abrupt change coming over us.

Mann often uses pans to convey a sense of motion and excitement. They tend to fairly fast, compared to those of other directors, and to convey a "whiplash" feel.

There are tracking shots as well, in the scene where the hero moves down the street after selling his truck near the end of the film. Next we cut to the bad guys' car, and we see a moving shot from the car itself. These two tracking shots are impressively stylized. Both move from right to left, an approach that is often thought to convey a sense of difficulty or effort to a traveling shot.

Mann sometimes closes in on a character at the end of a shot, tracking in on them to emphasize some strong emotion they are experiencing. This is an approach associated with Alfred Hitchcock.

Noir Visuals

There are many mirrors in the film. These mirrors tend to be architectural: they are used to extend and reveal the architecture of a room. They have clearly been planned out by the art director and Mann. Their position is linked to the camera set-up, the two working in tandem to reveal exactly what the film wants to show us about a particular room. The mirrors tend to be bureau top mirrors, like the one in *T-Men*. This is linked to the low socio-economic status of the characters: just about everybody is in some cheap room, where the bureau has a mirror on its top. This contrasts with Fritz Lang films, which often show chic apartments where the mirrors are built-in around the fireplaces.

The hero is usually in single breasted suits, whereas the villains are always in sharper double-breasted ones. The hero is also sometimes in work clothes, or farm denims. Even in 1947, double-breasted suits seem to be linked with swaggering displays of style. There is also a striking newspaper shot showing the hero in World War II soldier gear. Newspapers are used throughout the film, to tell the story of the crime. There is also a police radio in the sheriff's car. This interest in mass media is in the Lang tradition.

There is a tracking shot towards the end, where the heroine is boarding a bus going to California. The shot follows the bus driver, as he moves in a straight line through a crowd of people, announcing the bus' schedule. This scene, with numerous people standing around in largely fixed positions outside, anticipates the great crowd shots to come in *He Walked By Night*. As in that film, there is mixture of uniforms and civilian clothes in the shot: here it is the bus driver who is in an unusually spiffy uniform, complete with peaked cap. He walks with the stiff military carriage Mann will later associate with his cops. The police in the film tend to be in fancy black leather uniform jackets, also a Lang tradition.

A scene where villainous Raymond Burr orders a crime shows a light fixture swinging wildly over him. His face and that of his henchman, keeps going from bright light to darkness and back again. The effect is not a mechanical alteration: the light is wildly swinging, and in all directions. It is strikingly experimental; would that there were more scenes in the film like this. This scene is not a single shot. Instead, it is a whole series of set ups employing the swinging light fixture, each with a different point of view and emphasis. The first of these is the most bravura and intense; then they gradually decrease in intensity, although they all pack a punch.

Later, Burr will be shown injured and in bed. A city light will be going on and off outside his window, in a way that has been much caricatured in recreations of the noir look. Despite this, it is a striking shot. It reminds us that his character is associated with unstable lighting. Such blinking external lights had already been used by cinematographer Tony Gaudio in the gangster film *Little Caesar* (1930), long before the invention of noir around 1941. So they are hardly an innovation of film noir.

The finale also shows a sustained burst of style. First there is a scene combining intense close-ups with the ticking of a clock; such scenes of clock watching are common in Fritz Lang and other noir. The close-ups get more and more extreme; finally they just show the characters' eyes.

Next, there is a big shoot out on a staircase. The director pulls out all the noir stops, shooting from dramatic angles both high and low. These are also in the Lang tradition of complex staircases. This is a whole montage sequence, showing every possible baroque angle on the staircase. The photography/lighting helps here as well, with shadows of the banisters falling over the characters, when we are not seeing actual shots of the staircase. This is one of the great staircase scenes in a noir film.

The scene is linked to shots of the outdoor staircase in front of the building. These urban scenes are full of lettered signs and bill boards, an urban noir tradition.

Border Incident

Border Incident (1949) is by the same team of director Mann, writer John C. Higgins, and photographer John Alton. While most of the films of this team are deeply urban, like most film noir, *Border Incident* is set in the countryside: both sides of the California-Mexico border. The film is in the tradition of *T-Men*: it stars two undercover agents, who infiltrate a sinister criminal conspiracy, encountering terrifying danger. Both films include Mann regular Charles McGraw among their villains. This film is shot on location, like many Mann films, and other semi-docs.

The respectful, egalitarian treatment of both Mexicans and Americans in the film makes a pro-Civil Rights statement, like Mann's subsequent *Devil's Doorway* (1950). It also recalls the Good Neighbor collaboration between Chile, Columbia and the United States in Higgins' *For the Common Defense!*.

Border Incident differs from *T-Men* in that only one of the agents goes undercover as a crook: the American agent, played by George Murphy. By contrast, the Mexican agent played by Ricardo Montalban is undercover as a laborer. It is a whole new persona for him, and one that involves intense danger from the bad guys. But it is not a criminal role. In this it differs from not just *T-Men*, but from most of the undercover semi-docs of the era.

Both Montalban and Murphy play highly sympathetic characters. The audience, then and now, is probably used to thinking of both men in lighter roles. Both were mainly

familiar as song-and-dance men during the 1940's, famous for their charm and good nature. This film offers them a complete change of pace.

Composition

Border Incident has many shots which involve large groups of men standing around. These recall shots in *He Walked By Night*. In both films, we see men, most often in exteriors, from slightly elevated angles. The men are scattered through a large open space. Each man in the crowd is an individual. Yet the men also form elaborate geometric groups and patterns on screen. The men tend to be fairly formally dressed, in clothes that proclaim their work roles. There are many shots of the Mexican laborers here; all have their hats on, and are dressed for work. These shots rarely include women. They seem like a formal portrait of men in groups. The men are usually sympathetic: we see Mexican workers in *Border Incident*, the police in *He Walked By Night*. The villains in the films do not get this treatment. The shots emphasize the men's machismo. They communicate work roles and an idealized image of the men performing their jobs. The sense of male bonding in groups is strong.

Other shots tend to be architectural. They tend to include slashing diagonal lines from the architecture, prominently featured. These include interior roofs, often with strange architectural features, or the covered entryways of buildings. The diagonals allow unusual, highly creative compositions.

At night, outside the cantina, we see shadowy shots down the street. These recall the street shots during the policeman's murder in *He Walked By Night*.

There are also trapezoidal compositions here, recalling *T-Men*. As in that film, the trapezoids are caused by angled doors and windows, projected on the flat plane of the screen. Some of these shots involve deep focus, such as an interior where we see through two separate doorways, each making a differently angled trapezoid on screen.

Many exterior scenes in *Border Incident* can be called architectural. The chase of the motorcyclist reveals an outdoor landscape full of man made constructions, such as canals, roads and railroad bridges. Mann sometimes shoots these from an elevated angle, so that the shots resemble aerial maps. The film in fact opens with airplane shots of a giant canal. The earlier railroad bridge scene in Mexico is also full of the complex architecture of the bridge. Mann also has a highly architectural scene at a Post Office here, recalling the Post Office in *He Walked By Night*, and the hero who is a mail carrier in *Side Street*. The richest building in the film is the water tower. The outside of the tower is a complex maze of balconies, staircases and ladders. These wind along the outside the building, going up many levels. Their complexity recalls the

many-storied staircase at the end of *Desperate*. The staircase in *Desperate* is in the interior of the stairwell; the stairs and balconies in *Border Incident* wind along the exterior of the water tower, exactly the reverse approach. Both sequences involve virtuoso filmmaking of their staircases and architecture.

By the way, I am unable to fully rationalize the architecture of the water tower here. When Montalban first sees the water tower, he seems to be 180 degrees around the tower from the guard. The guard in turn is 90 degrees away from George Murphy's room. Montalban then moves apparently 90 degrees to the right, and starts climbing a ladder, which should bring him directly up the tower on the same side as Murphy. Instead, he seems to wind up 90 degrees from Murphy, when he reaches Murphy's level on the tower. The photography showing Montalban climbing is very dark, and perhaps I am imagining or not noticing a 90 degree turn somewhere. Or perhaps the filmmakers are using composites of various buildings, to make better images, and the composites do not exactly align. This does not really matter.

Depth Staging

Many shots in *Border Incident* involve deep perspective down a wall or road. When Montalban pokes his head outside the tent, on his way to the water tower, we see a shot down the side of the tent building. This building forms a long perspective down one side of the screen. Montalban's head is in close-up, while the perspective stretches off to a deep focus background. This contrast of deep focus perspective and facial close-ups will be used throughout *Border Incident*. Faces are often at the forefront, while other characters might be seen in long shot, standing at the far end of the perspective. Mann emphasizes the contrast by having Montalban's face right in front of the building stretching off into the distance, not in the open space of the left side of the shot.

Deep focus shots often show a person moving from the foreground of the shot, all the way to the back, or vice versa. Mann will hold the shot precisely as long as it takes the person to move between the extremes. When Jeff the motorcyclist enters the post office, we see him move from the door in the deep focus rear, all the way up to the clerk's window in the foreground. At the end of the scene, we will watch a reverse of this progress, from window to door. Similarly, the clerk will move down the aisle behind the windows, then back up again, in a similar pair of shots. Vehicles often show a similar progress. The motorcycle moving through the field of lettuce will travel from the rear of the shot to the foreground. The forward propulsion from rear to front is an important part of the rhythm and style of the film.

Even short "walks" in the film are often straight towards the camera. When George Murphy is imprisoned in the water tower at night, he slowly walks towards the screen

door of his room, and the camera, twice in the film. Both times, this involves him from being in the shadowy darkness in the back of his room, towards the bright light at its front. His appearances out of the darkness are classic examples of Alton's use of high contrast photography, from deep darkness to light.

Sometimes Mann's camera will point straight down an open area. When the motorcyclist leaves the post office, the camera is pointed straight down a road. A building in the distance has its wall parallel to the plane of the shot. Along the left hand side, we see a steep perspective, formed first by a telephone pole and lines, then by a church. The shot mixes "perspective" in one region (the lines and church) and a head-on "parallel" shot in another (the building). This is a common staging approach in *Border Incident*. Similarly, when we first see the guard at the water tower, the left side of the shot is taken up by the tower building, whose wall and staircase are perfectly aligned and parallel with the plane of the shot. On the right, we see a deep perspective down the alley between two buildings. There are structures deep in the alley that are also aligned with the plane of the shot. The mix of parallel and perspective creates visual variety in the shot. It also creates a sense of visual rhythm between the contrast of the two.

Other shots do not align so purely. The long shot of the train tracks during the motorcycle chase are slightly at an angle. Mann has set up the shot so that we see the train tracks "vanishing to a point" in the distance. The staging never uses this rear part of the tracks; the car and motorcycle stay within the front half of the shot. Still, the vanishing point is always visible. The deep perspective, apparently to infinity, underlines the sense of perspective in the shot.

Pans and Composition

Mann will sometimes join up shots with pans. When Montalban sticks his head outside the tent, the initial perspective shot is eventually joined by a pan to a second deep perspective shot, down an alley between buildings. At the post office, when the clerk has finished his walk to the foreground of the deep perspective view of the aisle, the camera pans to the left, and starts a new shot. This second shot is very different: it is one of Mann's groups of men on the job. Here we see the immigration chief (John Ridgely), a uniformed cop, and a Post Office official. These men have their hats on, in the Mann tradition of such men in groups shots - they are fully, formally dressed for their jobs. Such hats also serve as phallic symbols. The shot is remarkably composed: the lower background is full of countless rectangular mail boxes that form a brilliant geometric pattern, the upper background shows geometric constructions near the ceiling of the Post Office Building. But it is not especially deep focus, nor is it perspective oriented. Soon the men all stand up. They now form a second geometric grouping, different from the first, but equally geometric. Mann has clearly staged them both sitting and standing, to form interesting geometric patterns.

The use of deep focus, the positioning on people within the shot, and their motion, backwards, forwards and sidewise, all can be considered as part of "staging". But staging also is closely tied with another task (and opportunity) of the director: composition. Composition can be defined as "the geometric patterns created on the screen, their visual beauty, and the emotional effects they arouse in the viewer". When Mann shoots down a street, the geometric arrangement of buildings, vehicles, telephone lines creates a visual pattern. This pattern is interesting and beautiful for its own sake.

Costumes

George Murphy's leather jacket, and a differently styled leather jacket of the motorcyclist, remind one of the leather jackets worn by the police in *Desperate.* They also suggest a working man and working class feel. During the noir era, leather jackets were associated with either teenage kids, or with grown men with very little money, who could not afford to wear suits. The jacket is part of Murphy's undercover persona. When he is himself, as a government agent at the start of the film, he is wearing a suit, and so is Montalban.

The villains in this film are in Southwestern farm gear. These are not the fancy cowboy clothes of a thousand Westerns. Instead, they are grungy work clothes. These are some of the dingiest and least glamorous clothes in film history. They strongly convey a milieu - they are unquestionably Western ranch and farm gear. But otherwise they are strictly deglamorized. Only the immigration officials and police have sharp clothes in *Border Incident.* There are suggestions that the villains here belong to a "subculture". Their clothes suggest that they all belong to a ranching lifestyle, one based on exploitation of the Mexican laborers.

Side Street

Side Street (1950) is somewhat in the tradition of *Desperate* (1947) among Mann's work. Both deal with a hapless young hero who gets pursued by both gangsters and the police. Both heroes have innocent young pregnant wives, who give birth over the course of the story. Both heroes are extremely youthful, with innocent, hangdog expressions. Both seem infinitely less tough than the grown-up, macho gangsters they encounter. Both heroes keep making dumb decisions, ones that make the audience groan with impatience: a child of five would know not to do the dumb things these guys keep doing to put their head into the noose. The protagonist of *Side Street* is even more annoying in this regard. The hero of *Desperate* is at least one

hundred percent honest. By contrast, the protagonist of *Side Street* starts the film by committing a petty theft. He is driven to it by desperation over his poverty and concern for his wife. Still, its a crime, one that will involve him in terrible pursuit by the crooks.

Side Street evokes earlier films shot on location in New York City. This is new territory for Mann. As in Henry Hathaway's *Kiss of Death* (1947), the film opens with the hero committing a theft, one motivated by poverty and a desire to support his family, a theft that will go terribly wrong, and blow up in the hero's face. The film is also close to another New York City set film, Jules Dassin's *The Naked City* (1948). Both films have sympathetic members of the police, trying to solve the crimes. Both films open with an omniscient narrator, one that gives us a mini-documentary about life in New York City. Both film's narrators give us statistics about life in New York City, both show typical members of the city. The use of a third person narrator is somewhat unusual in film noir. It is a lot more common for noir films to be narrated in the first person, with the central character in the story narrating events shown in flashback. By contrast, *The Naked City* and *Side Street* have male, third person narrators who know everything about the events that are shown in the films. The narrator keeps nudging the audience, encouraging them to pay attention to some feature of the case. Both narrators have a sardonic tone. They are bemused observers of human nature in general, and of life in the big city. Neither films have flashbacks. However, the way that the narrator seems to know everything that is going to happen gives both films a slightly fatalistic edge, as in the flashback film noirs. *Kiss of Death* also has a third person narrator, who is a woman: even more unusual in film noir.

The film opens with a brief tribute to the New York police, and one suspects that one is going to see a semi-documentary about the police, in the tradition of earlier Hathaway and Mann films. However, while the police are continuing characters in the film, the semi-doc traditions are played down. There are no lab scenes or scientific detection, and little attempt is made to glamorize the cops. The most prominent cop is played by Charles McGraw. The film is part of his transition from the mob killers he played in the mid 1940's, to his early 1950's roles as a tough but good guy cop. The film has a classic comedy shot where this super tough officer has to hold a pampered Pekinese dog found at a crime scene. This incongruity is delightful. McGraw shows himself a good sport here. There are other factors at work than simple comedy, however. The fact that this tough man is nice to dogs suggests a fundamentally decent side to his character. Both in films, and in advertisements, dogs are frequently symbolic stand-ins for children. A man who is kind to dogs is a way of suggesting that a man will be kind to children, and protect them. So the film is suggesting that McGraw will be a good father. This is an important image, in a film that centers on its naive hero Farley Granger's attempt to grow up, and be a responsible father and husband.

The villain of *Side Street* (1950) anticipates that of *99 River Street* (1953), directed by Phil Karlson. Both are characterized by their relationships to women. These bad guys are smooth, well dressed crooks, who romance naive women who will do anything for them. However, as soon as the women become the slightest bit inconvenient to them, as witnesses who could identify them, for instance, both men murder the women with complete casualness. Both film's villains kill women in the same way: they strangle them while they are kissing the women. Both men's instant transformation from smooth seducer to murderous killer is especially startling.

Side Street is notable for its overhead shots of Manhattan, with car chases taking place far below in narrow alleys between skyscrapers. These city shots remind one of the exterior landscapes to come in Mann's Westerns. The buildings here take on the same photogenic role the rocks and mountain will in Mann's *The Naked Spur* (1953), for instance.

Two O'Clock Courage

Two O'Clock Courage (1945) is a remake of Benjamin Stoloff's *Two in the Dark* (1936); both films are based on a mystery novel by Gelett Burgess, *Two O'Clock Courage* (1934). Stoloff had transitioned from director to producer by this time, and he served as producer of the remake. The remake has added a great deal of comedy relief, that was not present in the original. *Two O'Clock Courage* is in the tradition of whodunits, but it also has some features that look forward to Mann's film noir work. The hero is a lost character, gradually journeying into a world he knows little about. In this he resembles the heroes of *T-Men*, *Desperate* and other Mann thrillers to come. Here, this world is entirely nocturnal.

Also, his amnesia seems to make him take on a new identity of sorts. The real hero is a bewildered man with amnesia, trying to find out his name. He keeps pretending to be a functioning human being, sometimes with various aliases and professions. This has a similar feel to the new identity taken on by the heroes of *T-Men* and *A Dandy in Aspic*. Like them, the hero keeps shifting back and forth between his real self and his pretend persona. These new persona help the hero do his detective work in the bewildering world in which he finds himself, just like the new persona aided the sleuthing of the hero of *T-Men*.

As in later Mann films, other characters keep becoming suspicious that the hero is not who he says he is. Here, this is largely played for laughs, with most of the suspicion coming from a comedy relief reporter. However, the reporter keeps on passing his suspicions to the police, so there is an edge of menace here, and always some

suspense. In later Mann films, such suspicions give rise to intense suspense and nightmarish horror.

The hero here is hunted by the police. This relates the film to both *Desperate* and *Side Street*.

The hero here shares most of his adventures with the heroine of the film. This also resembles *Desperate* and *Side Street*. In all of these films, the heroine's sharing of the hero's experiences is a voluntary choice on her part, something she does out of loyalty, love and generosity. In all of these films, the hero is the one in trouble. The heroine is not. She could have chosen to remain in the "normal" world. Instead, she follows the hero on his journey into exile and alienation. It is as if Eurydice followed Orpheus into the underworld.

In both versions, the hero is played by a gentlemanly actor of unusual refinement: Walter Abel in the 1936 film, Tom Conway in this remake. He seems gentle, quiet, non-violent, intelligent and trustworthy. This refinement allows the heroine to trust him, even though he is found alone, at night, with amnesia and mixed up in a murder case.

Class lines are strangely marked in *Two O'Clock Courage*. The heroine, the reporter and the police are all working class. So are most of the non-suspects in the film, like the tailor shop workers and the landladies. By contrast, the hero, the murder victim and the suspects are all upper crust sophisticates, with ties to the theater world. This is somewhat atypical of Mann's noirs of the late 1940's and Jimmy Stewart Westerns of the 1950's, where the heroes tend to be working class. It does anticipate *A Dandy in Aspic* (1968), in which the hero and the British agents tend to be upper crust, with an intellectual background, and the Russians tend to be working class in feel. The collision of two social classes gives a surrealistic feel to these films. One also thinks of the scientists in *The Heroes of Telemark*, and the military types with whom they work. The upper crust characters in *Two O'Clock Courage* are all full of hidden secrets, including the amnesiac hero who does not know who he is. But the working class characters are all honest, and are exactly who they seem to be. The hero and the upper crust Brits in *A Dandy in Aspic* also seem far more duplicitous than the Russians.

Visual Style

The opening shot is one of Mann's striking compositions. It includes three strong dark verticals: the street sign, the building corner, and the hero's body. These verticals strongly stand out against the rest of the nocturnal image. In this it recalls some of the shots with strong straight lines, during the early scene of the murder of the

policeman in *He Walked By Night*. The background of the shot has regions of diffused light, shining out into darkness; these too, anticipate some of the Alton effects to come.

The opening shot includes a strong "track in", in addition to other camera movements. This sort of forceful track in will become a leitmotiv in the film, recurring at key moments. For example, when the hero finally remembers the events of the murder, the flashback shot includes a track in to the second room he enters. It is very forceful. It makes the flashback seem even more dream like and hallucinatory. It occurs after the double doors of the room have been opened, and tracks partly through the doors. It conveys an effect of journeying into a visionary realm, one that was only exposed to view after the doors were flung open.

The track in's tend to be into whole rooms, or large exterior vistas. They are not the Hitchcock device of tracking into a close-up of an actor.

Most of the scenes in *Two O'Clock Courage* lack the compositional richness of Mann's later work, however. The film is gracefully made, but it is shot in a more conventional style. Also, there are very few genuine exteriors shot on location here, so Mann's flair for outdoor photography is not employed.

Much of the film takes place at cheap rooming houses. These are more respectable that the cheap hotel in *T-Men*, but have something of the same architectural feel. Other parts of this picture take place at a fancy nightclub and mansion, and these scenes are closer in feel to 1930's whodunits, than to film noir.

Devil's Doorway

Devil's Doorway (1950) is a ferocious Civil Rights film, looking at injustices done to Native Americans. The film looks at a successful Indian cattle rancher, who is gradually stripped of his life by the racist laws of the era. The hero wants to be integrated into American society. He has a vision of a society in which red and white work and live together, all in a common social framework. But most of the white people of his era want no part of this. They instead set up racist laws, which persecute Native Americans.

The integrationist vision of the hero, is also directly relatable to the Civil Rights efforts of the 1950's. Martin Luther King and other 1950's Civil Rights leaders also had an integrationist vision for American society. And they too had to non-violently resist racist laws. So the film is immediately translatable into the contemporary

politics of its era. The difficulties the hero has entering a bar directly invokes the Jim Crow segregation of lunch rooms in the 1950's, too. The fact that the hero has just returned from fighting in the Civil War also echoes the real life situation of black men at the time, many of whom were recently back from World War II.

The hero resembles the hero of *T-Men*, in that he lives in two different worlds, with two different identities. He has his original Native American identity, as part of the Shoshone tribe. And he has a new life, in which he tries to operate within the white society of his time. At first this operation is successful; later it becomes tragic. Penetrating the hostile white society in *Devil's Doorway* is exactly analogous to the penetration of the criminal gang by the Treasury agent hero of *T-Men*. It is a powerful social commentary, that the white society of 19th Century Wyoming is just as hostile, sinister and vicious as the horrific criminal gang the hero infiltrates in *T-Men*. In fact, white Wyoming is even sicker, more horrifying, more criminal and more evil than the murderous counterfeiters in *T-Men*. Both white Wyoming and the criminal gang are highly organized criminal activities. They are consciously led by sinister men, who know just what they are doing. There is nothing accidental; they are whole large-scale organizations run on deliberately criminal lines.

The hero also anticipates the protagonist of *A Dandy in Aspic*, who is caught between British and Russian society. Just as the agent in *Dandy* has only one true British friend, the heroine of the movie (Mia Farrow), so does the hero in *Devil's Doorway* have just one lasting white friend, who is also the heroine here. Both of these women have little power or influence in their worlds. They are marginal figures in societies where all the power is concentrated in male authority figures. *Devil's Doorway* has interesting feminist themes, too.

Devil's Doorway is understandably grim. But it is also surprisingly good as a work of story telling, with a constant flow of interesting incident. It has plenty to say, but it is not a work of static preachment.

Other Mann films look at minority groups sympathetically. There are the Hispanics in *Border Incident* and *He Walked by Night*, and the wronged Native Americans in *The Naked Spur*.

Devil's Doorway (1950) seems to be Mann's first major Western. It takes him to beautiful landscapes, which are featured prominently in the film. This is the start of a new era for Mann, in which his major films will be Westerns, featuring prominent location photography.

The Heroes of Telemark

The Heroes of Telemark (1965) is a drama about the Norwegian Resistance in World War II. It shows some features in common with earlier Mann movies. Like *Desperate* and *Side Street*, it deals with a group of people who live in hiding in the shadows of society, trying to escape from persecution by powerful, corrupt figures who rule it. The heroes of all these movies are often on the run. They keep changing home from one place to another. Wherever they go, they try to set up a new home base, and a new domestic existence, but they often have to abandon it for a new location. As in *Desperate*, a baby is born on the road here, and protecting it plays a key role in the drama. In both films, the hospital is a place of refuge for the characters, albeit a temporary one. The hospital workers are wholly sympathetic people, who try valiantly to aid the characters.

The villain (Richard Basehart) of *He Walked By Night* also lived a shadowy existence, hunted by the authorities. Like the protagonists of this film, he often moved about in underground chambers and tunnels. The resistance fighters here spend much of the film in underground cavities. In both films, these areas are highly industrial. Also, both the resistance fighters and Basehart are experts on radio and other electronic devices. Much of the existence of both groups centers on radio. There are also resemblances here to the heroes of *He Walked By Night*: the snow white uniforms worn by the characters in the middle of the film recall the virginal looking white milkman's uniform worn by the hero of that film. Both films have intense contrasts between pure white and pure black.

Both the early sections and finale of *The Heroes of Telemark* take place on medium size ships. Such a ship was also the setting for the opening sequence of Mann's Western, *Bend of the River* (1952). Mann has a real flair for photographing such ships in exciting ways. He knows how to make every part of the ship come alive, and be a vivid presence in the film. There are also shipboard sequences in *Thunder Bay* (1953). *A Dandy in Aspic* (1968) has sequences on the London Docks.

Much of the middle of *The Heroes of Telemark* takes place in spectacular mountain scenery in Norway; the film was shot on location. These scenes recall the Western United States mountainous landscapes of *The Naked Spur* (1953).

Other Filmmakers

The Heroes of Telemark shows the influence of Fritz Lang. Lang's *Cloak and Dagger* (1946) had a similar subject: the attempt of Allied agents, working undercover, to sabotage the Nazis' development of atomic weapons. Both films have a scientist hero, who gets involved in action sequences as the film progresses. It also resembles Lang's *An American Guerrilla in the Philippines* (1950), in that it deals with a group of

resistance fighters in occupied territory. As is typical of both Lang and Mann, there are many characters in uniforms here, including black leather ones. Clocks, another Lang trademark, play a big role in the finale here, just as they did in Mann's *Desperate* . Both finales are highly suspenseful. Clocks also play a role in the final scenes of *Raw Deal*.

The Heroes of Telemark anticipates Andrei Tarkovsky's *Stalker* (1979). Both films take place in a region filled with both seedy looking industrial buildings, and beautiful natural scenery. Both the industrial settings and the nature are the subject of much poetic, meditative photography. Both films deal with the frustrating, dangerous attempts of a small group of people to penetrate this region. Mann's film has a dream-like quality that anticipates Tarkovsky's. Both films have a Northern setting, with *Stalker* being shot in Estonia, and *The Heroes of Telemark* in Norway. Both Mann and Tarkovsky are famous for their ability to shoot landscapes.

A Dandy in Aspic

A Dandy in Aspic (1968) is Mann's final film. He died during its production, and the film was completed by its star, Laurence Harvey. Critics seem to be relentless about panning this work. By contrast, I have seen it many times over the years, and have always thoroughly enjoyed it.

The hero is related to the undercover agents of such early Mann films as *T-Men*. Like them, he has two identities, and he takes on a new role so he can be part of an organization. Here our hero is a Russian spy, but he has adopted an English identity so he can be an undercover agent within British Intelligence. In both films, the hero's dual identity becomes an overwhelming experience and personal burden. Mann vividly illustrates the personal costs and emotional impact of such an action.

The heroes of both films become noted for their fancy, elaborate clothes in their new roles. Both are dressed to the hilt, in flamboyant, spiffy clothes that express tremendous flair and personality.

Links

The following links deal with Anthony Mann:

These links are to sites outside of this web site.