Although both of tonight's films can loosely be termed "court-room dramas," both are entirely different in content, mood and approach. The British, it would seem, from films like "Action for Slander," "The Winslow Boy" and "Carrington V.C.," are far more concerned with the principles of justice than the mechanics of it. The issues involved are often quite picayune, important more in the sense of involved honor and integrity. The courtroom methods lean to ritual and tradition rather than expediency, and despite the use of scorn and sarcasm by opposing counsels, both seem quite aloof and detached in the client as an individual. He often seems but a peg on which to hang the trial exercise, and the key requirement is not so much that a man's guilt be proven or disproven, but that some kind of abstract justice triumphs. (This is particularly true of one of the best of all courtroom dramas, "One More River" - a Hollywood film but from a British story and a British director - in which the innocent accused are in fact adjudged guilty). The American court-room, at least according to Hollywood, is far different. Cleverness, tricks and showmanship seem to rate higher than the truth, the defense attorney the star, the prosecuting attorney the villain, juries prone to be swayed by emotion rather than the facts. Happily, this is not universal even in the other nationality -- but so consistent has the Hollywood version been, that many Europeans take its also had an unwelcome influence of American and European films containing American-localed trial sequences invariably enlarge on already grotesque Hollywood stereotypes, as witness the French "Law of the North". Tonight's two films are not selected as trying to prove the superiority of one approach over the other; they are both just very good films in their own right, which do happen to illustrate rather nicely these very different styles.

ACTION FOR SLANDER (United Artists-Alexander Korda, 1937) Directed by Tim Whelan; produced by Victor Saville; Scenario by Miles Malleson from a play by Mary Borden; 9 reels; Camera, Harry Stradling.

Perhaps what one strikes one most about "Action for Slander" today is its at least superficial similarity to Renoir's "The Rules of the Game". For a large part of this film, the setting is the same - a weekend party at an aristocratic country house. There is the same juxtaposition of class-conscious behaviour between the elite and the semi-comic servants; there is even a shooting-match with sly innuendoes about the rules. But whereas Renoir was cynical about rules of conduct, this British film is deadly serious; Renoir lets adultery slide into near-slapstick, whereas the British dispose of it discreetly before the film even starts, and merely refer to it casually via the throw-away line of dialogue. I don't want to make too much of the affinity between the two films, but it does seem entirely possible - even probable - that Renoir saw "Action for Slander" or the play on which it was based - and saw some of it as a framework for his own story. ("The Rules of the Game" is a 1939 film, so the situation couldn't have been reversed).

"Action for Slander" was produced by Victor Saville's own newly set-up company, releasing through Korda and using his production facilities. Director Tim Whelan was a good and versatile director, but the film so much reflects Saville's own style and style that one can, I think, assume a personal participation in the film. In fact, Graham Greene, in his days as a critic, and who liked the film very much (despite a long-sustained vendetta against Korda) referred quite casually to Saville as the director in his review, making no mention of Whelan: either a mistake or an unfair slight, but certainly an indication of how strongly the film bears Saville's stamp. It is all pretty undistinguished play-into-film, but it is such a pleasure to watch such stylish acting, and listen to good dialogue, beautifully performed, that hardly seems to matter. As in "The Winslow Boy", the court case is built solely on evidence, and there is a key question, that the jury must decide, in this case, whether a respected army officer did, or did not, cheat at cards. Such issues may seem rather old-fart today - which is a pity, for they shouldn't. The British Army probably has more pressing matters to worry about in Ireland and elsewhere, but the regular officer who would sell Government secrets, or defect, is precisely the kind of individual who would cheat at cards, so maybe the issues aren't so outdated after all. In any case, from my own British army years I can confirm that the type played by Clive Brook was (and almost certainly still is) very much present in the army set-up. He's the kind of officer one respects but never really likes - there's a snobbism that one expects to be there, but also a certain priggishness that irritates. Brook's performance is quite perfect, and seems almost an extension
of his Captain Harvey in "Shanghai Express". One can almost visualise the years in between, dull plodding work in a peacetime Army, a low rate of pay and increasing boredom after those exciting years in China with Marlene Dietrich. One can feel the strain in both Brok's stolidly honourable professional soldier, but even though the films are so different, there's such a marked similarity between the Brok of "Shanghai Express" and the Brok of "Action for Slander" that the point is worth making. For the rest, the film is flawlessly typecast, and here the phrase is used in an approving sense. Arthur Margetson is just right as the rotter, and Francis L. Sullivan, with glowing brows and dramatically pointed pencil, is again ideal in the courtroom. Only Peter Bull, often cast as a sadistic, brow-beating attorney, was capable of presenting a more formidable image beneath the wig and gown of the lawcourts.

--- 10 Minute Intermission ---

**LAWYER MAN** (Warner Brothers, 1932) Directed by William Dieterle; scenario by Rian James and James Seymour from an original by Max Trell; Camera, Robert Kurrle; 7 reels. With William Powell, Joan Blondell, Helen Vinson, Claire Dodd, Allen Jenkins, Sheila Terry, Alan Dinehart, David Landau, Kenneth Thompson, Curley Wright, Rockcliffe Fellows, Edward McWade, Dot Farley, Jack la Rue, Henry Hall, Wilfrid Lucas, Claire McDowell, Frederick Burton, Max Davidson, Patricia Ellis, Sterling Holloway, Roscoe Karnes, Wade Boteler, Hooper Atchley, Dewey Robinson, Irving Bacon.

If we spend less time on "Lawyer Man" than "Action for Slander", it is only because it is a far more typical genre film, and in earlier notes for films like "The Mouthpiece" and "State's Attorney" we've covered the ground quite thoroughly. Oddly enough, although the courtroom action is a key part of the narrative, the film itself stays completely away from the courts! William Powell is such a good actor - and we are so familiar with the genre - that this deliberate avoidance of the familiar battleground hardly seems to matter. It's a fast-paced, snappy little melodrama, basically unreal enough so that one doesn't consider the "moral atonement" climax either a letdown or a concession. The film's action is libidinously pre-production Code too: one astonishingly suggestive sexual sight-gag (involving Powell's cigar) would not come amiss in a contemporary porno film, but its basic wit, and Powell's aplomb, make it perfectly acceptable in a tastefully outrageous way. It's an elaborately mounted film, so much so that back projection is a night-club scene is rather a surprise, and some of its comments on graft and respectable racketeering seem unfreshingly contemporary. There is a rather abrupt transition in one scene, doubtless due to the careless excision of a two commercial somewhere along the line, but at most only a second or two are missing.

William K. Everson

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A brief rundown on the Summer schedule: much fuller details will be available soon in the Bulletins. Summer shows are on Wednesday nights at 7:30.

1. June 16: Mid-30's Cagney and Bogart: ST LOUIS KID (Cagney) and THE GREAT O'HALLEY (directed by William Dieterle, a remake of a silent Milton Sills) with Pat O'Brien, Bogart, Ann Sheridan; 2. June 23: Two major silents from 1914, now one of the most fruitful "rediscovery" years: THE WISHING RING, a lovely, lyrical Maurice Tourneur film made in Fort Lee, and THE ITALIAN, a Thomas Ince flop full of remarkable acting, stylistic and technical innovations, a forerunner of "Greed" in its naturalism; 3. Two rarely shown film-noir thrillers: THE GHOST SHIP, directed by Mark Robson, most elusive of all the Val Lewton horror-thrillers, with Richard Dix; and THE HOUSE BY THE RIVER by Fritz Lang, with Louis Hayward, Jane Wyatt; though only a 1950 film, all negative material has been lost, and since the film is too black and dark to make good dupes, it is well on its way to becoming the newest of "lost" American films; Date of this program was not given; it's June 30. 4. July 7: ONE RAINY AFTERNOON, a very pleasant imitation-Lubitsch musical, directed by Rowland V. Lee, with Francis Lederer, Ida Lupino; BROADWAY THROUGH A KID'S EYES, only repeat this Summer, a fast-tough, pre-code drama, mixing gangsters and music; directed by Lowell Sherman, with Russ Columbo, Constance Cummings, Blossom Seeley, Texas Guinan, Paul Kelly. 5. July 14: Two major silent stars in untypical talkies. Douglas Fairbanks in REACHING FOR THE MOON (sorry: also a repeat - but from our very first series), a zippy, art-deco designed musical comedy, with Bebe Daniels, Edw., Everett Horton, Jack Mulhall, Bing Crosby; THE CAT'S PAW, Harold Lloyd in a curious Frank Capra-like political satire. Fresher then than now, but very worthwhile. 6. July 21: Two examples of the very early (1929-30) movie operetta: GOLDEN DAWN with Vivienne Segal, Walter Woolf King, Lupino Lane, and THE LOTTERY BRIDE with Jeanette MacDonald, John Garrick, Joe E. Brown.

Far more details on these films will be available in the Summer Bulletin, and individual queries can be taken care of in the question/answer period today. The silent films will, as usual, be accompanied at the piano by Stuart Oderman. Some big surprises in the Fall series by the way.