THE GREAT FLAMARION (Republic, 1944; rel. 1945) Directed by Anthony Mann
Produced by W. Lee Wilder; Screenplay by Heinz Herald, Richard Weil, and
Ann Wigton, inspired by a character in Vicki Baum's story "Big Shot";
Pagal; 78 mins.

With Erich von Stroheim (Flamarion); Mary Beth Hughes (Connie Wallace); Dan
Duryea (Al Wallace); Lester Allen (Tony); Stephen Barclay (Eddy); Esther Howard
(Oleo); Michael Mark (Night watchman); Joseph Granby (detective); John Hamilton
(Comedian); Mexican dancers (Carmen Lopez, Fred Valario); Singer (Tony Ferrell)

Especially since it is a more interesting film in retrospect that it might have
seemed at the time, the almost total neglect of "The Great Flamaron" is hard
to understand. The New York Times brushed it off rather snidely, and in 1945,
before Film Noir was either fully understood or studied as a body of work, most
of us tended to regard it as essentially a Stroheim film. Since he was doing a
number of B's at that time, including "The Mask of Dimitri" for PR, it was easy
to lump it in with that. But Republic was the only company to issue a high-
production film on its own merits, and an especially creditable production from a still
fairly small company like Republic, which still concentrated primarily on a
large output of "B" westerns, small action pictures and serials. Of their 54
productions that year, "The Great Flamaron" was certainly one of the biggest
(only the John Wayne specials and a couple of minor dramatic films and musicals
had bigger budgets) and together with Gustav Machaty's "Jealousy" (which ran a
few weeks back quite well) and other film noir students tend to inflate the merits of films just because they fall
into that category, one would expect belated recognition of it. But it is not
even listed in the basic FILM NOIR reference work by Ward and Silver, while, in
the foreword to her generally excellent study of Anthony Mann, Jeannine Bainger
admits that it was one of seven earlier Mann films that she had not bothered to
read or write about because they weren't worth it! From Mann's point of view,"The Great Flamaron" is actually of some importance since it was his sixth
film, it is, at eight reels, his closest yet to an "A" film and also it is his
first bona-fide film noir. (The earlier "Dr. Broadway" and "Strangers in the Night"
were borderline). Anyway, it is certainly a film that wears surprisingly
well and that Stroheim himself seemed to take seriously instead of just walking
through it, as he did with so many cheapies where he realised that they were just
using his name, but where he needed the money too badly to turn anything down.
This is a film in which Stroheim flourished, in 1929, but he brings more humanity and more of a sense of humor to it. He is not the
same Stroheim touching in some scenes, and clearly injects many little bits of business
himself: the meticulous brushing of his almost non-existent hair, and the little
waltts of joy as he awaits his paramour. In the latter role, Mary Beth Hughes
is none too subtle - but possibly you don't need subtlety in dealing with all
too willing victims like Stroheim and Dan Duryea, done in twice in one evening
by double-bass playing damse The print is well-used but complete, and at that
we're lucky to have it. Negatives and prints of this film now seem to be almost extinct,
which may be another reason for its virtual neglect.

-- TEN MINUTE INTERMISSION --

TOO LATE FOR TEARS (Runt Stromborg Productions-United Artists, 1948, rel: 49)
Directed by Byron Haskin; Screenplay by Roy Huggins based on his own novel;
Camera: William Mellor; Music, Dale Butts; 96 mins.

With Elizabeth Scott (Jane Palmer); Don DeFore (Dan Blake); Dan Duryea (Danny
Puller); Arthur Kennedy (Alan Palmer); Kristine Miller (Kathy Palmer); Barry
Kelley (Lt. Breach); Jim Nolan (Parker); June Storey (girl); Billy Halop (boat
attendant); Jimmie Dodd (hobo); Garry Owen (switchboard officer); Jack Shea,
Charles Flynn, Robert Kellard, Robert Rice (policemen).

Although ultimately a United Artists release, "Too Late For Tears" was clearly
originally made for Republic, since the entire technical crew is Republic's.
Whatever was wrong with the deal probably explains the considerable lapse of
time (nearly two years) between completion of the film and its release (and
also a pity) that neither of tonight's films were photographed by John
Alton, who did a lot of Republic work at that time, and was the noir cinematogra-
grapher par excellence. The film loses a little momentum by (a) coming rather
late in the day when its "Double Indemnity" plot was fairly familiar, (b) by
being a trifle overlong, given that plot familiarity) and, most of all, (c) by
having a particularly weak, late-arriving and unimpressive "hero" (Don DeFore)
who seems ill at ease throughout and its release (Toby Gildea's)

Elizabeth Scott's head, although the poor girl has a perfect excuse for murdering
two husbands in that she wanted to "move out of the ranks of the middle-class
poo hornor, and not particularly stylised -- extensive use of Los
Angeles environs takes the film out of the studio a lot - "Too Late For Tears"
is an enjoyable re-travelling of familiar paths, and makes one wish that Byron
Haskin (who also directed the under-rated "I Walk Alone") had been utilised
far more on noir subjects.

---- William E. Everson

Program ends: app. 10.46 No discussion session