TWO FILM NIGHTS FROM 1949

**BORDER INCIDENT** (1949) Directed by Anthony Mann; Produced by Nicholas Nayfack;
Screenplay by John C. Higgins from an original story by Higgins and George Sukerman;
Camera, John Alton; Music, Andre Previn; 96 mins. NY premiere, Globe Theatre, November '49.
With: Ricardo Montalban (Falo Rodrigues); George Murphy (Mack Bolan); Charles Lang (Joaquin Sosa); Arnold Moss (Bartolo); Alfonso Bedoya (Chiquito); Teresa Cullinari (Maria); Charles McGraw (Jeff Amboy); Joe Varney (Poocholo); John Ridgley (Mr. Nesly); Arthur Hunnicutt (Clarkenford); Sig Rumann (Hugo Wolfgang Ulrich); Otto Waldis (Fritz); Harry Artrip (John Boyd); Tony Barr (Louis); Rosene Jones (Senora); John McGuire (Norson); Jack Lambert (Chuck); Ned Young (Rappy); Fred Graham (Leathercoat); Lynn Whitney (Bela Amboy); Martin Garralaga (Col. Alvarado); Paul Marion (One-armed man); William Phillips (Jim); Lita Barron (Rosita); Frank Cullen (Clerk); Ed Maxwell (Doc Kelo); Mitchell Lewis.

Both of tonight's films were released within two months of one another, and both are from that post-1947 noir period when noir was being mixed with a semi-documentary style. The approach is more naturalistic, using real locations rather than studio sets; expressionistic Germanic lighting has given way to more realistic photographic style, but many of the narrative and characterisation conventions remain the same, and the emphasis on unfolding most of the story at night is unchanged. "Border Incident" is interesting mainly as yet another collaboration between director Mann and cinematographer Alton (who will be honored with a series, at which he will be present, at Astoria's Museum of the Moving Image later this year). In a way, it is a kind of reworking of their 1947 "Man"; again we have two agents working separately on the same case, and even the identical situation of one of them facing death while the other is powerless to intervene. Like most MGM films of its type, it is overlong and overproduced, and despite its pretentions is a dressed-up "B" picture. However, Mann's hard-hitting direction, Alton's stunning photography and an absolutely marvellous collection of villains, touching every noir base from intellectual biggie to European shyster, second-in-command thug and Mexican bandito, contrive to keep it all lively and eminently watchable, though sometimes it becomes a shade too grim to be considered purely a "fun" thriller. Witty amusing too is the film's postscript which suggests that the events of the film are thoroughly worked out, thanks to a mutually beneficial collaboration between the FBI, MGM and God (probably in that order), whereas actually the conditions shown are as rampant as ever and probably less nearer to solution now than they may have been sometime 45 years ago, when the film was made.

**THELVES' HIGHWAY** (20th Century Fox, 1949) Directed by Jules Dassin; Produced by Robert Bassler; Screenplay by A.J. Bezerides from his novel "Thieves' Market"; Camera, Nicholas Musuraca; Music, Alfred Newman; 90 mins. NY premiere, Roxy Theatre, September '49.
With: Richard Conte (Nick Gareos); Valentia Cortes (Rica); Lee J. Cobb (Figlia); Barbara Lawrence (Polly); Jack Oakie (Slob); Millard Mitchell (Ed); Joseph Petven (Pete); Norris Carnovsky (Tango); Tamara Shayne (Farthena Gareos); Kasia Ormszewski (Mrs Palanczy); Robert Schiller (Polanksy); Hope Emerson (Midgren); George Tyne (Charles); Edan Max (Dave); David Clarke (Mitch); Walter Baldwin (Billy); David Opatoshu (Frenchy); Percy Helton (caffe owner); Frank Richards (Pig); Jim Nolan, Robert Foulk (policemen).

Based on a novel by A.J. Bezerides, who also wrote the 1940 "They Drive By Night", "Thieves' Highway" was an unexpectedly well received film in 1949. Fox opened it at the Roxy, (backed by a big stage show) mainly as an excuse to uncull their new Italian-import star Valentia Cortes. It ran into mild censorship problems at the time, partly because of its violence (also censored somewhat in Britain) and also because of the suggestive quality of one of its love scenes - though Fox called attention to that by using it as a key element of their ads. Like other noirs of the period, its plot diffuses and mixes standard noir elements. Most of the characters are misfits and losers, and revenge is a key motif - yet apart from the Valentia Cortes role, none of the protagonists blame their problems on the war. Richard Conte (a wonderful noir icon, whether as hero or villain) is a vagabond foreman of Marlon Brando in "On the Waterfront", while Lee J. Cobb's role is a virtual dry-run for his Johnny Friendly in that same film. Conte emerges victorious far more than most noir heroes of the period, although the cop's warning about the dangers of taking the law into one's own hands is clearly there at Production Code insistence. Like "The Set-Up" it limits its action to a specific time period, and gains suspense and momentum thereby. Studio work, special photographic effects and extensive location work (San Francisco, Oakland, Oxnard, Santa Rosa and other California locations including Highway 99) are superbly welded, and one has no sense of constructive studio space that was often, deliberately subordinated to the mists. Surprisingly that the film is somewhat less memorable than it was remembered and is not the least forgotten in favor of Dassin's bigger and more showy films ("The Naked City", "The Night and the City" and his later European films) but it remains one of his best. The film is no longer generally available, and our quite old print has one or two ragged spots, but on the whole is in very good shape.

--- William K. Everson

Program Ends approx. 10.30. No discussion session this evening.
A reminder: Next week is the only week in the semester when our show is preceded by a Jazz Concert; entrance to the auditorium will not be until approx. 7.20.

A SECOND REMINDER of errors in the printed BS Bulletin: Program listed for Feb. 18 actually plays March 18; program listed for Feb. 25 actually plays Feb. 18; program listed for March 18 plays February 25. Schedule issued at our last December show is CORRECT.