

Comments re: March 4, 2014 class

In yesterday's class there was discussion of paranoia as an element in *film noir*. Yet, there seems to be no evidence of paranoia in the plots of the movies *Strangers on a Train* and *In a Lonely Place* discussed yesterday. Bruno Anthony is a sociopath. His actions are premeditated. It is his premeditation that makes his behavior so chilling. As for Guy Haines, his fear is not a function of paranoia. He has a legitimate reason to be afraid. Guy conspired with Bruno to commit murder. That Guy conspired in jest makes it no less a conspiracy. The fact that Bruno possesses Guy's lighter is proof that the two of them had established some kind of connection. That the police keep the lighter is evidence that they were not finished with Guy.

Dixon Steele is a more sympathetic character than Bruno. He is a military veteran, a former commanding officer and someone struggling to make a living. The last item alone is enough to put him on edge. Now under suspicion for murder, he breaks down under the pressure, lashing out at others. His acting out is not driven by paranoia. He is innocent and knows it. Rather, Steele is being provoked by the police who will not stop harassing him; the harassment makes him angry. The source of the harassment is real.

Someone in the class mentioned the possibility of Steele having Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. That is never established in the story but it cannot be ruled out as a causative factor in Steele's outbursts. Steele's girlfriend, Laurel Gray, also has cause to be afraid, in her case, of Steele. The police tell her about Steele's violent past; that alone is more than sufficient to trigger an alarm, and ruin a relationship in the process.

Robert Walker's performance as a sociopathic killer is uncanny, proof of his skill as an actor. He becomes the epitome of the amoral, narcissistic person who will stop at nothing to gratify his needs. Perhaps the performances that most closely approximate the intensity and style of Walker's performance as a "severely disturbed person" are Jessica Walter's as a homicidal stalker obsessed

with a radio disc jockey in *Play Misty for Me* and Andy Robinson's as a sadistic murderer and kidnapper in *Dirty Harry*.

Harry Hines, the actor who is under the carousel in *Strangers*, deserves at least an honorable mention.