

Examples Of Composition

T-Men

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T-Men (1947)

directed by Anthony Mann

photographed by John Alton

The composition of this shot is immediately evocative of the style called Film Noir. It embodies the classic deep shadows, deep focus, and ceiling details which were often omitted in standard Hollywood fare. The lighting is also stark and gives the impression of realism as available lighting while actually being expressionistic.

The use of deep focus gives this composition many layers of control, and in this case that is quite literal as we can see that all avenues of escape to our central figure are physically blocked in both film space and in real space. Considering our central figure, this too, exhibits a classic compositional motif of the hero dressed in white. However, the hero here is not strictly in white which befits his shady role. Thus his gray suit stands as a metaphor for his characterization of the Federal Agent working undercover among the criminal element, who are classically attired in black. Even the details of him wearing a coarse cross-hatch patterned suit suggests that in this scene he is a *marked man*.

When we examine the composition of the men framing him, we find the dynamic tension of a triangle enclosing him. The ceiling beams also force the perspective with their angles all converging towards him. Even the chair at the bottom of the frame intrudes as a barrier, while the mans spread hands are held expressively as though being dusted off, or otherwise washing our central figure's fate away.