

About The Wrong Son

By Allen Cole
Playwright and Composer

I began writing The Wrong Son in the summer of 1991. For a long time I had been reading novelists of the roman noir school of the 1940's and 50's (Cornell Woolrich, Jim Thompson, James M. Cain). What appealed to me about these novels was the epic narrative style, the outrageous coincidences, the insane romanticism, the dangerous psychological underpinnings, the “dimestore existentialism”.

One novel in particular, I Married a Dead Man, by Cornell Woolrich (known to many as the writer of Rear Window), became a point of departure for me.

This inevitably led me to the films of this period, (directors such as Orson Welles, Alfred Hitchcock, Billy Wilder, etc.) as well as their composers (Bernard Herrmann, Elmer Bernstein, Henry Mancini, etc.).

I discovered that one important narrative strand of the noir genre is that of “everyman on the run, accused of a crime he did not commit.” The subtext of this type of story always involves the discovery by the fleeing protagonist that, despite his apparent innocence, *he has the potential within himself to have committed the criminal act.*

Like a character in a Greek tragedy, the protagonists of these films inevitably run headlong into the violence they've been trying to escape. This struggle to escape the inescapable is the motor for the suspense so crucial to the genre, and it is the central thrust of *The Wrong Son*.

Noir is also clearly born out of the “guilty conscience” of post-war, late 40's North America. The atrocities of the Holocaust and Hiroshima had not yet been glossed over by the happy faces of the 50's. This was particularly true for the young men of that period, so many of whom had difficulties returning to reality at home.

My grandparents, who grew up on the Bay of Fundy, occasionally spoke of this dark period. So many young Nova Scotia men died in the war, so many others, like Ryle in *The Wrong Son*, came home damaged. And those who didn't go to war (like my grandfather, who had polio as a child and was deemed unfit), often felt enormous guilt.

The complexities of this period of history, along with the foggy streets of Halifax and the lonely coastline of the Bay of Fundy, is what led me to marry the noir genre to my home province.