

iff and you aren't a cowboy." "We should have dug deeper than a grave..."; "The world doesn't make any heroes outside of your stories..."; "Next time we'll have a fool-proof coffin"; "...You were born to be murdered..."; "Look at yourself, they have a name for faces like that..."

Among the requisite characters in film noir is the outsider/innocent, the character who in the course of the story gets educated (along with us) in the way things really are. Holly Martins is such a character, who being an outsider and a relatively innocent American, assumes solidarity and objectivity can coexist. In fact it seems likely Holly thinks they work well together and that there is a mutual goal in play, such as coherence or justice. This is probably what most Americans would assume who have never experienced a world war up close and personal. And such an American would always have a hard time tuning in to the *Weltschmerz*, disillusionment and often outright cynicism suffusing a typical post war milieu.

Since Holly Martins believes solidarity and objectivity have never quarreled, he also assumes you don't have to choose. Anna Schmidt has known all along that you do have to choose, and she has made her choice. In fact, for people of her time and place, it is sometimes difficult to tell whether they made the choice or are merely aware of the choice made for them.

As noir would have it the outsider/innocent must submit to a sojourn of coming to consciousness and so Holly embarks on his and beckons us to tag along. The rest of the characters, burned out and idling in the exhaustion of their respective post-war existences, catalyze Holly's rising awareness, prodding him inexorably toward his own psychological fork in the road. With 22 minutes left in the film, Holly reaches that requisite state of consciousness, stares the real world in the face and sheds his innocence: "What price would you pay?"

The synergy of *The Third Man* peaks in Harry Lime. How do we establish the paternity of this character? Who was *the author of his existence*? Is it Greene, or Reed or Welles? The mephistophelian figure we encounter exists purely through their intermingled imaginations. You instantly sense why Holly and Anna have been in the grip of his spell. Harry is as indefensible as he is irresistible and his cheerful nihilism fleetingly tempts us to believe that war and catastrophe can justifiably turn everyone into little dots.

A funeral should qualify as the perfect ending to a story. But proper film noir will have none of such narrational neatness, because ending with a funeral is too much of a certifiably discernible denouement, and *echt* noir prefers a *denouementlos* denouement. Carol Reed deftly obliges this preference. As the zither serenades us for the last time with its melancholic commentary, Anna walks along the avenue leading away from the cemetery, between the long line of barren trees, heading toward Holly. He waits and then she walks past him. He lights a cigarette and flicks the match away.

One can readily infer Anna is professing her solidarity for Harry, the love of her life, and has only contempt for the objectivity Holly displayed in relation to Harry. Conversely, one can just as easily assume her indifference simply means she has no capacity to love again. Or perhaps all it means is that they will meet later for a drink in some cozy *Heuriger* and listen to more zither music.

THE GERMAN SOCIETY OF PENNSYLVANIA

Friday Film Fest Series



The Third Man

By Carol Reed

February 27th, 2015

• 6:30 PM •

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The Third Man (1949)

Director: Carol Reed

Producer: Alexander Korda (UK); David O. Selznick (USA)

Screenplay: Graham Greene, Carol Reed, Orson Welles

Cinematography: Robert Krasker

Music: Anton Karas

Cast: Joseph Cotton (Holly Martins); Trevor Howard (Inspector Calloway); Alida Valli (Anna Schmidt); Orson Welles (Harry Lime); Ernst Deutsch (Baron Kurz)

Spieldauer: 105 minutes

Release Date: September 1949 (UK); February 1950 (USA)

Commentary: A. Krumm

P (Aⁿ) = absolute Noir

If you somehow persuade a rare assemblage of artists to pool their gifts in one creative vessel, you are bucking the odds. It is in essence a collaborative crapshoot. You may be merely fueling an ego driven centrifuge where all the pretty pieces just fly apart. Or perhaps there is simply no synergy among them. Everything depends on the chemistry. *The Third Man* is such a venture and the elements coalesce powerfully, yielding a timeless film the whole of which far exceeds the sum of those pleasing parts.

The film is all the more remarkable if you consider the individuals comprising that cooperative effort, all of whom were dominant figures in their own fields and none of whom were accustomed to sublimating their personalities in the interests of the greater good, in particular the largest among the group (whether calculated in terms of fame, stature or ego), one Orson Welles, whom a friend once fittingly described as “a multitude of a man.”

The Third Man is classic film noir derived from a synthesis of *Trümmerfilm* noir, crime novel noir and proto cold war noir. No one has ever accused it of being neo-noir. It stars Joseph Cotton, Trevor Howard, Orson Welles and Alida Valli, but their characters are rivaled and often overshadowed by a fifth star, post-war Vienna, as rendered by the directorial craft of Carol Reed and the haunting cinematography of Robert Krasker. They didn't like this film in Vienna when it was released. Now they have a museum to preserve its memory and you can even book a Third Man Sewer Tour online.

The alchemist for *The Third Man*, indeed the moneyman, motivator and all around midwife for the project was producer Alexander Korda. Post war Vienna fascinated him and he wanted to capture on film the dynamics of the four-power occupation and above all the devastated condition of the city. So in conjunction with Carol Reed he solicited Greene to go to Vienna and “find a story.” Thus it is ultimately thanks to Korda that the eerie *Stunde Null* atmosphere of the city lives on and that multitudes around the world are familiar with such striking features of the cityscape as the *Wiener Riesenrad*, the *Wiener Zentralfriedhof* and the *Wiener Kanalnetz*.

As a writer, Graham Greene was an *Augenmensch* possessed of a visual orientation which made all of his novels good candidates for film adaptation. That visual sense en-



compassed not just an instinct for the telling detail or vivid image, but also the economy and precision with which he linked his scenes to draw the reader into the story and into the world in which the story dwells. Thus since Greene's novella was an intentional draft for the screenplay of *The Third Man*, one might think there is little or nothing to analyze in terms of literature cum film.

Yet the evolution of the script is a cogent example of creative chemistry in action. Reed and Greene allowed the publication of a version of the final shooting script which showed the emendations made by Reed and Welles. The author did not have to die for the film to be born; it is undeniably a Graham Greene story, yet the editing provides an acute tutorial on the ways in which his prose was tweaked and tugged to satisfy the dictates of the grammar of film.

Nonetheless Reed remained remarkably faithful to Greene's original text. The only noteworthy disagreement between Greene and Reed was the ending. In Greene's treatment we are allowed to believe that the good guy finally gets the girl; in the film we are given a scene of exquisite ambiguity that ignites our imagination even as the story ends. This was the joint inspiration of Reed and David Selznick (who in most other aspects of the endeavor, with the exception of casting, was diligently ignored) and later Greene conceded that Reed had been right to insist on this ending.

Along with his considerable repertoire of directorial skills, Carol Reed knew his noir. It is always advisable to shoot in black and white, with the chiaroscuro effect an insistent reminder that dark and light travel in tandem throughout the world, incessantly jousting for dominion in the hearts of men. All the stylistic gestures and conventions are lovingly observed: a starkly ambivalent atmosphere of existential weariness shading towards grimness; blurred moral boundaries, indeterminate identities, and heavy hints of perspectivalism when it comes to getting a grip on that slippery substance called reality.

And Orson Welles? His biggest contribution was to put in a brief but brilliant acting performance devoid of any contretemps and let Reed direct the film. Years later (after initially confusing things) he graciously emphasized that “It was Carol's film.” Nonetheless, many critics and commentators have noted the stylistic influence of Welles previous oeuvre on Reed's approach. Welles signal contribution to the final screenplay was his immortal cuckoo clock speech.

An unexpected star emerged from *The Third Man*. Along with Reed's exposition and the cocked camera angles and visual atmospherics of Krasker, there is Anton Karas plucking away at his zither. Karas was an unknown musician who performed in taverns around the city. As the story goes, Reed heard him in one of those taverns, carted him off to London and would not let poor Karas return home until he had composed the music for the film, including the Harry Lime theme. The zither music doesn't seem right; but that is just the point – nothing in film noir is supposed to seem quite right and the zither music provides the perfect disorienting commentary on the story. No soap opera suspense chord on an organ could do it any better.

Film noir also needs noir-*Sprache* and *The Third Man* is bursting with it (such dialogue is allowed to be exhilaratingly stagey, but must always be pregnant with angst ridden inferences): “Everyone ought to go careful in a town like this.”; “I don't know anything, except I want to be dead too”; “Leave death to the professionals...”; “I'm not a sher-