

The Third Man (PG) UK 1949

14 November 2016

DIRECTOR: **Carol Reed**

Running time: 111 minutes

LEADING PLAYERS: **Orson Welles** (Harry Lime), **Joseph Cotten** (Holly Martins), **Alida Valli** (Anna Schmidt), **Trevor Howard** (Major Calloway), **Bernard Lee** (Sergeant Paine), **Wilfred Hyde-White** (Crabbin), **Erich Deutsch** (Dr. Winkel).

SCRIPT: **Graham Greene**. PHOTOGRAPHY: **Robert Krasker**. EDITING: **Oswald Hafenrichter**. MUSIC: **Anton Karas**.

If you are so envious as to be approaching this film for the first time, you will no doubt be struck by the black and white images of Vienna after the war, the chiaroscuro lighting and glistening cobbled streets by night. However, this is just one of the several points of interest of the film, of the different ways of approaching it even, that make it such a perennial favourite among critics and filmgoers alike.

It exists very much in the wake of those Italian films termed 'neo-realist', such as *Germany, Year Zero* (director Rossellini), using the City's bombed out remains as the backdrop for some banal personal drama. The documentary aesthetics of location shooting and brittle sound quality, together with unknown actors, announced a new type of social realism and political engagement. Reed is coming at it slightly differently, of course: from the Greene collaboration of *The Fallen Idol* and the labyrinthine streets and darkened doorways of *Odd Man Out*; the images have a more deliberate sheen, the canted camera angles are more poised, but there is no denying those piles of rubble or the untranslated German, or the occasional shot of grizzled extras/onlookers, their breath frosting in the night air.

Another angle is provided by Greene himself, who wrote the film treatment as a kind of Hitchcock spoof along the lines of *Foreign Correspondent* or *Secret Agent*. Holly Martins certainly has elements in common with the Greene protagonist, a bit of a nobody, a flawed hero, not even happy in love. He commits the unpardonable sin, that of Judas, even if his motives are just ones. Furthermore, he is forever being associated, by Calloway, by Paine, even by Lime, with his generically dreadful Western novels, such as *The Lone Rider of Santa Fe*, the implication being that he is as stolid and as phoney as his literary credentials, so disappointing

to his audience at the impromptu lecture undoubtedly stolen from *The Thirty-nine Steps*. Like the producer Selznick, who held Valli under contract, but otherwise had little to do with the predominantly British production, he is the American only along for the ride, and taken for one at that. All of which might seem a bit unfair on Cotten (another Hitchcock reminiscence – the well-travelled Uncle Charlie in *Shadow of a Doubt*), who is after all Welles's buddy from Mercury Theatre days.

This brings us to Welles, who did about three days' work and is on screen for all of fifteen minutes, but who is forever associated with the movie, not least thanks to Kenny Everett... Everyone cites the cuckoo clock speech, which, the actor allegedly wrote, to blow up his line count a little. But it is, above all, the figure of Welles that is used effectively here, stumbling about the sewers, or his white face caught in an upstairs light, detached from his black coat, like a revenant from a gothic horror film. This is the last great Welles film that the actor didn't direct, and actually a lot more fun than *Citizen Kane*.

Finally, this is a film of names – 'Calloway', 'Martins? ...Martins?', 'Winkel', 'Paine, Paine, Paine'..., a film whose very title alludes to a conundrum of identity. That, and the reaching out for iconic moments in the visuals (the final shot), may make it the first modernist work of commercial cinema.

David Clare