



British Cinema in the 1940s has often been labelled the 'Golden Age' although this term could not be applied to what was happening in the world at the time. The six years of world war were followed by a period of hardship and rebuilding. Europe was becoming divided between two ideological blocks as foreseen by Winston Churchill.

In the war years European cinema seemed to have two missions – to distract the population and to bolster the morale of the nations through propaganda.

British cinema was no exception to this. In the early part of the decade dramas laden with propaganda were produced. At the same time comedy and costume dramas were keeping the population amused and entertained.

Post-1945, British cinema's own Film Noir seemed grim and foreboding, concerning itself with a burgeoning social revolt against the British 'subdued way of life'. Rejecting the status quo, society would face conflict, new ways of thinking and new expectations. Films told raw stories with showed concern for contemporary social problems, especially juvenile or youth crime. 'It Always Rains on Sunday' and 'Brighton Rock' for example, are both rooted in an anti-establishment rebelliousness. These films were made during a period of austerity, rationing and rising criminality around protection rackets, adolescent imprisonment, and youth rebellion.

Of all of the "Golden Age" films, the one that stands out most is Carol Reed's "The Third Man" It's one of the few British films that deserves to stand alongside the great classics of international cinema.

Released in 1949, Carol Reed's masterpiece reflects the moral uncertainty of a country trying to come to terms with a new era. It is a thriller but at the same time it explores the issue of moral choice. Far from being a simple-minded portrayal of good vs. evil, like so many films of the World War II era, 'The Third Man' was fearlessly ambiguous and complex in its morality. In places it is funny and witty, in others it deals with a sense of existential crisis which has emerged after the end of the world war.

The script of the film was written by novelist Graham Greene. Before writing the screenplay, he had created the atmosphere, characterisation and mood of the story by writing a novella. He wrote it as a source text for the screenplay and never intended it to be read by the general public, although it was later published under the same name as the film. In 1948 he had

toured the city, its sewers and some of its less reputable night-clubs looking for inspiration and a sense of the city which was to become a character within the story.

Starring Joseph Cotton as Holly Martins and Orson Welles as his friend Harry Lime, the film reunites these two actors who had previously starred in Welles' masterpiece "Citizen Kane". Director Reed was certainly influenced by the themes of betrayal and male friendship shown in this film. Also in major roles are Trevor Howard as Major Calloway and Alida Valli as Harry's girlfriend Anna.

One could also say that the Harry Lime theme and the whole soundtrack of the film, played on the zither by Anton Karas is also a major star of the film.

It is set in post war Vienna and tells the story of the black market and murder. An out of work pulp fiction novelist, Holly Martins, arrives in a post war Vienna divided into sectors by the victorious allies, and where a shortage of supplies has led to a flourishing black market. He arrives at the invitation of an ex-school friend, Harry Lime, who has offered him a job, only to discover that Lime has recently died in a peculiar traffic accident. From talking to Lime's friends and associates Martins soon notices that some of the stories are inconsistent, and determines to discover what really happened to Harry Lime.

The opening of the film sets out the moral chaos of the period – everything is for sale and the black market is thriving. A divided city seems to be out of control. Martin's search for the truth of Lime's death presents him with a conflict of realities. Who should he believe? Lime's friends or the hard headed, Major Calloway? And what of Anna, Lime's girlfriend? Is her portrayal of Harry to be trusted?

The story develops out of these different narratives until, an hour into the film, we see Lime emerge from the shadows. His entrance is unveiled from a shadowy doorway, wrapped in a blanket of darkness,. Welles' fleeting first appearance must rank as one of the most memorable entrances and impact performances of all time.

As the story itself unwinds we see Holly's blind loyalty to Harry being challenged at every moment. Calloway reveals more and more of Harry's black market activities and Holly is presented with a moral dilemma. Should he protect Harry or should he betray him to the authorities? The more Holly finds out the more he seems to act recklessly and without any coherent purpose. Anna Harry's girlfriend remains dedicated to him, dead or alive, whereas Holly in the end is Harry's executioner. no matter that Harry is a murderous racketeer it seems wrong that his best friend should so completely turn on him. What drives him to this? His feeling of betrayal by Harry? His feelings for Anna? Or his own realisation that he has been a fool?

When Anna, at the end of the film, ignores Holly and walks away from him, there's a sense of justice. She punishes him for his betrayal. His good intentions and naivety count for nothing.

Carol Reed's direction creates a lurking sense of paranoia and betrayal, wonderfully capturing the fraught emotions of this period.

The expressionist style of lighting and camera angles adds to the overall feeling of disconnection and chaos from both a moral and personal viewpoint. Reed's direction with its carefully constructed shots and expressionist lighting creates an airy sense of past glories and wrecked dreams. Vienna itself becomes a character in the film- ruined but still beautiful. He even manages to create a mysterious beauty from the Vienna sewers.

This sense of faded glory, lack of moral and social certitude as well as criminality would be a continuing theme in the films of the following decade.

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