

“Nobody thinks in terms of human beings.”

## Orson Welles and the Cult of the Bad



The rôle of Lime was hotly debated. When Mitchum was still in the running, Selznick wired London: “There can be no question whatsoever about the fabulous difference in gross here with Mitchum who is clearly star of first rank against Welles whom Gallup claims is detriment and who in my opinion would not add a dollar to gross.”

Carol Reed reacted to suggestions for the casting of Harry Lime in much the same way as he reacted to the screenplay suggestions of David O. Selznick: he simply ignored them. No one was going to tread on his toes. He wanted an actor who was able to incorporate the angelic with the diabolic, the lovable school friend and brat “who made it all seem such fun”,

but who at the same time could turn into a cynical, nihilistic criminal and remain unaffected by the fate of the anonymous victims of his adulterated penicillin. He had to be a charismatic actor whose presence could dominate the screen and who would leave a powerful impression on the audience in a screen appearance of only a few minutes. Kirk Douglas? Robert Mitchum? Noël Coward? Trevor Howard? For Carol Reed there was only Orson Welles. The multi-talented Hollywood child prodigy was an excellent actor, as much at home on stage as on screen. He was artistically extravagant and eccentric in the extreme. He had great personal charisma, and was not unlike Reed’s own father, the legendary London actor-manager Sir Herbert Beerbohm-Tree. Only Welles would be able to personify the attraction and abhorrence of evil. Furthermore, it would be an absolute coup to bring together the two old friends Orson Welles and Joseph Cotten, who had known each other since their days together at the Mercury Theater and who had not starred next to each other since *Citizen Kane*.

Reed and Welles were in touch for the first time in Rome. Reed knew that he would need to be persuasive, as Welles would probably have a hundred reasons for not wanting to be in *THE THIRD MAN*. Not least of which was the fact that the man whom he was supposed to play does not appear until the second half of the film, and then only for a few minutes! He was also reluctant to break off his work in Venice on *Othello*. Of course, an actor such as Welles would have preferred to be on screen throughout the film, and then under his own direction! Nevertheless, Reed succeeded, and Welles agreed even

without seeing one single line of the screenplay. Then it was Alexander Korda’s turn to be persuaded. He had strong reservations about Welles, although not as much as David O. Selznick, who felt that hiring Welles would be a commercial risk. Korda had been forced to break off several projects with Welles, which would have given the American star the chance to make three films for London Films as actor, director and even producer, and all under conditions he could only have dreamt of in the States. But he had to admit that he could not imagine the suave Noël Coward in the rôle of a villain such as Harry Lime. Moreover, he knew that Welles always needed money. His Broadway show *Around the World in Eighty Days* had flopped, and Korda had rescued him from his creditors. Now Welles was trying to raise money for another project very dear to his heart, a film version of *Othello*.

However, Orson Welles would not have been Orson Welles, if he had not carried out a completely crazy game of hide and seek across half of Europe just before his contract needed to be signed. Perhaps this wilful and unpleasant prank was his revenge on Korda for letting their mutual projects collapse. Perhaps he was feeling intimidated by Reed, who was considered one of Britain’s best directing talents of the time. Whatever the reason, Korda was forced to send his younger brother Vincent to Rome to find Welles and bring him to London. He was told to be clever about it, and not to let Welles feel how much they needed him. Vincent Korda arrived in Rome and set up residence in the Hassler Hotel in order to catch Welles, whom he believed to be resident in the Grand Hotel only to learn that the latter

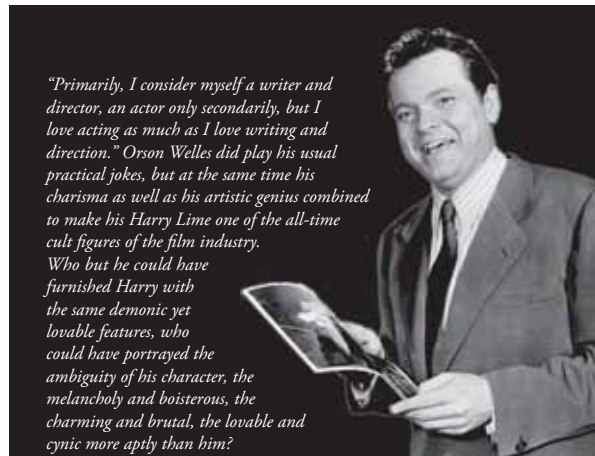
had only just departed for Florence. Korda followed him to Florence, not yet unduly upset by this cat and mouse game, but he missed Welles again in Florence, as he had apparently gone on to Venice. This game repeated itself in Venice, in Naples, and finally on Capri. At least Vincent Korda managed to catch a glimpse of Welles here. His ferry was just mooring on the island, as the actor was returning to Naples by speedboat. Welles was obviously enjoying the game, but knew at the same time that he needed the money, not least to pay his horrendous hotel bills, and Korda had promised to pay cash. “I was going to do it, but I was going to pay Alex for all those movies I hadn’t done”, he later admitted. The chase finally came to an end in Nice. Vincent Korda had caught up with Welles. And where else would he have found him but in one of the finest restaurants in town? Not wanting to take any further chances, Korda sent him to London in a private jet. The journey itself was trouble-free. However, Welles still felt it necessary to make a point. Vincent had brought back with him a basket of exotic fruit for his brother Alexander. The present was a real luxury as post-war England was still in the grip of rationing, but by the time Vincent handed over the fruit, Welles had taken a bite out of each piece!

Negotiations with Alexander Korda began immediately. Welles was not particularly enthusiastic about the part of Harry Lime, and was only interested in getting the best possible financial deal. Normally, Korda offered an advance payment and a percentage of the royalties. However, this time he offered Welles an option of either a 20% share of the royalties or cash payment of \$100,000. Welles made the biggest mistake of his life: “I took the

\$100,000. The picture grossed, you know, something unbelievable ... in America it was only a success, but in the rest of the world it was an absolute bombshell - it was *The Sound of Music*, you know. There never was such a hit in twenty-five years as there was in Europe.” How could he have known that *THE THIRD MAN* would make seven million dollars in the USA alone?

The money Korda spent definitely paid off: Orson Welles’s charismatic presence and his extraordinary acting ability made the penicillin profiteer one of the most irresistible anti-heroes of film history. Choosing Orson Welles was truly a stroke of Carol Reed’s casting genius. The cast was brimming with talent, but Welles was

its undisputable star. Would Noël Coward, Trevor Howard or even Robert Mitchum have been able to convey the same sense of melancholy and wit, self-pity and brutality, the loveable yet disreputable and unceasingly cynical personality in the way that Welles did? Graham Greene had succeeded in concentrating his views on the world into perfectly composed dialogue, and chosen the Great Wheel as the most symbolic location for the action. Carol Reed had shot this turning point of the film in a truly innovative manner. Yet it was to a large degree the bravura performance of the American *wunderkind* that made *THE THIRD MAN* what it is today: a classic.



*“Primarily, I consider myself a writer and director, an actor only secondarily, but I love acting as much as I love writing and direction.” Orson Welles did play his usual practical jokes, but at the same time his charisma as well as his artistic genius combined to make his Harry Lime one of the all-time cult figures of the film industry. Who but he could have furnished Harry with the same demonic yet lovable features, who could have portrayed the ambiguity of his character, the melancholy and boisterous, the charming and brutal, the lovable and cynic more aptly than him?*

He came all the way here to visit a friend of his. The name was Lime. Harry Lime..... Where are you staying? – With him, Stiftgasse Lime.....Coffin? – Mr. Lime's.....Could called Lime.....So you were a friend of Baron Lime.



von Kurtz. – It's I would much around.....I wanted to ask you some questions about Harry Lime.....



15. – His name? – Lime, Harry you tell me, is this? – A fellow Harry's?.....Mr. Martins, excuse me, a mistake. – I was a friend of Harry like to meet you, Baron. Come

I've been He said

talking to a friend of Harry's. Baron Kurtz. Do you know him?..... Harry had been anxious....He was Harry's driver....You and I were

both friends of Harry Lime – I was his medical adviser....I want Harry's friends.....I helped Harry fix her papers, Mr. Martins..... to the porter at Harry's place.....Give me the Harry Lime file..... real. He wasn't just your friend and my lover. He was Harry.



to meet all of I was talking Harry was

To a great extent Harry Lime's myth is founded on Welles's brilliantly staged entrée in a darkened, night-shrouded doorway in Schreyvoglgasse, (Anna's street), where Harry's face is briefly illuminated by a light from an upstairs window. Could there have been a greater entrance for an actor who appears only in the second half of the film? As if by magic, he steps out suddenly from the darkness of the doorway, a saint and a sinner rolled into one, with a mocking smile. He fills the screen with so much intensity that one could almost believe he had been standing behind a gravestone since the beginning of the film just waiting to burst into the plot in the fifty-ninth minute like a diabolical *deus ex machina*.

Orson Welles once gave an interview in which he said that he did not care how many lines he had as Harry Lime. The most important thing was how present he was in the film. And present he certainly was, for his name was mentioned fifty-seven times before his first appearance. The prologue gives him the leading rôle in the very first minutes: "Ah, I wanted to tell you about Holly Martins from America. He came all the way here to visit a friend of his. The name was Lime, Harry Lime." At the funeral Martins is told it is a Harry Lime who is being buried. Baron Kurtz introduces himself to Martins as a friend of Harry: "I think his best, except you, of course." At Smolka's Bar Martins assures Major Calloway that "nobody knew Harry like I did." Anna talks of Harry former doctor. The police are searching for Harry's letters. Anna assures Calloway that Harry never did anything. Popescu welcomes Martins at the Casanova Bar: "Any friend of Harry is a friend of mine." Major Calloway describes in great detail

Harry Lime's racket. But to Anna, "Harry was real. He wasn't just your friend and my lover. He was Harry."

Welles once compared his appearance out of the darkness of the doorway with the part of the great magician Mr. Wu, which he had acted years before on stage. As he explained to Peter Bogdanovich in an interview, "The old star actors never liked to come on until the end of the first act. Mr. Wu is a classic example. I've played it once myself. All the other actors boil around the stage for about an hour shrieking, 'What will happen when Mr. Wu arrives?' 'What is he like, this Mr. Wu?' and so on. Finally a great gong is beaten, and slowly over a Chinese bridge comes Mr. Wu himself in full mandarin robes. Peach Blossom (or whatever her name is) falls on her face and a lot of coolies yell, 'Mr. Wu!!!' The curtain comes down, the audience goes wild, and everyone says, 'Isn't that guy playing Mr. Wu a great actor?' That's a star part for you! What matters in that kind of rôle is not how many lines you have, but how few. How counts is how much the other characters talk about you. Such a star vehicle really is a vehicle. All you have to do is ride."

Orson Welles was not only the perfect Mr. Wu, but also the perfect charmer. Not only Anna's purring cat, but in fact the whole world is at Harry's feet. His friend admires him, and his lover remains truthful to him. In the novel Calloway warns the reader, "Don't picture Harry Lime as a smooth scoundrel. He wasn't that. The picture I have of him on my files is an excellent one: he is caught by a street photographer with his stocky legs apart, big shoulders a little hunched, a

belly that has known too much good food for too long, on his face a look of cheerful rascality, a geniality, a recognition that his happiness will make the world's day." But Calloway knows only too well that he is worse than just a charming villain. Not only does he know how to obtain a false passport, where to slip into Vienna's underground passages and how to buy the cooperation of the Soviets, but he is also one of the "worst racketeers who ever made a dirty living in this city." "He could fix anything... how to put up your temperature before an exam, when he was fourteen he taught me the three card trick," reminisces Holly, full of melancholy. For Welles he was the incarnate force of evil. When the two friends finally come face to face on the Great Wheel, Harry Lime looks contemptuously down at the people reduced to the size of dots: "Victims? Don't be melodramatic. Look down there. Would you really feel any pity of one of those dots stopped moving forever? If I offered you 20,000 pounds for every dot that stopped, would you really, old man, tell me to keep my money? Or would you calculate how many dots you could afford to spare? Free of income tax, old man, free of income tax." With a dangerously roguish smile, he opens the car door: "I carry a gun. You don't think they'd look for a bullet wound after you hit that ground." It is only when he learns that his body has been exhumed that he becomes insecure. His smile freezes. His movements show discomfort. He cannot look his childhood friend in the eye. Only by walking up and down the car and chewing indigestion tablets can he control his unease. Does he feel that fate is finally catching up with him? He is bothered by Anna's lot: "I've got to be so careful. These Russians, Holly - well, I'm safe so long

as I have my uses." But he would not be Harry if he did not regain the upper hand, and try to justify his crimes and those of the rest of the world: "In these days, old man, nobody thinks in terms of human beings. Government's don't, so why should we? They talk of the people and the proletariat, and I talk of the mugs. It's the same thing. They have their five year plan and so have I." He discards any sense of guilt and instead reveals precisely the contempt of mankind and cynicism so redolent of the times. And, as if to make sure that his friend really gets the message, he smugly delivers his famous, perverse justification of his crimes correlating the aesthetic triumphs of Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci in Italy with warfare, terror, murder and bloodshed under the Borgias, and linking brotherly love, five hundred years of democracy and peace in Switzerland to the development of no more than the cuckoo clock.

The line about the cuckoo clock is perhaps the most frequently quoted line of the film. Euphoric critics claim it is the key message of the film. Witnesses to the filming, however, are convinced that everything followed from Welles's mood. For just one moment he wanted to slip out of the director's firm grip and to challenge Reed's direction. Whatever the reason, this cynical afterthought binds the name of Orson Welles to THE THIRD MAN forever.

And yet the auspices had not always been good. Once Orson Welles had finally arrived for filming at Shepperton Studios on 17th January 1949, studio boss Alexander Korda decided to attend in person on set, and to watch filming of the Great Wheel scene. Would Welles try to



Carol Reed, Alexander Korda, Vincent Korda (his back towards the camera) and Orson Welles embroiled in conversation. Korda, who had told Carol Reed, "Try not to let him know how much we need him, but get him back here and I'll persuade him to sign a contract" makes a personal appearance at Shepperton to make sure Orson Welles does not usurp the director's authority.

give Carol Reed directorial notes again, as he had a few weeks earlier in the sewers? Everyone knew that the actor was jealous of Carol Reed, who, following *Odd Man Out* and *The Fallen Idol*, belonged to the top echelon of directors. The air was thick with tension, but Reed was not perturbed. Welles on the other hand was nervous. Sweat appeared on his forehead, and he had difficulty in remembering his lines. After thirty unsuccessful takes, he began to look exhausted. Hysteria took over. To make up for his insecurity, Welles tried to undermine the director's

authority. Hardly had Reed turned his back to him that he started doing a gay imitation of the director's clumsy, duck-like walk, intending to raise a laugh and win the unit to his side. All he won was a dead silence. Anyone else would either have had words with Welles or thrown in the towel (which is what Reed actually did with Marlon Brando on the set of *The Mutiny on the Bounty*). Instead, *sotto voce*, but loud enough for Welles to hear, Reed told Ted Scaif, the camera operator, to try the next take without film. The next take was perfect. Reed had won. Welles took

the hint, and thereafter he was as good as gold. When asked about this later, he said that he could see through the whole game, but that Reed had caught him out with one of his own tricks: "As a director I soft-soap the actors. I caught Carol doing that with me and, what was worse, I found myself believing him. Carol and I have one thing in common: we are awfully patient with me." However, when asked whether working with Orson Welles was worth all the trouble, Reed replied with composure: "He is quick, and very, very fast. It's like working with a volcano, but it's fun. One day you think he's caught your idea. The next day he is off on quite a different track. He's a wonderful showman. He likes to make everybody laugh..." Joseph Cotten later explained to Elizabeth Montagu that Welles, no matter how brilliant he was as a director, was unsure of himself as an actor, especially when playing opposite his old friend: "It all goes back to our days together at the Mercury Theater, when he had a kind of inferiority complex about acting, especially with me."

Critics praised Carol Reed unstintingly for this *tour de force* with Orson Welles. His first-class performance was a sure proof of his strength as a director. Reed understood Welles, and realised that him made the highest demands on himself, always searching for new terrain and experimenting. Not always successfully, however. One time it may have been the critics who tore him to pieces. Another time he may have been let down by financiers, and then Korda would not see a future in their ambitious mutual projects. Whatever the case, Welles was always able to attract attention to himself, whether positive or negative, and to make headlines and get the largest share of the

credits. Angela Allen remembers working with him: "He was a tremendous wit. You could feel his aura and his presence, but he was also like a spoilt child that loved playing games."

And still, in the Great Wheel scene Welles manages to put everyone else in the shade, Alexander Korda, Graham Greene and Carol Reed. Even if THE THIRD MAN was not his film and the genius actor and director was never part of the production team, some film writers still seem to be clinging to the myth that Orson Welles not only wrote his own dialogue, but was also responsible for the screenplay as such, or at least parts of it. It is suggested that he had added "certain characteristics" to the rôle of Harry Lime and that he directed some scenes himself. One also reads that THE THIRD MAN contains many elements which made *Citizen Kane* such a masterpiece.

Following the extraordinary success of THE THIRD MAN, whether consciously or unconsciously, Orson Welles had started to create a myth around his own contribution. He had always been a great raconteur, and gradually the impression arose that he was not only responsible for the cuckoo clock lines but also for the whole scene in the Great Wheel. This seemed to irritate Graham Greene considerably. When the author sent a friend a personal copy of the screenplay, he stipulated in the dedication that only those lines which he had marked in the text were Welles's. The rest were all his own. Later Greene, however, admitted that Welles's lines were some of the best in the film. Guy Hamilton is doubtful that the lines came from Welles: "I have no justification for saying this, but my whole instinct tells



"What kind of a spy do you think you are, satchel-foot? What are you tailing me for? Cat got your tongue? Come on out, come out, whoever you are. Step out into the light and let me have a look at you. Who's your boss?"



Harry Lime's entrance remains one of cinema's greatest moments: "THE THIRD MAN had no face: only the top of a head seen from a window," is what Graham Greene wrote. Carol Reed has made it a film classic. The film is already more than half over. For fifty-nine minutes Harry has just been a word. The cat is the clue for an observant audience, but for most what happens is a surprise - for sure also for Holly Martins!



1 Orson Welles has finally arrived in Vienna. The long-awaited star is met at the Südbahnhof Station by Assistant Director Guy Hamilton to his right and Production Manager Hugh Perceval to his left. There had been a great sense of anticipation among the cast and the unit. Welles's reputation as an independent-minded, highly talented bully of an actor had intimidated most actors and directors who had worked with him before.



2 Sightseeing in Vienna. No matter how difficult Orson Welles may have been on the set, when it came to meeting people in the street he was as easy as could be. In this picture he poses with an Austrian policeman in front of the parliament.



3 "Unless I try something new, I get bored with everything". Orson Welles discusses a theatre project with the director of Austria's National Theatre, Raoul Aslan. Between the two men Helga Romanow, who looked after Orson Welles during his stay in Vienna in 1955.

for the creator of  
the best bloody Marys  
in the world!  
with thanks  
Orson Welles

4 In 1955 Orson Welles stayed at the Sacher Hotel where he spent many happy hours in the Red Bar. This is what he wrote into the guest book: "for the creator of the best bloody Marys in the world! With thanks, Orson Welles"



5 Orson Welles back to Vienna. Here he is having a good time at Anton Karas's Heurigen wine tavern.



1 Simply wanting to look good: The rôle of Harry Lime was the only one Welles ever played without false hair or make-up. In all of his appearances in *THE THIRD MAN* he gives the impression of stepping directly out of his own life, and so he stayed in tune with Carol Reed's realistic approach.

me that it is not Orson's line. Orson takes credit for it ... I'm convinced that it's not an Orson Welles original. More than that I can't say and I could be very wrong." He wasn't wrong. Welles may have got the inspiration from his research on the Borgias for his part in *Prince of Foxes* as Cesare Borgia, the epitome of corruption and evil. In an interview he once revealed that he had drawn the inspiration from a Hungarian play.

Bogdanovich's interview with Welles also touched upon the subject of Welles's general contribution to *THE THIRD*

MAN. Asked what else he had done apart from playing Harry Lime, the actor answered that he had also written his part. Bogdanovich: "Every word of it?" Welles: "Carol Reed is the kind of director who'll use any ideas – anything that's going. I had notions for the dialogue, and Carol liked them." He was asked if he had anything to do with the actual setups and shots in the picture. He replied that he only had a few ideas, such as the fingers coming through the grille. And the cat scene? "That was pure Carol", he admitted. "He had a little second-unit specially set up for it, and at the end of every day we went there and

tried it again, over and over, till he thought it was right." Welles also gave Reed full credit for the ending on the cemetery: "It was a great shot invented by Carol, not by Greene or anybody else. Wonderful idea." He watched the scene, and wished that he could pretend he had contributed at least something to this marvellous take. The man who was always at Reed's and Welles's side is the one who knows for sure: "Welles had bugger all to do with the direction", said Guy Hamilton. And still, when one looks for *THE THIRD MAN* video or DVD in the shops, one can be sure to find it filed under "W" for "Welles".

Orson Welles stood neither behind the camera nor sat in the director's chair, nor did he write the screenplay, but there was a larger-than-life personality encapsulated in his part. His charismatic appearance on screen was simply imbued with the compressed power of his multi-faceted personality, his knowledge of the human psyche, his almost obsessive love of experimenting both in theatre and film, and his almost childish love of games of illusion. So the key part of Harry Lime was the pivot around which everything else had to revolve, and this left very little room for the others, both on the set and in the film itself. If it weren't for Welles's milestone performance as the attractive as well as repugnant Everyman in the style of Hugo von Hoffmannsthal, *THE THIRD MAN* might not have the world-wide reputation it enjoys today, and it might not be one of the most honoured films of all time. Undisputedly, Welles was the one who added the touch of emotion, glamour and thrill, which elevated *THE THIRD MAN* from an undisputed masterpiece to a classic.

Orson Welles might well have been a thorn in the side of Hollywood's studio bosses because of his proverbial extravagance and lack of commercial marketability, and he might have divided legions of critics, film historians and fans into opposing camps. Nevertheless, they all agree on one thing that Harry Lime became the bravura performance of his career; despite the fact that it was more or less only a supporting rôle, that he never cared to play it and that he accepted it only because of his notorious lack of money. Harry Lime remained Orson Welles's trademark character which helped him and the film to become unforgettable.

Whenever Welles appeared in public or gave interviews, he was Harry Lime and he ensured that even after fifty years people would remember him as such. In 1951, as cinema, dance and variety stages across the world were still vibrating to the zither music of Anton Karas, he resurrected Harry Lime with a popular spin-off radio show for the BBC titled *The Adventures of Harry Lime* hosted by, and starring, himself as a re-creation of his famous character from *THE THIRD MAN*: "That was the shot that killed Harry Lime. He died in the sewers underneath Vienna, as everyone knows who saw *THE THIRD MAN*. That was the end of Harry Lime. But it was also a beginning. Harry Lime had many lives. And I can recount all of them. And why can I? Because my name is Harry Lime." With the same nonchalance as Harry but not quite as ruthless and villainous, Welles had Harry charging from one adventure to another, mixing with the underworld in some of Europe's most disreputable cities, seducing pretty women, concocting bizarre intrigues and escaping dozens of dangerous situations

by a hair's breadth. In *A Ticket to Tangier* Harry gets caught up in a dangerous drugs racket. In *Two Is Company* Harry uses his mafia connections to arrange a marriage in an unconventional if lucrative fashion. It was brilliant and witty entertainment from a man who calculated that, as long as people associated him with Harry Lime, he might as well benefit from the fact and at the same time create publicity for his own production of *Othello*. Although only two of the fifty-two episodes were actually written by Welles himself and some unofficially directed, his persuasive and secretive voice and his gift of turning virtually every situation into a practical joke gave the series its vitality and suspense. The actor Robert Arden, who appeared regularly in the Harry Lime series, praised Welles's uncanny speed with which he was capable of piecing together an entire show: "To those of us more used to working with the BBC, in radio shows his technique was a revelation. At the BBC, they would take three days to record a half-hour show. Orson had it all together and recorded inside one morning." The musical accompaniment in the shape of zither music was of course by Anton Karas. And, if that was not enough for dedicated Harry Lime fans, they could buy the radio plays in book form a year later. One of the episodes eventually became the germ of the Orson Welles classic *Mr. Arcadin* (1955), a study of the shady background of a mystery man, with which Welles hoped to recapture some of the ingredients that had made *Citizen Kane* such a landmark success. A year later Welles produced the television series *Around the World with Orson Welles*, one episode of which was entitled *THE THIRD MAN* in Vienna. Not even in the late sixties did he let go of Harry. In 1968, he produced *Spying*

in Vienna (Orson Welles's Vienna) with Mickey Rooney and Austrian star Senta Berger. Ironically, this rather bizarre ten-minute stint was shot on location in Zagreb, Croatia. Unlike in *THE THIRD MAN*, Welles strolls through Vienna at a leisurely pace, commenting on the city and its inhabitants. He visits the Sacher Hotel and the Great Wheel, and finally he finds himself involved as spies abduct the most beautiful woman in town. A print is kept in the Orson Welles Collection at the Munich Film Museum.

The figure of Harry Lime was also resurrected in seventy-seven episodes of the BBC spin-off *THE THIRD MAN*, starring British star Michael Rennie. They were produced in Hollywood and the Shepperton Studios between 1959 and 1963. But the only points in common between the original and the spin-off were the title and the title music. In the new version there were no hosed-down cobbled streets, none of the spectacular cinematography nor the sublime suspense of its model. *THE THIRD MAN* also lived on in a colourised television version produced by Ted Turner, on hoardings, in television advertisements, in political caricatures, on an unrecorded Beatles' variation of the famous Harry Lime Theme or in the sound track of the German Western parody, *Der Schuh des Manitu* (2002). In Vienna, the city of its making, it is still screened three times a week all year round and *THE THIRD MAN*'s fiftieth anniversary was crowned with its being voted in a British Film Institute poll Best British Film of the Century, and with the release of a digitally re-mastered DVD version. Once a myth, always a myth. Modern producers continue to be drawn in by the



2 Double-checking continuity: The star with Peggy McClafferty

fascination of THE THIRD MAN, and talks of sequels never stop. Even when Graham Greene was still alive, the Austrian director Robert Dornhelm dreamt of making The Fourth Man. The story about Orson Welles coming to Vienna to play Harry Lime in order to make money for his delayed *Othello* production is still high on his agenda. Originally, everyone wanted to take part, from Orson Welles to Joseph Cotten and the entire Austrian cast. Graham Greene, however, was not interested. Nor did the plans of the Australian producer Phil Brady for a sequel to THE THIRD MAN materialise. In 1997, Oliver Stone planned a remake in a co-production with Lumière Pictures, but nothing materialised. Who could actually take on Orson Welles, or wear a duffle coat more casually than Major Calloway? Steven Spielberg had a better idea: Harry Lime and Holly Martins in the bodies of two world-dominating mice in The Third Mouse, an episode in the cartoon series Pinkey and the Brain, a twenty-minute homage, with zither music played by unseen hands in the prologue, a tilted camera in the style of Carol Reed and of course the Giant Wheel, cuckoo clock and sewers. Even outside the English-speaking world THE THIRD MAN has left its imprints. It served as inspiration for Zoran Tadic's Croatian production The Third Woman, set against the background of war in Yugoslavia.

When Welles signed his contract for THE THIRD MAN, he was thirty-three years old and had already a purported five thoU.S. And engagements to his credit. As actor and director, he was praised as a genius by a large fan club, but he was also condemned by legions of Hollywood executives and critics who simply could not, and would

not, tolerate his unviab artistic demands and eccentricities which would prevent his productions from making money at the box office. Born the second son of a wealthy inventor and a concert pianist, he showed remarkable gifts already in early childhood, excelling at poetry, painting, acting, music and magic. His earliest artistic pursuits were dramatisations of Shakespearean dramas in the puppet theatre of his playroom, directorial interpretations of classic and modern playwrights at school, and a stage debut at the age of sixteen in a production of *Jew Suss* in Dublin's Globe Theatre, where he had misrepresented himself to the director as a star of New York's Theatre Guild. In 1934 he hit Broadway playing Tybalt in *Romeo and Juliet*. At about this time Welles met John Houseman with whom he formed the Mercury Theater, which soon became famous for its original, bold productions. He also set new standards for radio drama, and with one of these productions Welles received world-wide attention for the first time: his dramatised radio adaptation of H.G. Wells's apocalyptic novel *The War of the Worlds* caused widespread hysteria among Americans one Sunday evening in October 1938. Originally conceived as a macabre contribution to the forthcoming Halloween celebrations, the extremely realistic presentation of Martians landing in New Jersey sent thousands into a panic, and the police into the studio. Everyone started talking about him, and it was not long before Hollywood showed an interest in the brilliant outsider. Barely twenty-five-years-old, he was given carte blanche to show off his talents as (co-)author, director and actor in *Citizen Kane*, in which he co-starred with Joseph Cotten. Perhaps no other director's first publicly shown film had caused as great a stir nor

created a greater impact in the world of film. It pushed cinematic boundaries to the limits and broke all Hollywood records, at least in artistic, if not financial terms. Critics raved over his acting ability and his extraordinary directorial debut as well as the rendering of the story of *Citizen Kane* himself, based openly on the life of the legendary and eccentric newspaper magnate Randolph Hearst. His innovative use of camera and sound set the trend for filming in the 1940s, and the screenplay, which Welles had co-written with Herman J. Mankiewicz, won an Academy Award. With *Citizen Kane* Welles carved out a place of lasting importance for himself in the world of the cinema. Unlike many others of his films which were re-edited or even wholly or partially re-written, *Citizen Kane* unquestionably belonged to himself alone. But it also started Welles' s dubious reputation as "box office poison" – the film-genius who was financially unviable. During the course of his spectacular career, which evoked almost constant controversy over its more than fifty years, Welles succeeded in completing only thirteen films for commercial distribution, including, however, some of the milestones of film history. Among them are *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1942) again starring his friend Joseph Cotten, *The Lady from Shanghai* (1964) in which he co-starred with his then wife Rita Hayworth, award-winning *Othello* (1952) and *Touch of Evil* (1958), a tale of corruption set in a sleazy American border town, all of which ironically earned him only mediocre success at the box office. And yet his reputation went to show off his talents rather limited number. Welles was constantly coming up against the boundaries of the possible. Each of his film projects charted new territory, but often foundered. It was once said

of him: "One Orson Welles is enough. If there were ten thoU.S. And Orson Welleses, society would fall apart like an exploding bomb". Disenchanted with the pragmatism of Hollywood and hoping to find more artistic freedom in Europe where he could work on his own terms, he left the States for a prolonged self-exile only eight years after his greatest triumph. In Europe in the 1950s, he was able to realise his many high-flying projects more or less independently of outside producers. Luckily, his skill and reputation as an actor was most helpful in this period. His fees for his supporting rôles and cameos, such as the \$100.000 he earned for playing Harry Lime, flowed directly into his own projects. "I use my own work to subsidise my work. In other words, I'm crazy", he said later. For years he shot his films wherever his engagements would lead him in his nomadic life. Thus, *Othello* became a four-year enterprise, shot in many locations with frequent interruptions, but finally it was worth the effort, when it was awarded the Golden Palm at Cannes. Many other projects remained fragmented. Apart from a short return to the States, during which he appeared in his own Broadway production of *King Lear* and starred as corrupt police chief Hank Quinlan in *Touch of Evil* which he also directed, he would not return finally to the USA for three decades. When he did in 1975, the year of the release of *F for Fake*, the American Film Institute honoured its prodigal son with a Lifetime Achievement Award – of course against the backdrop of a huge image depicting him as Harry Lime! In 1984 the Directors' Guild bestowed on him its highest honour, the D.W. Griffith Award. When Welles died of a heart attack a year later, he left his partner and collaborator Oja Kodar,

whom he had met during the making of *The Trial* and who acted in his films and often helped co-produce them, a collection of film material unprecedented in film history. The full scope of his oeuvre only became clear when she handed the work to the Munich Film Museum for keeping and research. It included fragments of unfinished films, outtakes, rehearsals, improvisations and interviews.

When one thinks of Harry Limes' Vienna, two locations come immediately to mind: the Giant Wheel of the Prater Amusement Park and the city's extensive sewers. There is no doubt that both locations have contributed immensely to the overall appeal of THE THIRD MAN. Graham Greene in the original story as well as Carol Reed in the film ensured that both loomed large in the relationship between the two friends Harry Lime and Holly Martins: the highest point of the ride marking the end of Martins' innocence, the sewers representing death. Perspectives change at the giddy top of the journey. Height challenges our assumptions: what difference does it make "if one of those dots stopped moving forever?" One sees the world through different eyes. That surely was also the point for Vienna's number one entertainment tycoon Gabor Steiner: to be lifted high above all worldly matters for a few pennies, and to spend a few carefree minutes looking out over the ghost trains and merry-go-rounds of the amusement park below and over the cityscape of Vienna.



Graham Greene uses the unforgettable location of the Great Wheel for the crucial turning point in the story about Harry Lime. It is at its highest point that Harry reveals the depths of his infamy. His cynicism encapsulates the crimes of the twentieth century and crosses the Communist-Capitalist divide. Greene's story is not just a thriller, but also a modern morality play.



MARTINS: Have you seen any of your victims?  
 HARRY: You know, I never feel comfortable about these things. Victims! Don't be melodramatic! Look down here.  
 [Harry opens the sliding door of the car.]



MARTINS: I should be pretty easy to get rid of.  
 HARRY: Pretty easy.  
 MARTINS: Wouldn't be too sure.  
 HARRY: I carry a gun. I don't think they'll look for a bullet wound after you hit that ground.  
 MARTINS: They dug up your coffin.  
 HARRY: And found Harbin?  
 Hm ... Pity.



HARRY: You're just a little mixed up about things in general. Nobody thinks in terms of human beings. Governments don't, why should we? They talk of people and the proletariat, I talk about the suckers and the mugs. It's the same thing. They have their five year plans and so have I.



HARRY: Would you really feel any pity if one of those dots stopped moving for ever? If I offered you twenty thoU.S. And pounds for every dot that stops, would you really, old man, tell me to keep my money - or would you calculate how many dots you could afford to spare? Free of income tax, old man. Free of income tax. It's the only way to save nowadays.



*"... and a world for Martins had certainly come to an end, a world of easy friendship, hero-worship, and confidence that had begun twenty years before in a school corridor."  
 (THE THIRD MAN, p. 82)*





Orson Welles is having some fun with his long-time friend Joseph Cotten. He loved making mischief because he had a "low boredom threshold" as he once told a journalist.



Orson Welles as *Citizen Kane* and Joseph Cotten as Jey Layland: It was a clever coup of Carol Reed, to cast them again side by side in *THE THIRD MAN*.



"Don't be so gloomy. After all, it isn't that awful. Remember what the fellow said: in Italy under the Borgias they had warfare, terror, murder, bloodshed, but they produced Michaelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci and the Renaissance. In Switzerland they had brotherly love - they had five hundred years of democracy and peace, and what did that produce? The cuckoo clock. So long, Holly."

"The Cuckoo Clock Speech": The only scene where Orson managed to slip in *his* version" of the script. The confrontation between the two friends counts among the finest performances of both actors. At the same time it is a perfect blend of great writing, directing and acting. The colloquial tone belies the philosophical as well as religious character of their conversation. Greene, the Catholic convert, was steeped in religion - even when he was often a prodigal son - and knew his Bible well. The inspiration came from Matthew 4,9-12, the temptation of Jesus by Satan on the mountain.



1 The umpteenth take: The expert acting and perfect interaction of the two actor-friends belie the fact that this sequence had to be shot thirty-two times.



2 Trying to direct the director: On the mock-up steps of the Great Wheel



3 Joseph Cotten looks concerned about Orson Welles's rearranging his lines to suit himself. He himself stayed as close to the script as Welles would allow him. Assistant Director Guy Hamilton is on the left.



*"He was out of the café again before Martins had put down the receiver. It was one of those rare moments when none of my men was in the café. One had just left and another was on the pavement about to come in. Harry Lime brushed by him and made for the kiosk."  
(THE THIRD MAN, p. 113)*





High Tension on the Sewer Location: "Carol, I can't work in a sewer. I come from California."



However memorable that definitive image of Orson Welles illuminated by the light shining from a living-room window, however extraordinary his performance in the Great Wheel scene, what makes his performance unforgettable is his last scene in the sewer. Caught by Major Calloway's trap and with the Viennese Sewer Police in hot pursuit, Harry Lime descends down into the underground world of the sewers so familiar to him, and meets his fate half way up the steps of a cast-iron spiral staircase. He is only inches away from freedom when his friend catches up with him and finishes him off. It is Welles's wonderfully expressive face that stops this scene becoming sentimental. His eyes reflect not only the panic of a murderer for whom escape is no longer possible. In his eyes we see the total helplessness of a man who at the very bottom of his heart is not so bad that he does not deserve either redemption or pardon. As his glance meets that of his friend, his fear leaves him; he nods almost imperceptibly and thus signals to his friend that he is ready to pay for his crimes. Evil is finally redeemed.



The legendary chase scene through Vienna's labyrinthine sewers. It made Welles the city's quintessential underground man.

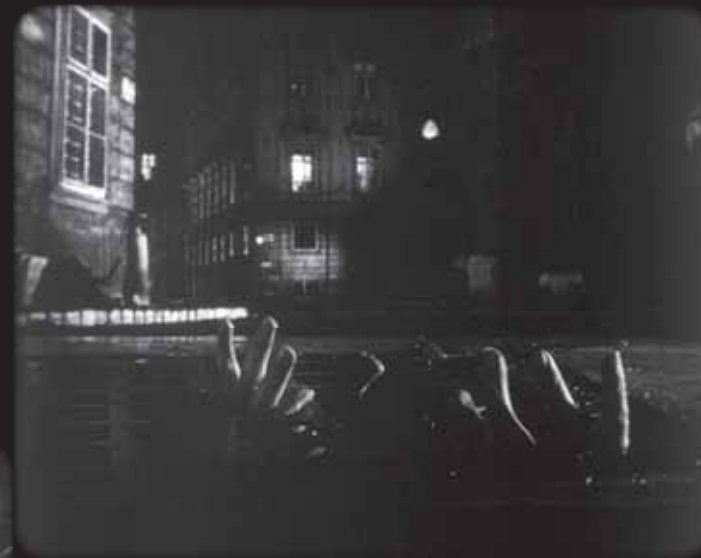


*"The silly thing is the bastard doesn't stand a chance. The manholes are all guarded and we've cordoned off the way into the Russian zone."*  
(THE THIRD MAN, p. 114)



*"Paine took a whistle out of his pocket and blew, and very far away, here and again there, came the notes of a reply. He said, 'They are all down here now. The sewer police, I mean. They know this place just as I know the Tottenham Court Road. I wish my old woman could see me now.'"*  
(THE THIRD MAN, p. 114)





The Final Shootout: Cornered, the massive iron steps, the supports and the damp bricks have turned the sewer into his prison. His small caliber handgun is dwarfed by the structure, all that is revealed of his face is an eye revealing his desperation. The fingers of his other hand grip the step in a futile gesture.



7. 75.

*"For a moment I thought he was dead, but then he whimpered with pain. I said, 'Harry,' and he swivelled his eyes with a great effort to my face. He was trying to speak, and I bent down to listen. 'Bloody fool,' he said - that was all. I don't know whether he meant that for himself - some sort of act of contrition, however inadequate (he was a Catholic) - or was it for me - with my thoU. S. And a year taxed and my imaginary cattle-rustlers who couldn't even shoot a rabbit clean? Then he began to whimper again. I couldn't bear any more and I put a bullet through him."*  
(THE THIRD MAN, p. 117)



Harry's Dying Moment: It releases all tension and allows the moral meaning of the story to seep through.





