

## Portraits of Egoism in Classic Cinema II: Negative Portrayals

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### 1. Conceptual Recap

In this trio of articles, I examine how egoism is explained in six great classic films. I suggested in the first review that we need to distinguish the various meanings of “egoism.”<sup>1</sup> I distinguished “psychological egoism,” which is the strong claim that all humans (or even all animals generally) always act to maximize their individual self-interests, from “default egoism,” which is the weaker claim that all humans usually act to maximize their individual self-interests, though they can and will on occasion act out of ultimately other-regarding concern.

I also distinguished both of these psychological views from “ethical egoism,” which holds that any person ought to act solely to maximize his or her ultimate self-interest, and “rational egoism,” which holds that any person is irrational if he or she does not act to maximize his or her ultimate self-interest.

These, I suggested, were essentially philosophic concepts. More psychological are the concepts of egotism and cynicism, both personality traits, and also the concepts of a narcissist and a psychopath, both personality disorders (i.e., psychologically dysfunctional personality types).

An egoist of whatever stripe need not be an egotist (i.e., a boastful person) nor a cynic (i.e., a person who has or routinely expresses skepticism of others’ motives). And neither an egotist nor a cynic need be an egoist.

We noted that both narcissism and psychopathy are psychologically extreme manifestations of egoism, so while a narcissist or a psychopath is certainly an egoist, an egoist need not be either. Since both personality disorders will be important in this review, it is worth recalling how psychologists typically characterize them.

A “narcissist” is a person who is very emotional, feels superior to and has contempt for those deemed inferior, is egotistical, craves admiration, fantasizes about fame and power, wants to dominate others, is insensitive to

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<sup>1</sup> Gary James Jason, “Portraits of Egoism in Classic Cinema I: Sympathetic Portrayals,” *Reason Papers* 36, no. 1 (July 2014), pp. 107-21.

others' feelings, sets grandiose goals, is given to jealousy (and suspicion of jealousy in others), is thin-skinned, and is manipulative.<sup>2</sup> A "psychopath" (or "sociopath") is a person who may appear to be charming and good, but in reality is completely self-absorbed; thoroughly dishonest; domineering; attention-seeking; comfortable with danger; impulsive; totally without empathy; unable to feel guilt; unable to take responsibility for his actions; and predatory, manipulative, and callous in his relationships with others.<sup>3</sup>

## 2. The Egoist as Narcissist or Psychopath

In the first of this trio of articles, I looked at two classic films in which egoism is presented as more or less morally benign. Let us turn next to a pair of films in which the filmmakers (specifically, the directors and writers) portray egoists more negatively, namely, as narcissists, or worse, as psychopaths.<sup>4</sup>

### a. *All about Eve*

Let's start with a great melodrama, made in 1950, in a genre movie studio executives used to call the "women's movie." It is the superb *All about Eve*, and was both a commercial as well as a critical success. In fact, the film was nominated for a then-record fourteen Academy Awards, winning six (including for Best Picture, Best Supporting Actor, and Best Director). Even more unusually, the actresses in all four of the major female parts were nominated for Oscars for their acting—that is, either Best Leading Actress or Best Supporting Actress—in the picture.

The movie is really all about that peculiar industry, Broadway Theater. All of the major characters in it are theater people. The movie opens at an awards banquet. We meet Eve Harrington—Broadway's new ascendant star—as she is being presented with the Sarah Siddons Award for best new actress on stage. As we watch, we hear the snide and snooty voice of the Dickensian-named Addison DeWitt. DeWitt introduces himself (he is a prestigious theater critic), and promises to tell us all about the meteoric rise of Eve—all about Eve, in fact.

DeWitt is played with supercilious charm by George Sanders, who won the Best Supporting Actor award for his performance. Sanders was a personality actor who typically played an intelligent, witty, sybaritic narcissist in his roles—which seems to have been his genuine personality. Eve is

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<sup>2</sup> Accessed online at: <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/narcissistic-opersonality-disorder/DS00652>.

<sup>3</sup> Scott O. Lilienfeld and Hal Arkowitz, "What 'Psychopath' Means," accessed online at: <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article.cfm?id=what-psychopath-means>.

<sup>4</sup> *All about Eve*, directed by Joseph L. Mankiewicz (Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation, 1950); *The Third Man*, directed by Carol Reed (London Film Productions, 1949).

magnificently played by Anne Baxter, who was nominated for a Best Leading Actress Oscar for her work here.

Just before Eve is given her award, the presenter intones, “We know her humility, her devotion, her loyalty to her art, her love, her deep and abiding love for us, for what we are and what we do, the theater. She has had one wish, one prayer, one dream—to belong to us. Tonight, her dream has come true. And henceforth, we shall dream the same of her.” We see that the audience is surprisingly unenthusiastic. They know all about her, and as DeWitt’s voice over her freeze frame says, “You all know all about Eve. What can there be that you don’t know?” Quite a bit, it turns out.

We then flash back about a year, and meet the film’s other leading female character, actress Margo Channing (played with all her formidable emotional intensity by Bette Davis, who was nominated for the Best Leading Actress Oscar for her work here). Margo, while the top actress on the stage, is now forty years old, and worried that her career path will head downward from here. (As an aside, we should note that among other important sub-texts in this richly complex movie, there is an exploration of the tension between career and marriage for women—rather surprising, since the film was produced in 1950.)

One night after a performance, Margo’s closest girlfriend Karen encounters a young woman in the alley near the theater’s stage door. (Karen is well-played by Celeste Holm, who was nominated for the Best Supporting Actress Oscar for this part.) The sad-faced woman introduces herself as Eve Harrington, and tells Karen how much she admires Margo, the lead actress, and how she has seen all of the performances of the play in which Margo is currently starring. In an act of compassion she will come to rue, Karen invites Eve backstage to meet her professed idol.

Eve and Karen go into Margo’s dressing room, where Margo, along with her coterie, is resting after the show. These include her loyal, long-time maid Birdie (played as comic relief by veteran character actor Thelma Ritter, also nominated for a Best Supporting Actress for this film). There is also Lloyd Richards (Hugh Marlowe), the author of the play and Karen’s husband. Also present is Bill Sampson, Margo’s long-suffering beau and a director about eight years younger than she is. Bill is superbly played by Gary Merrill, who had the difficult job of playing opposite Bette Davis as her romantic interest. (In fact, the two actors married after the film was completed and released.)

Eve tells the assembled group the tragic story of her life. She tells them (displaying a docile and dejected demeanor) that she was born the daughter of a poor farmer, and went on to work as a secretary for a brewery, where she fell in love with acting after joining the company’s small theater. She found acting “like a drop of rain on the desert.” She married a local boy, and moved to San Francisco while her husband fought in the Pacific. When he was killed in combat, she was all alone there. It was only the transformational experience of seeing Margo on stage that saved her, and she followed Margo to New York. While telling her sad story, she meekly flatters Margo with such

lines as, "I've seen every performance . . . I'd like anything Miss Channing played in . . . I think that part of Miss Channing's greatness is her ability to pick the best plays."

The group—Margo's inner circle—is deeply moved, especially Margo herself. She is obviously vain, and such flattery helps Eve sell her sob-story. Only the sardonic Birdie sees through Eve, remarking sarcastically, "What a story! Everything but the bloodhounds snappin' at her rear end." This comment doesn't disabuse Margo—it only angers her, and she rebukes Birdie: "There are some human experiences, Birdie, that do not take place in a vaudeville house—and that even a fifth-rate vaudevillian should understand and respect." So Eve joins Margo's circle, and moves in with her as an assistant.

But we soon see that even as Eve is working as a seemingly loyal assistant to Margo, she is in fact craftily moving to replace Margo. Eve works to sow division between Margo and her boyfriend Bill, as well as between her and Lloyd. She tricks the overly trusting Karen into arranging for Margo to miss a performance (allegedly for her own good), which means that, as Margo's understudy, Eve will get to perform—and she slyly makes sure that all of the theater critics are in attendance.

Eve then makes a play for Bill, though he rebuffs her. She even blackmails Karen into pushing Lloyd to give Eve (rather than Margo) the lead in his new play, by telling Karen she will let Margo know that Karen helped her to arrange Margo's missing the performance. To Karen's relief, Margo independently decides she doesn't want the part anyway.

All of this gives us the perfect picture of the manipulative and deceptive tricks a thoroughgoing narcissist might use to get her way. However, it is precisely here where Eve's narcissistic thespian *pleonexia* (over-reaching) leads her to her final fate.

At this point, having secured the lead role in Lloyd's new play, but having angered Margo, Bill, and Karen in the process, she decides to use DeWitt to advance further. This, we realize, is rather like a Siamese cat fighting *mano-a-mano* with a tiger. Before the premiere of Lloyd's new play, she confides in DeWitt that she intends to get Lloyd to divorce Karen—the very woman who gave Eve the initial chance to become part of Margo's circle—and marry her. Eve claims that Lloyd has professed his love for her, and will now write brilliant plays for her.

DeWitt, angry because she is attempting to use him—a novice arrogantly trying to best the master!—and, we suspect, because he wants Eve for himself, lets her know that he has discovered all about the real Eve, that is, has learned her actual life story. She is, in fact, Gertrude Slojanski, and while she is indeed from Wisconsin and did actually work for a brewery, she was paid off to leave town and keep quiet about her affair with her boss. She is neither an orphan, nor the wife of a war hero, nor a passionate devotee of Margo. DeWitt blackmails her, saying that she now belongs to him, and won't be marrying Lloyd or anyone else. She is visibly stunned and completely silenced.

In the dénouement, we switch back to the Sarah Siddons award ceremony, where the regal Eve accepts her award with all of the faux humility we now expect. Her disingenuous acknowledgement of Margo, Bill, Karen, and Lloyd is met with their cold stares. After the ceremony, she gives the award to DeWitt and—forgoing the party in her honor—returns home. As she wearily enters her apartment, she finds that a teenage girl named Phoebe (from the Greek for “bright and shining”—like a new star) has managed to get in and is sleeping on her couch. Phoebe (played nicely by Barbara Bates) immediately starts to ingratiate herself to Eve, offering to pack Eve’s trunk for her trip to Hollywood.

In the final scene, Eve’s doorbell rings while she is in her bedroom, and Phoebe answers. It is DeWitt, who is dropping off the Siddons award. Phoebe flirts with him, and considering how much older he is, this is clearly manipulative, and we sense that DeWitt, so very used to this sort of treatment from this sort of woman, immediately recognizes a future acquisition to his “stable.”

After he leaves, Phoebe tells Eve that it was just a cabby dropping off the award. The film closes with Phoebe dressing in Eve’s costume dress, and admiring herself in the mirror with Eve’s award held above her head.

Seeing this image of Phoebe in a multiple reflection, we recognize the grandiose dreamwork of yet another narcissist with thespian ambitions, and we know that Eve faces additional retribution.

What are we to make of these characters? While Margo and Bill aren’t complete narcissists, they are certainly vain and more or less full of themselves.

Looking first at the character of Margo, it seems clear that she is certainly a vain, domineering drama queen (which is why casting Bette Davis for the part was so inspired). Her emotional overreaction to turning forty, and her general histrionics indicate this. (Who can forget her announcement at her party, “Fasten your seatbelts, it’s going to be a bumpy night!” warning the guests of the dramatic outbursts to come.) We also see this in her supercilious comments on autograph seekers: “Autograph fiends, they’re not people. Those are little beasts that run around in packs like coyotes. They’re nobody’s fans. They’re juvenile delinquent, they’re mental defective . . .”

Bill is also vain, bragging at one point as he leaves for Hollywood to sign a picture deal, “Zanuck is impatient. He wants me, he needs me.” (Bill is referring, of course, to Darryl F. Zanuck, and this is a sly, self-referential joke, for Zanuck was in fact the producer of this film.)

However, Margo isn’t totally narcissistic in the clinical sense we defined it above. For it is obvious she loves Bill, and has deep affection for Lloyd, Karen, and Birdie, and is drawn in by Eve precisely because she is compassionate (if also gullible).

Eve, by contrast, is surely a perfect narcissist. She is cunning, a manipulative liar to the core, and freely uses people for her own purposes—from her hometown boss, then Karen, then Margo, then tries to use DeWitt. Indeed, she attempted to steal the husband of the very woman who first

interceded on her behalf, using sex as a tool for her advancement (as she did in her home town). And she deeply craves the adulation that comes from being a star—like being in a desert and craving rain.

Eve is only contained in the end by DeWitt, an equally profound, if more crafty and calculating, narcissist. He controls her, we suspect, for sexual purposes, though this is unclear. In fact, some have argued that both DeWitt and Eve are obliquely portrayed as gay<sup>5</sup>—but I find that dubious. Consider first DeWitt. To begin with, there is no indication that he is attracted to either of the male leads (or any other men in the movie). More importantly, Sanders was invariably cast in the role of the debonair woman's man or womanizing cad, and it seems to me that we are meant to view him in this film as a heartless narcissist who uses his power as a theater critic (the power to make or break actors' careers) to prey sexually on young, upcoming actresses. One sees this also in the scene at Margo's party: DeWitt has brought a gorgeous, ambitious young actress, Claudia Casswell (played appropriately by Marilyn Monroe, in a brief appearance). While DeWitt gives her advice on how to make use of the contacts at the party, he is dismissive of her talent, saying that she is "a graduate of the Copacabana School of Dramatic Art." In *Eve* (and at the very end, Phoebe), we see that he understands his prey all too well.

Regarding Eve's sexuality, there is likewise little evidence that she is sexually attracted to any of the other women in the story. Yes, she moves in with Margo as an assistant, which perhaps can be construed as some sort of spousal relationship, though even that claim is debatable. However, she looks at Margo not with erotic interest, but (as Birdie notes) with predatory interest. From what we can tell, then, the only people Eve seems sexually involved with or interested in are men, and then only for what they can do for her. She isn't so much gaily homosexual as grimly heterosexual, or perhaps asexual.

Looking at the main characters in this film, we see yet another subtext. The film advances the view of the people who gravitate toward the theater (and presumably to the motion picture industry as well) as being generally vain, grasping, overly emotional, self-absorbed, desperate for adulation, and often even clinically narcissistic. It is a view of show business as a kind of Hobbesian state of narcissistic nature, that is, a war of all narcissists against all. (I leave it to the reader to decide whether this view is an accurate sociological observation.)

### ***b. The Third Man***

Let us consider next *The Third Man*. This film is a superb piece of film noir crime cinema, but—as do *The Bridge on the River Kwai* and *All about Eve*—it transcends its genre. It was brilliantly directed by Carol Reed (who was nominated for a Best Director Oscar for his work in the film), and the screenplay was written by eminent author Graham Greene, who first wrote

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<sup>5</sup> Accessed online at: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/All\\_About\\_Eve](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/All_About_Eve).

it as a short novel. While it won an Academy Award only for Best Black and White Cinematography, it won the British Academy Award for Best Film, and the Grand Prix at the Cannes Film Festival. What's more, it is rated as the greatest British film of the twentieth century by the eminent critics association BFI (the British Film Institute).

It is outstanding again at every level. Visually, it is stunning, with the action taking place against the bombed-out streets of Vienna, and toward the end, its sewer system.<sup>6</sup> The cinematography was enhanced by the use of odd camera angles and stark lighting, though not all critics have appreciated it.<sup>7</sup>

Adding to the film's visual power is the aura of political and moral ambiguity of the city. During this period, Vienna was a pawn in the Cold War, and it was divided into four occupation zones, each governed by a major Allied occupier: the U.S., the Soviet Union, The United Kingdom, and France. The economy of Austria at this time was less than 60% what it was before the war, with food and consumer goods in severe short supply, and with inflation, crime, and unemployment rampant. There were a number of food riots. All of this spawned a large black market, which forms the backdrop for the story.

This compelling cinematography was accented by the film score, written and played on a solo zither by Anton Karas. The title theme was a huge international hit.

At a literary level, the Graham Greene story is a fascinating and novel crime story, one in which the lead character doesn't appear until the middle, and in which the story (and film) both opens and closes with the funeral of its lead character. Moreover, it is one involving very odd (not to say *outré*) characters, with often very witty dialogue.

Greene's writing really lent itself to cinema: nearly seventy of his novels were put on film. He wrote popular books in a literarily respectable style, and was a close contender for the 1961 Nobel Prize in Literature. He wrote a number of works infused with his Catholic religious sensibilities, but was also fascinated by "great power" international intrigue, and especially international espionage—an interest spurred no doubt by his stint in Britain's MI6, its equivalent of the CIA, during WWII. That interest colors this film, as does Greene's life-long focus on the reality and prevalence of evil in our world.

At a philosophic level, *The Third Man* is brilliant for making the viewer think about the nature of evil and what leads people to live a life of evil, why love can go unrequited, and the ideas of friendship, betrayal, and conflicts of duties.

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<sup>6</sup> The only other movie I can recall that features a major city's sewer system as an essential venue for the flight of the main character is the underrated film noir classic *He Walked by Night*. A good précis of the film can be accessed online at: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/He\\_Walked\\_by\\_Night](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/He_Walked_by_Night).

<sup>7</sup> On these points, see: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Third\\_Man](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Third_Man).

The film opens with Holly Martins (impeccably played by plastic<sup>8</sup> actor Joseph Cotten) arriving in post-WWII Vienna.<sup>9</sup> Holly is a writer of pot-boiler Westerns—a kind of Zane Grey manqué. He has been invited to Vienna (and his ticket purchased) by his long-time closest friend, Harry Lime, with the promise of a job.

Harry is portrayed in a legendary performance by Orson Welles. Welles had worked with Cotten both in radio and in cinema, most importantly in the classic *Citizen Kane* (1941). Welles, though he could be a plastic actor, was usually a persona actor. He often played the arrogant, intelligent narcissist (a paradigm case of type casting!).

Welles had a hand in writing some of his dialogue—especially the “cuckoo clock speech”—and it is rumored in some of the direction as well, especially the final chase through the sewer system. In any case, it appears that Reed was certainly influenced by Welles’s own directing style in such great Welles pictures as *The Stranger* and *The Lady from Shanghai*, and especially the aforementioned *Citizen Kane*.

Holly decides to go to the address he was given, and there he is told that Harry is dead—he was hit by a car while he crossed the street, and his funeral is being held even then. Holly rushes off to it, and there he meets two British military policemen, Major Calloway (admirably played by Trevor Howard), and Calloway’s aid, Sergeant Payne (Bernard Lee). Payne, it happens, is a devotee of Holly’s books. Holly also meets a beautiful woman, Anna Schmidt (alluringly acted by Alida Valli), who turns out to be Harry’s mistress.

Calloway offers to buy Holly a drink, and takes him from the cemetery along the main road back into the city. Over drinks, Calloway tells Holly that Harry was wanted by the police, saying, “[Harry’s accidental death] was the best thing that ever happened to him . . . . He was about the worst racketeer that ever made a dirty living in this city . . . . You could say that murder was part of his racket.”

Holly, who thinks of Harry as a lovable rogue—mischievous perhaps, crafty certainly, but not vicious—becomes angry, and tries to punch Calloway, whereupon Payne punches him first. Calloway shows his obvious contempt for Holly by telling Payne to take “the scribbler with too much drink in him” to a British military hotel, tossing Holly some military money (script) and advising Holly to get out of Dodge, so to say, that is, to fly back to America.

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<sup>8</sup> In the first article of this three-part series, I defined a “plastic actor” as one who acts his character strictly as guided by the scriptwriter and director. A “persona actor” is one who usually informs the character with the actor’s own (real or projected) personality.

<sup>9</sup> A detailed summary of the film can be found on Filmsite.org, the American Movie Channel’s cinema database site, accessed online at: <http://www.filmsite.org/thir.html>.



At the hotel, Holly is invited to deliver a lecture on modern literature, which allows him to stay. He sets out to prove that his friend is innocent—saying that he plans to write a new novel—“It’s a story about man who hunted down a sheriff who was victimizing his best friend . . . I’m gunning just the same way for your Major [Calloway].”

Parenthetically, one subtext in this film is the clash between the black-and-white moral perspectives of a simplistic American Western with the moral ambiguities in the modern age. In the original novelette/script, both Holly and Harry are Englishmen. Carol Reed’s decision to make the lead characters American, and make one of them a writer of dime-Westerns, was a brilliant stroke.

Holly then meets a friend of Harry’s, “Baron” Kurtz (unctuously portrayed by Ernst Deutsch), who also claims to love Holly’s books, in a café. Kurtz tells him that Harry was killed when he crossed the street to talk to another friend, a Romanian by the name of Popescu (menacingly played by Siegfried Breuer). Harry was hit by a truck, Kurtz says, and Kurtz and Popescu carried him to the sidewalk, where Harry told Kurtz to take care to see that Holly is well taken care of and sent home.

But Holly realizes that Kurtz’s story differs significantly from the one he was told earlier (by the porter nearby) that Harry had died instantly. Holly presses Kurtz on this:

Holly: [Pointing to the porter] But he said he died instantaneously.

Kurtz: Well, he died before the ambulance could reach us.

Holly: So it was only you and this friend of his, uh, who was he?

Kurtz: A Rumanian, Mr. Popescu.

Holly: I’d like to talk with him.

Kurtz: He-he has left Vienna.

When Holly presses him for information about Anna, Kurtz is even more evasive, only telling Holly that she works at the Josefstadt theater, and advises Holly that “You’d better to think of yourself”—an egoistic criminal recommending that Holly think egoistically, perhaps, but also a covert threat to get Holly to back off.

Holly returns to the hotel, where Payne offers him a ticket home, courtesy of Calloway, but Holly—increasingly convinced that something happened to his friend, and wanting to get to the bottom of it all—hands the ticket back. As Calloway and Kurtz have learned, Holly is driven to find the truth—a sort of Sheriff Oedipus, so to speak—and, like Oedipus’s search, Holly’s will have shattering, unintended consequences.

That evening, Holly goes to the theater and meets Anna, who proves equally cryptic and elusive. Holly—who we see is clearly attracted to her—asks if she loved Harry, and she replies melodramatically, “I don’t know. How can you know a thing like that afterwards? I don’t know anything more except I want to be dead, too.” When he questions her about Harry’s death, she gives an account different from both Kurtz’s and the porter’s. She reports that

Harry's own doctor just happened to be passing by when the accident happened, and—stranger still—that the driver of the car/truck was in fact—*Harry's own chauffeur!* At this point, Holly is convinced that his roguish friend has been murdered.

Holly and Anna then visit Harry's apartment, and Holly talks to the porter, who was an eye-witness. The porter's version of events has it that Harry did die instantly, apparently with a crushed head, and that there was a third man present at the scene, a man who was not Harry's doctor, who was never questioned by the authorities. Holly presses the porter to tell the police his story, but the porter refuses to get involved. He tells Holly to leave. As he walks Anna back to her apartment, she warns him not unkindly, "You shouldn't get mixed up in this . . . Why don't you leave this town—go home?" Calloway, Kurtz, and now Anna have warned Holly to get out, but he is too obtuse or stubborn to heed the advice.

Holly and Anna arrive at her apartment to discover that the police (including Calloway) are searching it. They find a forged passport Harry had given her. Holly feels protective of her, but also annoyed that Calloway won't take seriously Holly's theory that Harry was murdered. Calloway said he doesn't care how Harry died, and reiterates that Holly should leave. When Holly says that he intends to get to the bottom of the matter, Calloway cynically replies, "Death's at the bottom of everything, Martins. Leave death to the professionals."

Holly persists in his quest. After Anna is arrested, he visits Harry's doctor, Dr. Winkel (Erich Ponto), who tells him that Harry's crushed skull was consistent with either an accident or a murder. Later, after Anna is released, Holly accompanies her to a club, where Kurtz introduces him to the Rumanian Popescu who—just coincidentally—is now back in Vienna. Popescu tells Holly his version of the story—that Harry was killed by a truck, and there was no third man there. Holly tells him that, obviously, someone is lying.

We next see several scenes in rapid succession. We see Popescu talking to someone on the phone, arranging a meeting with an unknown person, along with Kurtz and Winkel. Then we see the porter shout to Holly that if Holly will come by later, the porter will tell him more about the accident.

But when Holly and Anna show up later at the porter's residence, they find that he has been murdered. The crowd gathered outside suspects Holly of committing the crime, and he flees. He finds a cab, tells the driver to take him to Calloway's headquarters, but the cab takes him instead to a literary club meeting (which he had earlier agreed to address). While betraying his ignorance of modern literature, he is obliquely threatened by Popescu, who is accompanied by two thugs. After making it clear that he intends to continue investigating Harry's murder, the thugs chase him. Holly eludes the thugs, and makes his way to Calloway's office. This sets up the dénouement.

Calloway expresses exasperation, saying, “I told you to go away, Martins. This isn’t Santa Fe. I’m not a sheriff and you aren’t a cowboy. You’ve been blundering around with the worst bunch of racketeers in Vienna, your precious Harry’s friends, and now you’re wanted for murder.” Calloway then calls for Harry’s dossier. It shows that Harry’s gang has been stealing penicillin from the military hospital, watering it down (so they can sell more of it), and peddling it on the black market. When the ever-obtuse Holly asks, “Are you too busy chasing a few tubes of penicillin to investigate a murder?” Calloway connects the dots for him, replying, “These were murders. Men with gangrened legs, women in childbirth. And there were children, too. They used some of this diluted penicillin against meningitis. The lucky children died. The unlucky ones went off their heads. You can see them now in the mental ward. That was the racket Harry Lime organized.”

Calloway then shows him a slide-show montage of evidence: pictures of Harbin, the orderly at the hospital who stole the penicillin for Harry, fingerprints, and other photographs that finally convince Holly that Harry was evil. Holly agrees to leave Vienna.

An intoxicated Holly later visits Anna again, and finds that while Calloway has also informed her of the extent of Harry’s criminality, she still loves Harry—as she puts it, “Harry was real. He wasn’t just your friend and my lover, he was Harry. . . . A person doesn’t change because you learn more.” As he leaves her apartment building, Holly sees a figure in a dark doorway across the street. He shouts out, and when a resident upstairs opens a window, the light illuminates the face of the lurking man. It is—*Harry Lime*.

Harry, it turns out, faked his own death. *He* was the third man, and had his car run over Harbin (the complicit hospital orderly), and then buried Harbin in Harry’s grave—a ruse that completely fooled Calloway (and everyone else).

Harry vanishes before Holly can get to him. Holly immediately informs Calloway, who at first thinks Holly’s drunk (which he is), but rapidly figures out that Harry is indeed alive and has fled into the city’s huge sewer system.

Anna, brought in to police headquarters again for questioning, is at first shocked to hear that Harry is alive, but refuses to give the police any information about him, even to save herself from deportation to the Russian zone. She shows her protective love of Harry, saying, “Poor Harry. I wish he was dead. He would be safe from all of you then.”

Holly arranges (through Kurtz and Winkel) to meet Harry the next day at the giant Ferris wheel at the Wiener Riesenrad park. In arguably the most riveting scene in the film, the two meet and talk in one of the gondolas as the wheel takes them high above the city. Holly tells Harry about Anna’s plight, which Harry derisively dismisses by saying, “What did you want me to do? Be reasonable. You didn’t expect me to give myself up. ‘It’s a far, far better thing I do.’” Anna’s love is as unrequited by Harry, it appears, as Holly’s is for her. In fact, as I will explore below, Harry was complicit in Anna’s arrest.

When Holly brings up Harry's victims, Harry displays his mentality, a side of him Holly doubtless never saw (because Harry doubtless hid it):

Victims? Don't be melodramatic. Look down there [at the other people in the park, who look like small dots in the distance]. Would you really feel any pity if 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. The only way you can save money nowadays.

Harry then tells Holly that he always carries a gun, indicating that he is contemplating using it to kill Holly. However, Holly tells him that the cops have already figured out what's going on (they dug up the corpse from Harry's supposed grave and identified it as Harbin). Harry then resumes his self-justification, noting, "Nobody thinks in terms of human beings. Governments don't. Why should we? They talk about the people and the proletariat, I talk about the suckers and the mugs—it's the same thing. They have their five year plans, I have mine."

When they reach the ground, Harry offers to take Holly on as a partner (reminding Holly that "I've always cut you in"), advising Holly that it wouldn't be difficult for Holly to adjust his moral views in order to be comfortable joining the volunteers. Harry makes the point implicitly in his "cuckoo clock speech," to which I will return below.

Later, pressed by Calloway to help, but still under Harry's spell, Holly is reluctant to set Harry up for capture, but Holly agrees to do so when Calloway agrees to stop Anna's deportation. However, when Holly meets Anna later, she angrily refuses, saying that while she no longer loves Harry, she "couldn't do a thing to harm him." (This signals that despite her protestations, she really still does love Harry.)

Holly returns to Calloway, and says that he now just wants that ticket back home. Calloway realizes that Anna has swayed the weak Holly. He offers Holly a lift to the airport, but takes him to the children's ward at the hospital instead. Here Holly actually *sees* the victims of Harry's handiwork. (We, the viewers, never see the children directly—we only see a sad, discarded teddy bear.) Holly relents—he will arrange a meeting with Harry at a place, a café, where the police will be waiting. As he says wearily to Calloway, "You win . . . I'll be your dumb decoy duck."

Later, while Holly sits at the café (truly a sitting duck), Anna rushes in, having learned of the trap from Kurtz (now under arrest), and angrily confronts Holly, as Harry enters from the back:

Anna: What's your price [for cooperating with the police in Harry's capture] this time?

Holly: No price, Anna.

Anna: Honest, sensible, sober, harmless Holly Martins. Holly—what a silly name.

Seeing Harry enter, she warns him to get away. Instead, Harry draws his gun, and motions for Anna to get out of the way. But Harry is forced to flee when Sergeant Payne comes in through the front of the café.

The movie ends with Harry, after being chased through the streets, going underground into the sewers, where the police follow, entering at multiple points. Harry kills Payne, and in turn is wounded by Calloway. Holly takes the gun from Payne's hand, and he strides off after Harry—like a sheriff striding after the bad guy, gun in hand, facing a showdown. He catches up with Harry, who is now wounded and trapped, and—when Harry seems to invite it—finishes his friend off with a single shot.

The movie closes ironically similar to the way it opened: Holly, Anna, and Calloway all at Harry's funeral, only this time it's real.

What are we to make of the main characters in this film? Let's start with the two male leads, the protagonist Holly and his eventual antagonist Harry, and discuss them in order.

Certainly, whatever else Holly is—morally simplistic? overly single-minded? simply obtuse?—he is no egoist. He is clearly a devoted friend of Harry until his eyes are opened in the children's ward—even, it would appear, at the bitter end in the sewers of the city. And his search for the truth shows a commitment to principle. He also clearly felt the children's suffering, which is why he helped the stern and unlikable Calloway hunt down Harry. And he obviously falls in love with Anna.

As an aside, some have suggested that Holly's relationship with Harry is somehow "homoerotic."<sup>10</sup> This seems unlikely, however. There is no evidence we see in the film that Holly has ever had any sexual involvement with or even any sexual attraction to Harry. He only says the he was a lonely student at school, and that Harry was his best friend. This hardly indicates anything more than fraternal feeling. (This "school" was very likely a boarding school; both characters were British in the original script/novelette, and sending one's children off to boarding school is very common in Britain.) And more to the point, he falls in love with Anna—while he is convinced that Harry is dead. (He doesn't make a play for her during the period when he knows that Harry is alive.)

What about Harry Lime? It seems clear that while Harry is charming, not only is he an egoist, he is a criminal, and to the core—indeed, a classic sociopathic criminal. Holly initially views him as a kind of lovable rogue, recalling Harry as his best friend in school—who always knew the best ways to cheat on tests—until he is disabused of that notion by Calloway, and more importantly, by his own eyes as he tours the children's ward.

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<sup>10</sup> See, for example, the Filmsite.org entry on the film, accessed online at: <http://www.filmsite.org/thir2.html>.

That most compelling scene of the movie (mentioned above) gives us important insight into Lime's psychopathy. Recall that Harry meets Holly at a park, and takes him up in a Ferris wheel gondola. As they reach the apogee, Harry rhetorically asks Holly to look at the small figures walking around below on the fairgrounds, and whether he wouldn't be willing to see some of those tiny figures toppled over for a decent sum of money. This fascinating scene shows us the mentality of the psychopath: they see other people as though looking at them through a telescope held backwards—it is to see them as tiny, like ants, small in their significance, not as ends in themselves.

But in the gondola, Harry reveals to Holly (and us) that he has been cooperating with the Russians, and in fact is the one who informed on Anna. He says this, while drawing a heart with Anna's name in it on the fogged-up window. This reveals how lacking in loyalty he is to his country and his paramour. He shows no empathy.

He also shows his manipulative side, when he says to Holly—whom Harry surely has learned has fallen in love with Anna—to take good care of her. He seems to be offering her to Holly as a kind of reward or bonus to recapture Holly's loyalty.

Along with his inability to empathize and his tendency to manipulate others, the psychopath often suffers from a grandiose self-image. Harry is not immune to this, as betrayed by his infamous “cuckoo clock speech.” He tells Holly saucily,

“You know what the fellow said—in Italy, for thirty years under the Borgias, they had warfare, terror, murder and bloodshed, but they produced Michelangelo, 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!”

He arrogantly supposes himself to be some kind of prince—instead of a vicious and heartless racketeer willing to make money even at the cost of children's lives. (The Swiss were not amused by the line, which was as historically inaccurate as it was insulting.)

Of course, there have been hundreds of portrayals of psychopaths in film over the years—serial killers, for example, have proven especially fascinating to filmmakers. (In fact, we have Hitchcock to thank for the widespread use of “psycho” in our vernacular English, from his extremely popular eponymous film.) However, while Orson Welles's portrayal of Harry Lime is fascinating for a variety of reasons, it is especially fascinating for his illustration of the fact that the psychopath can be seductively handsome and charming.

The point here is that the serial killers we see in film—think Hannibal Lecter, Norman Bates, not to mention Freddie Krueger or Jason Voorhees—are typically weird, menacing, or otherwise repellant. But in real life psychopaths are often (if not typically) good looking and able to project

charisma. For example, Ted Bundy and Albert DeSalvo (a.k.a. “the Boston Strangler”) were both handsome and could talk their way into their victims’ trust.

Again, portraits of racketeers are common in cinema. The “mob” or “gangster” movie is an enduring genre that dates back to the earliest days of the film industry, starting in 1906 with *The Black Hand*. This genre ascended in the 1930s, reflecting the flourishing of organized crime in the 1920s and 1930s—a flourishing, of course, fueled by the passage of Prohibition in 1920.<sup>11</sup> Examples include such classic gangster films as: *Little Caesar* (1931), starring Edward G. Robinson; *The Public Enemy* (1932), starring James Cagney; *Scarface* (1932), with Paul Muni; and *The Petrified Forest* (1936), with Humphrey Bogart. But in these films, while the filmmakers may have showed the mobster as arising from poverty or an otherwise rough background (thus on occasion portraying crime as a social problem), the gangsters are almost always portrayed as manifestly dangerous and generally repellant.

The power of this point—that beauty can mask evil—is driven home both internally in the film’s structure, and externally in the film’s reception.

Internally, two additional scenes from the film are crucial to conveying this idea. First, note that when Holly visits the hospital ward, he actually *sees* the children sickened or crippled by Harry’s black-market penicillin; however, we (the audience) do *not*. Why Reed chose not to show us any of the victimized children, or their grieving parents, is unclear. (Just imagine what a director such as Steven Spielberg would have put on the screen in this situation.) It is possible that this could simply be the use of a Greek dramatic device—let the violence occur offstage (here, off-screen), so that the audience will be forced to imagine it, which increases its power to affect the viewer. And it is possible that the intention of this scene is to underscore that to the psychopath, his victims are invisible to him; he doesn’t see them, or at least, doesn’t see them as important or worth consideration. But I would argue that the director wants us to know only intellectually that Lime is a child-killer: we (like Anna) never see it, so are still under the influence of Lime’s charisma.

Second, the closing scene also illustrates the power of physical appearance to cloud moral judgment, one that is jarring in its moral impact. After Lime’s (genuine) burial at the end of the film, Holly initially accepts a ride with Calloway, but asks to get off out when they pass Anna as she walks down the road. He stands facing her, and the camera focuses on her as she walks toward him. We know that Holly loves her, and that Anna knows it, so we expect that she will stop and reconcile with him, because he truly is a morally good (if shallow or even fatuous) man, or at least he did the right thing in bringing down Lime, an evil criminal. Yet she walks stone-facedly right by Holly, and we wonder—*why?*

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<sup>11</sup> Accessed online at: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prohibition\\_in\\_the\\_United\\_States](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prohibition_in_the_United_States).

Some critics have suggested she is cold toward Holly because he “betrayed” Harry.<sup>12</sup> This again seems dubious. Yes, in the café where Holly awaits Harry in a police trap, Anna is angry at Holly and shows contempt for him. But this just shows her continuing love for Harry. She shows no hatred toward Holly, just indifference. And that indifference is all she has *ever* shown him during the movie, even when it must have been clear to her that Holly loved her. At one point, she tells him bluntly, “You know, you ought to find yourself a girl,” signaling that *she* doesn’t want to be his lover. In fact, to the extent that she has thought about Holly at all, it is with contempt—he is nothing compared to the charismatic Harry.

No, it seems clear that the power of Lime’s charismatic personality, suave wit, and handsome features still command her affections, even after knowing his crimes and even after his death. None but the good *deserve* the fair, we think, but the film suggests they don’t always *get* the fair.

Parenthetically, it is important to note that the decision to end the film with Anna snubbing Holly was the director’s, not the writer’s. Greene had originally ended the story with Anna walking off arm in arm with Holly. In the original novella, he writes:

I watched him [Holly] striding off on his overgrown legs after the girl. He caught her [Anna] up and they walked side by side. I don’t think he said a word to her: it was like the end of a story except that before they turned out of my [Calloway’s] sight her hand was through his arm—which is how the story usually begins. He was a bad shot and a very bad judge of character, but he had a way with Westerns (a trick of tension) and with girls (I wouldn’t know what).<sup>13</sup>

But over Greene’s strong objection, Reed (backed by David O. Selznick, the film’s producer) refused to have Holly wind up with the girl. He was right, in my view—he made the film more philosophically rich and psychologically insightful.

Externally, after the film’s release and commercial success, the public fell in love with the character of—*Harry Lime!* Welles was able to parlay his success in the film into a successful radio series of the same name, one that used the same theme music, which ran from 1951 to 1952.<sup>14</sup> In this series, he played Harry Lime as a benign, cosmopolitan, genially roguish con

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<sup>12</sup> Accessed online at: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Third\\_Man](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Third_Man).

<sup>13</sup> Graham Greene, *The Third Man* (New York: Viking Press, 1949), p. 157.

<sup>14</sup> For a sketch of the series, and to listen to its episodes, see: <http://www.otrfan.com/otr/series/harrylime.html>. We should remember that Welles experienced his earliest acting success on his highly successful *radio* series—*The Mercury Theater on the Air*. That series ran from 1938 to 1940.



man, doing good for (or at least not doing harm to) society generally.<sup>15</sup> It appears that the public, no less than Anna Schmidt, couldn't get over Lime's good looks, brilliance, and charisma, positively associating it in the end with a (non-existent) morally good character.

This film thus superbly illustrates a very important psychological insight. Psychologists refer to it as the "halo effect": it is difficult for people generally to resist associating (or more precisely, imputing) moral beauty with physical beauty.

The halo effect has been empirically convincingly demonstrated. Eminent psychologist Robert Cialdini puts the point nicely in his book on the psychology of persuasion.<sup>16</sup> He defines the halo effect as a situation in which one salient positive characteristic completely dominates the way that individual is evaluated by others. As he puts it:

Research has shown that we automatically assign to good-looking individuals such favorable traits as talent, kindness, honesty, and intelligence. Furthermore, we make these judgments without being aware that physical attractiveness plays a role in the process. . . . For example, a study of the Canadian federal elections found that attractive candidates received more than two and a half times as many votes as unattractive candidates. [But] . . . follow-up research shows that voters do not realize their bias. In fact, 73 percent of Canadian voters surveyed denied in the strongest possible terms that their votes had been influenced by physical appearance.<sup>17</sup>

Cialdini cites other research that shows that physically attractive individuals are hired much more frequently than unattractive applicants with the same credentials, and that physically attractive defendants are given jail time half as often as unattractive ones accused of the same crimes. Moreover, attractive people are far more likely to get help when in need, and are far more likely to persuade an audience than are the unattractive.

Cialdini adds that this phenomenon is equally found among men and women, and applies to others of the same or opposite sex. I would add that it is not a matter of homoeroticism if men judge other men who are handsome as also having other good qualities or women who judge other women who are beautiful as also having other good qualities. Instead, it is a matter of

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<sup>15</sup> Accessed online at: <http://www.mercurytheatre.info>.

<sup>16</sup> Robert Cialdini, *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1993). See also Judith H. Langlois et al., "Maxims or Myths of Beauty: A Meta-Analytic and Theoretical Review," *Psychological Bulletin* 126, no. 3 (2000), pp. 390-423.

<sup>17</sup> Cialdini, *Influence*, p. 171.

evolutionary psychology: members of the tribe look up to the physically dominant individuals.

Put another way, male members of a wolf pack don't want to have sex with the alpha male; they are just subordinate to him. Only *he* gets to mate with the alpha female. Holly is under the spell of the halo effect of Harry until he sees the children's ward; we and Anna never see the ward, and so remain under the halo spell to the end. Calloway was wrong: not death, but evolution, is at the bottom of everything.

