

to poison the air completely. Even the exposure of the traitor does little to dispel that poison, and despite some surface niceties, the film ends as bleakly as it began.

For Tourneur, a director so subtle in his use of black and white that the variant grades of his blacks are discernible even to casual moviegoers, *Berlin Express* is an unusual departure. The delicately balanced, internalized fearfulness of *Out of the Past* and the even more modulated elements of fear in his other noteworthy films noirs differ markedly from *Berlin Express*, in which the entire landscape is fear made solid. Made visible. The four cult films on which Tourneur collaborated with the maverick (and pioneering) producer Val Lewton in a twenty-month span in 1942 and 1943—during the war—*Cat People*, *I Walked With a Zombie*, *The Seventh Victim*, and *The Leopard Man*, are famous for the fact that the nocturnal horrors at their respective centers remain *invisible*, menacing, detached while at the same time pushing at the envelope of our sensibilities from within. The tension, and the shocks, are heightened by restraint, and an ominous, unliftable sense of imminent danger. In *Berlin Express*, the sense of danger is anything but submerged, and the forces behind the extreme paranoia are never concealed.

Two destroyed cities, an express train linking them, and a set of the most fearful, suspicious passengers one could imagine—blasted of trust, each inhabiting his own cold sliver of a compartment: *Berlin Express* is a film reduced, or honed, to a noir skeleton that we can hear rattling throughout the film as surely as we hear the rattling of that train as it rolls through the wasteland.

Carol Reed, an Englishman, directed *The Third Man*, and another Englishman, Graham Greene, wrote it, but it is the two American actors, Orson Welles and Joseph Cotten, and the characters they portray, who lend it its significance as a film noir. Filmed on location in Vienna in 1948, it was released in 1949, and interestingly, in keeping with the great emphasis the film lays upon the four occupied zones of the city—American, British, Russian, and French (they cooperated on this one)—there are two versions of *The Third Man*, British and American. The former opens with a statement by the director, Reed, and the latter is built around a voice-over, in vintage noir style (much like the one in *Out of the Past*), delivered by Joseph Cotten.

The presence of Cotten and Welles gives the film an unmistakably

strong American sensibility. Cotten acted in a number of memorable films noirs, most notably as the ladykiller (literally) on the lam from the city who visits his small-town relatives, for whom he can do no wrong, in Hitchcock's *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943). He also played the cuckolded, newlywed husband of Marilyn Monroe (he murders her and then dies going over the falls) in *Niagara* (1953). Welles directed and acted in two of the most dynamic and innovative films noirs ever, which, produced ten years apart, bookend the classic noir period: *The Lady from Shanghai* (1948) and *Touch of Evil* (1958). He also directed and acted in two noir curiosities. The first, *Mr. Arkadin* (1955), is a seedily baroque reprise of *Citizen Kane* and an over-the-top precursor to Federico Fellini's *La Dolce Vita*. Played by Welles, Gregory Arkadin, one of the world's richest men, a pioneer jet-setter, made his millions not in finance or commerce or even conventional crime, but in the white slave trade! At film's end, he leaps to his death from his private plane after learning that his daughter has discovered his true occupation. The other film, *The Stranger* (1946), is a curiosity only because, of all Welles' films, it does not distinctively hold a place in the great body of his work. Welles was notorious, by Hollywood standards, for marching completely to his own drummer once his films were in production; that is, he didn't care at all what the studio he was toiling for might think about his work. But in *The Stranger*, compliant with his studio for once, he turned out a linear, plot-driven film ("lead-footed," he called it). He did it for two reasons: ready cash, and the possibility of subsequent bankrolling by the studios; for despite having in his twenties directed two masterpieces, Welles was told he had to prove himself "marketable" to his Hollywood overlords. *The Stranger* flopped commercially and Welles was less marketable than ever. Afterwards, he would say: "I was ready never to act again." Fortunately, for us, he did.

Of course, both Welles and Cotten are best known for their superb work in *Citizen Kane*, a film without which we would not have film noir as we know it. Their personae in *The Third Man* are similar—with a twist—to those they displayed in *Citizen Kane*: in the latter Welles portrayed, extravagantly, a newspaper tycoon and heir to a mining fortune, while Cotten played his boon companion—prep school chum, college roommate (a whole string of colleges), and drinking buddy. Welles, who also wrote most of *Citizen Kane*, gave

Cotten's character the name "Jessadiah"—a mock-Biblical, mock-prophetic name, with a grandiloquent ring, for someone who turns out to have scant ambition (certainly in relation to Kane) and whose few attempts at moral suasion with Kane badly fail. Later, when Kane is sliding daily between his roles as urban powerbroker, art collector, and raconteur—a decidedly gaudy and ruthless Don Quixote—Cotten becomes his Sancho Panza.

It is fascinating to note that Welles, to whom the adjective "quixotic" was often applied, began filming a version of Cervantes' *Don Quixote* in 1955. In his peripatetic style, he would tinker with the film for the next thirty years, until his death. Never completed, the film was structured like a labyrinth: one image leading to another, finding amplification but never resolution—or even continuity after a certain point. One of Welles' biographers, Barbara Learning, described the fragments that made up the film as a puzzle which Welles was never able to assemble. He himself always referred to the ill-fated film as his "home movie."

In *The Third Man*, the circumstances are far different, but the Quixote/Panza link is not. Welles plays Harry Lime, an elusive, once again ruthless, kingpin in the thriving postwar black market. And, despite his coterie of sophisticated friends, loyal confederates, and a stunning Austrian actress who was his mistress, he turns out to be a rather loathsome blackmarketeer. Until late in the picture, despite his infrequent appearances, we have come to like, and even admire, Lime; he is certainly the most interesting character in the story. Then we learn that his specialty is not the usual contraband—gasoline, cigarettes, or identity papers—but penicillin, stolen from children's hospitals and replaced with a bastardized substitute that inflicts terrible deformities, or death, upon the unfortunate patients. When the Occupation military police get too close to him, Lime fakes his own death with the help of those confederates (neatly disposing of his inside-man at the hospital in the process) and—literally—goes underground.

Into all of this, quite awkwardly, drops Cotten-as-Panza, this time named Holly Martins, but if anything, less ambitious and even more ineffectual than Jessadiah in *Citizen Kane*. Martins is a down-on-his-luck, down-at-heels, hack writer of pulp westerns. "A drunken scribbler," the top military cop calls him. He's broke, cynical, and

self-deprecatory, and he's looking for his old friend Harry (yes, once again they've attended prep school and flunked out of college together), who has written to Martins, promising a job—presumably in the drug trade. But Martins knows nothing about Lime's illicit activities, and for most of the film he resists any suggestion that his pal might be a criminal. While trying to unravel the circumstances of Lime's faked death, Martins learns enough, however, to turn Judas (not mock-Biblical, but the real thing this time) and help the police trap Lime. For the latter, despite the odiousness of his crimes, one retains some faint sympathy to the end: it is hard, after all, to resist a character who, while several hundred feet above the city in a stalled ferris wheel, tries to explain his actions to Martins ("How could you, Harry?" the latter keeps badgering him) by making two observations. First, pointing to the milling crowds below, mere dots against the pavement, Lime asks Martins what he would do if someone were to give him (Martins) a thousand dollars for "every dot that stopped moving"—would he not accept it? Second, Lime observes that from Florence, with its incessant wars, political treachery, and "the Borgias," sprang forth the Renaissance—Dante, Michelangelo, and da Vinci—while Switzerland, "with ten centuries of peace and tranquility, produced the cuckoo clock." A noir epigram, if there ever was one.

And where is all this occurring? The setting of this film differs markedly from the cosmopolitan opulence of *Citizen Kane*. The Vienna of 1948 that backdrops *The Third Man* is also quite different from the Vienna that existed between 1860 and 1941. This was the Vienna of the Ringstrasse: a vision of urban reconstruction on a grand scale that, when it came to fruition, transformed the city from a medieval capital into the birthplace of urban modernism. Two pioneers of modern urban thought, Camillo Sitte and Otto Wagner, produced their seminal works during the apex of the Ringstrasse epoch, honing their ideas about street-planning, architecture, vast public works projects, and magnificent, permanent installations of public art, from fantastic statuary to enormous obelisks and colonnades. Endearing himself to subsequent urban thinkers with a humanist bent—like Lewis Mumford, who cited him for his "passion for urban beauty"—Sitte, in his major work, *Der Stadtebau (City Building)*, in 1889, railed against "the grid" school of thinking of one group of modernists and called for the cities of the future to employ more ir-

regular streets and squares; he stated emphatically: "A city must be so constructed that it makes its citizens at once secure and happy. To realize the latter aim, city building must be not just a technical question but an aesthetic one in the highest sense."

The Vienna of *The Third Man* is anything but secure and happy, and about the last thing on anybody's mind is aesthetics. The statuary, monuments, and many of the imposing buildings of the Ringstrasse are still in evidence, but many others have been reduced to the rubble of brick, jagged steel, and pulverized stone we saw in Frankfurt and Berlin in *Berlin Express*. But in this film Vienna is somehow more horrifying for the very reason that, rather than the near total rubble of Frankfurt, its ruins comprise a unique and eerie hybrid of a labyrinth that abuts various parts of the city—pockets of untouched buildings and clusters of unscarred streets—that escaped aerial bombardment and artillery fire in the closing months of the war. Most important to this labyrinth, however, is one of the public works projects that was a proud product of the Ringstrasse movement: the huge, labyrinth-into-itself sewer system constructed in the 1860s that empties into the Danube River. "The blue Danube," one of the military cops sneers while trudging through pools of sewage during the elaborate manhunt for Harry Lime in the sewer tunnels.

Harry Lime becomes one of the first of the truly underground anti-heroes in film noir, one whose labyrinth is figuratively and literally below the streets of a big city, when he takes to the sewer tunnels of Vienna. Mapping out in his head their byways, overpasses, mini-bridges, waterfalls, ladders, and stairwells, he manages to escape the tightening dragnet of the military police. The moral symbolism seems obvious enough: his mind is literally filled with the mechanics of sewage, reinforcing the notion that he is a sewer rat. Interestingly—is it a fascinating correspondence, or a coincidence?—in another film noir, *He Walked By Night*, set in Los Angeles and being filmed in 1948 at exactly the same time as *The Third Man*, another such criminal protagonist takes to the network of drain tunnels (constructed for flood runoff in a city of droughts) to elude a similar dragnet, and meets his end, shot while climbing a ladder to a sewer opening on the street—an opening that is by chance blocked—in exactly the same way as Lime.