

Travis Moore

FLM151: Section B — Fall 2016

Instructor: Kent Beeson

## Film Analysis #1

### Armature

## 1. What is the Armature of *The Third Man*?

*The Third Man* takes the viewer and the main character, American Western pulp-fiction writer Holly Martins, on a journey that asks where your morality lies in a world where your personal connection to those you know might conflict with the truth around you. Much of the moral ambiguity of the film revolves around Martins' quest to solve the mystery behind his friend, Harry Lime's death. Holly spends the beginning of the story feeling a sense of duty to solve what he feels is an injustice towards his friend, even going so far as attempting to assault a British Army Policeman upon hearing the truth about Lime's misdeeds (00:08:27 – 00:09:12). This moral dilemma of "trying to hold himself back" and "reaching the inevitable conclusion that Harry is an even man who must be stopped" happens quite often to Martins (Alphabetician). Martins spends the majority of the film torn between loyalty to his boyhood friend and his knowledge of the evil acts that Lime has perpetrated.

Martins' lack of moral clarity is further exasperated through his love interest to his friend Lime's former love interest, the actress Anna Schmidt. Anna Schmidt, even upon confessing that she knew that Lime no longer cared for her, refuses to waver in her loyalty to Lime (01:25:39 – 01:26:03). Despite Martins best intentions in trying to get Schmidt to see his point of view she "doesn't want to betray or sell out Harry, because she loves him for what he is" (Dirks). This unwavering dedication to Lime must be seriously troubling to Martins whose own morality is challenged between the love of his friend but the need to do the right thing and bring Lime to justice for his crimes.

The pivotal confrontation between Martins and Lime during the sewer chase puts Martin's morality to the true test near the end of *The Third Man*. Martin finally manages to chase down Lime trying to escape the sewer and has to make a choice to either help his friend escape or shoot him down (01:40:50 – 01:41:37). At this point in the Martins hesitates, still struggling with "his loyalty to the man and his loyalty to liberalism, democracy, and Christian morality" (Alphabetician). In his hesitation, Martins even looks to his friend, perhaps silently asking for what he should do. In the end, Martins shoots Lime in what must feel like a hollow moral victory that brings an evil man to justice at the cost of betraying his love for a good friend.

## 2. What are the main filmic elements (mise en scène):

The cinematography of *The Third Man* helps to reinforce the theme of moral ambiguity. Many scenes, such as when Martin and Schmidt are running away from angry mob that believes Martins might have murdered the Porter (00:47:45 – 00:48:25), make use of Dutch angles. The heavy use of Dutch creates many diagonal lines which "suggest a world without an axis and a culture of conspiracy where nobody is "straight" (Justice). This cinematography

technique emphasizes the moral quandary that Martins and the entire the state of Austria is in, where everything is literally slightly askew.

The setting of Allied-occupied Vienna also supports the ambiguous morality of the film by providing a location that is a contradiction itself. The city of Vienna, as shown in the film, is both architecturally outstanding with historical beauty and also terribly rundown with rubble and broken down vehicles. This contrasting imagery of beauty and ruin makes us "question our immediate impulse to lament and feel nostalgic; while the cherubic effigies and maiden-like statues seem like spies listening on the conversations below" (Justice). The environment plays towards making us both comfortable and also unsettled, like we're somewhere familiar but not all is quite alright. This creates an atmosphere that reflects the theme of moral ambiguity of the situation that Martins is in throughout the film.

### Works Cited

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