

RE-IMAGINING THE WAR IN
BRITISH FILM, 1945-1955

BY

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ABSTRACT

In the immediate post-war years, the war is curiously, although not totally, absent in British film, which seem to be occupied with “getting on” with life and offering distraction from the realities of post-war life. It is the time of the celebrated Ealing comedies, such as *Kind Hearts and Coronets* (1949) and *The Ladykillers* (1955), Dickens adaptations, and the Archers’ most ambitious projects. Critics tend to ignore these films that suppress the presence of the war when drawing connections to the post-war situation. However, the impact of the war is very much present in these films through the types of characters portrayed and common themes of displacement and isolation.

In looking at representation of middle-class women and men in British film of the post-war period, I examine the screen personae of Celia Johnson and Deborah Kerr, and Michael Redgrave and Alec Guinness. I look at how, through their various film incarnations, these four actors create screen personae of solid, dependable middle-class men and women, with their accompanying ideals of duty, community responsibility and obligation. I contextualize these identities in hardships of post-war life, using Angus Calder’s *The People’s War*.

Focussing on Carol Reed’s *The Third Man* (1949) and Jules Dassin’s *Night and the City* (1951), I re-examine British film noir, suggesting these films reveal British vulnerability and anxieties about their own displacement by America during the so-called “American Occupation” of Britain. In these films, maladjusted, childlike American protagonists disrupt and upset the social stability of the ancient cities – London and Vienna – where they find themselves. The structural damage of these cities creates liminal space

that allows outsiders like Holly Martins, Harry Lime, and Harry Fabian the room to operate and to disturb.

The final chapter speculates on the possible reason for re-casting and adapting the iconic British narrative of Charles Dickens: *Great Expectations* (1946), *Nicholas Nickleby* (1947), *Oliver Twist* (1948) and *Scrooge* (1951). Drawing connections between the post-war study *The Neglected Child and His Family* and D.W. Winnicott's theories on childhood development, I suggest that these narratives consider the problem of neglected children in post-war Britain through the safety of historical and literary distancing.

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Introduction:
Re-imagining the War in
British Film, 1945-1955

*I can't imagine myself without a war...the war's
simply come to be a part of one's self.*

~ Elizabeth Bowen

The teenaged protagonists of Charles Crichton's *Hue and Cry* (1947) spend time in the rubble of the bombed-out buildings in their neighbourhood. It is their refuge from the monotony of home and school. One of the youths does not speak at all; he only mimics the sound of the bombs falling and exploding. These details have nothing to do with the plot of the film, which concerns these young people battling gangsters who are using a popular comic to pass secret messages about their criminal activities. The details are simply present. There is no direct mention of the war in *Hue and Cry*, yet the evidence of the war pervades the film.

The profound and lasting impact of World War II affected both day-to-day life and the national psychology of the people of Great Britain. Despite "winning" the war, the victory was pyrrhic, and the immediate post-war years saw Britain struggle with economic hardships, social uncertainty, and new realities. The German air raids had killed over 60,000 civilians and left widespread and unprecedented infrastructural damage in major cities, especially London. The 827,000 children who had been evacuated from major urban areas needed to be reintegrated into their families. The increased political power given to the working class as a means of securing public support for the costly war upset the stability of the hierarchical class system. The rationing of goods and raw materials, begun

during the war, continued, making wartime sacrifices a post-war reality.¹ As colonies such as India, Burma, and Ceylon declared their independence, Britain, which had created and sustained an identity as a great colonizer and leader in the world, lost its place of prominence to a former colony, the United States of America. Though contemporary theory has called the idea of a coherent national identity into question, pre-war Britain's fantasy of such a stable national identity was challenged by the post-war circumstances.

I have chosen to focus most of my attention on the films of the decade that followed the war, 1945 to 1955. Although critics have traditionally opted to consider films in categories defined by decades, looking at films of 1940s and 1950s separately, most acknowledge a major shift in attitudes and styles that materializes in the mid- to late 1950s. I have chosen to examine film of the immediate post-war period, before new movements such as the Angry Young Man films and the second generation of war films began. These later movements have been well represented in the critical literature. I sometimes refer to wartime films as a means of contextualizing performances and themes, because I think, for example, that one cannot understand the larger significance of Deborah Kerr's performance in *Black Narcissus* (1947) without understanding her roles in *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (1943) and *Perfect Strangers* (1945).

In the post-war period, the war is curiously, although not totally, absent in many films. Though children play in bombed-out rubble and the hardships of rationing are referred to, actual mention of the war is rare. Even returning-soldier stories, so popular in post-war American cinema, are largely missing in British film, which seems to be occupied

¹ Sometimes the post-war conditions were worse than the wartime conditions, as T.E.B. Clarke indicates, recalling the first screening of *Hue and Cry*: "The winter was exceptionally cruel – we were being rationed more severely than at any time during the war" (qtd. in Barr, *Ealing Studios* 94).

primarily with “getting on” with life or offering distraction from the realities of post-war life. Critics have tended to focus on a handful of realist films, such as Robert Hamer’s *It Always Rains on Sundays* (1947), which represent a more realistic post-war life, but this is also the period of the celebrated Ealing comedies, like Hamer’s *Kind Hearts and Coronets* (1949) and Alexander Mackendrick’s *The Ladykillers* (1955), as well as four excellent adaptations of Dickens’s novels and Powell and Pressburger’s most ambitious projects. Critics tend to ignore these films that suppress the presence of the war when drawing connections to the post-war situation. However muted it may be, the impact of the war is very much present in these films in the types of characters portrayed and the common themes of displacement and isolation. The war seeps into films, styles, and performances in ways that are worth exploring.

My first two chapters examine the representation of middle-class women and men in British film of the post-war period. Rather than comparing the ways various studios have represented gender, I have chosen to adopt a “star theory” mode of analysis, which is rarely used in studies of post-war British film. Using the theories of James Naremore, Charles Affron, and Richard Dyer, I trace the progression of the screen personae of four key but under-considered actors: Celia Johnson, Deborah Kerr, Michael Redgrave, and Alec Guinness.

In “The Power of Choice: Celia Johnson and Deborah Kerr Complicating Female Identity,” I look at the screen personae of Celia Johnson and Deborah Kerr. Both women created personae of solid, dependable middle-class housewives in wartime films, such as *In Which We Serve* (1942) and *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (1943). This dependability is challenged and complicated in the post-war films *Brief Encounter* (1945),

Perfect Strangers, and *Black Narcissus*. Feminist critics have been generally dismissive or skeptical in their evaluations of these films, arguing that they ultimately serve to return women to their pre-war roles. However, I think that the performances of Johnson and Kerr illustrate the complexities of female identity and challenge the ideals of domesticity. These films do not “simply” suggest that women should return to the home, but, through Johnson and Kerr, explore the choice to return to the home, which many women faced after the war. Johnson and Kerr portray characters who struggle with legitimate desires and temptations. The choices these women face and the attractiveness of alternatives to defined roles put pressure on the idea that home is the natural place for women. Their desires are presented as viable, attractive, and plausible alternatives to the dull confines of domestic routine. And while the possibility of a new and more fulfilling identity is suggested, whether their choice to return is right or wrong is never fully determined.

The second chapter, “British Masculinities: Duty, Confinement, and Stiff Upper Lips in the Performances of Michael Redgrave and Alec Guinness,” looks at representations of middle-class masculinities with their accompanying ideals of duty, determination, and obligation – the “stiff upper lip.” No matter how much a character misappropriates or subverts the values of middle-class masculinity, the stiff upper lip is the final expectation of males under pressure. It can save and redeem through its associations with perseverance and “dutiful stoicism” (Durgnat, *A Mirror* 130). Tracing Michael Redgrave’s persona from his pre-war performance in *The Lady Vanishes*, I explore the institutionalized requirements for the masculine identity in post-war Britain, which required continued sacrifice and determination. Redgrave’s performances as Maxwell Frere in *Dead of Night* (1945) and Andrew Crocker-Harris in *The Browning Version* (1951) suggest the

need for a release from this confining stoicism. The multi-role performance of Alec Guinness in *Kind Hearts and Coronets* (1949), on the other hand, introduces the notion of the performative nature of the middle-class masculine identity. As Guinness plays eight characters in this film, the middle-class male is just another part he performs. This idea of performance is further developed in *The Lavender Hill Mob* (1951) and *The Ladykillers* (1955), where other characters mistake the respectability and honesty of Guinness's middle-class persona because of his appearance and manners.

In Chapter 3: "Towards a Reading of British Film Noir: Expatriates & Ancient Cities in Carol Reed's *The Third Man* (1949) and Jules Dassin's *Night and the City*" (1950), I investigate the existence of a uniquely British style of film noir. After detailing the complicated and contradictory theories of what film noir is and illustrating the influence of film noir on British filmmaking, I put forward Carol Reed's *The Third Man* and Jules Dassin's *Night and the City* as examples of British film noir. British film noir reveals British vulnerability and anxieties about their own displacement by America and American values of upward mobility. I trace such concerns to the so-called "American Occupation" of Britain during the later years of the war. Despite having literary material in the wartime stories of Elizabeth Bowen that could have provided the source material for developing a unique British film noir, these films displace their anxieties about their own disconnectedness onto American characters. They highlight maladjusted, childlike American protagonists who disrupt and upset the social stability they discover in the ancient cities where they find themselves. These ancient cities replace the traditional setting of film noir – the modern American city. These older cities, with their age, culture, and history, should be safe from such disruption. However, the rubble and damage from the

London blitz are suggested to create liminal space in which outsiders like Holly Martins, Harry Lime, and Harry Fabian can operate and disrupt the stability of British society.

The final chapter, “Adapting Dickens: Orphans, Parents, and Post-war Britain,” speculates on the possible reason for recasting and adapting the iconic British narratives of Charles Dickens. It is telling that during this period of national insecurity and redefinition of identities, filmmakers David Lean, Alberto Cavalcanti, and Brian Desmond Hurst would adapt the familiar and recognizably British narratives, *Great Expectations* (1946), *Nicholas Nickleby* (1947), *Oliver Twist* (1948) and *Scrooge* (1951). While it is true that literary adaptation has been, as David A. Cook states in *Narrative Film*, “a traditional staple of British cinema” (567), and while Britain had previously adapted Dickens’s narratives, these post-war films reveal a darkness and cynicism that is absent from earlier versions.

Using D.W. Winnicott’s theories of childhood development, which were put forth in studies of the effects of the wartime evacuations on children, I show that these narratives, with their safe historical distancing, consider the problem of neglected children in post-war Britain. While Italian neo-realist filmmakers were exploring similar issues about the future of children with stark and uncompromising contemporary settings in films such as *The Bicycle Thief* (1948), British filmmakers opt to displace such relevant issues to Dickens’s Victorian world.

In *BFI Companion to British and Irish Cinema*, John Caughie and Kevin Rockett recount that in 1946, only a year after World War II, the British public made over 1.6 billion trips to the cinema. I am interested in the sorts of popular narrative presented to the public and the way in which these films reflect the concerns and anxieties that were present in post-war Britain. Various critics and scholars have explored the impact of film as an

instrument of government propaganda during the war years, but I am more interested in what these films say about the time in which they were made. This is not, following Christine Geraghty's example, intended to be a survey of immediate post-war films:

"Interest in the study of British cinema has increased enormously in the last ten years and it now seems legitimate to focus on particular themes or areas without feeling the necessity to cover the whole field" (Geraghty xiii). The films that I have chosen to examine are ones that have been either ignored in studies of post-war British society or have been interpreted in limiting, sometimes dismissive, ways.

I am interested in how the films being made and the performances of the stars in these films reveal post-war anxieties and shifting perspectives of gender and class roles. Evidence of the war's impact on British post-war film runs much deeper than critics have traditionally acknowledged. Although the war itself is not directly foregrounded in the majority of the films I have chosen to explore, they reveal anxieties about traditional British values, traditional British roles, and Britain's diminished role in the post-war world. One cannot understand post-war British film without understanding how deeply the war affected Britain and, however unacknowledged it may be, how present the war is in these films.

Chapter One:
The Power of Choice:
Celia Johnson and Deborah Kerr
Complicating Traditional Female Identity

*I've got a home and a husband and a child of 14
still at school. I only came as a war-time thing –
I wouldn't say I disliked it; it's a change from
housework – but I hope I'll go back [home].
~ a married part-time piece-worker*

At the end of Compton Bennett's *The Seventh Veil* (1945), Francesca Cunningham (Ann Todd), having been cured of her neurosis, is given the power by her psychoanalyst to choose among her three potential suitors. This act of choosing potentially empowers Francesca to leave the manipulative, abusive relationship with her cousin and guardian, Nicholas (James Mason), and embrace with affection either the American jazz musician (Hugh McDermott) or the German portrait painter (Albert Lieven). Though she has struggled to free herself from her guardian's control throughout the film, once presented with the authority of choice, Francesca opts to return to Nicholas, the only family she knows.

The Seventh Veil's treatment of psychoanalysis – the first serious treatment in British film – and the heavy Freudian overtones have been much discussed in the critical literature, as have the feminist implications of the narrative. Feminist critics cite *The Seventh Veil* as a treatise on the limited roles afforded to women within a masculine society. In *Women in British Cinema*, Sue Harper examines screenwriter Muriel Box's influence on production of *The Seventh Veil*. Harper argues that the final film is an indictment against the patriarchal structures that “cripple women, until they internalize

those structures and learn to love their oppressor” (176). Francesca’s decision to return to Nicholas, then, simply confirms Harper’s reading of the film as an indictment. In *British Genres*, Marcia Landy describes *The Seventh Veil* as evidence of “Gainsborough’s flamboyant style with an emphasis on extraordinariness rather than ordinariness, hysteria rather than restraint and exaggeration rather than realism” (225). Though Francesca’s return to her guardian “does not constitute a happy ending” (227), Landy, like Harper, asserts that *The Seventh Veil* exposes ways in which women are controlled. “It serves to dramatize the post-war dilemma and growing cultural concerns having to do with the threat of women’s independence. It specifically serves to reveal the role of the medical institutions in the process of normalizing women’s positions” (226). Though Landy employs labels connected to family relationships in her analysis of *The Seventh Veil*, she does not see the ending as a return to family. Though she returns to Nicholas “voluntarily as a woman” (Landy 226), Francesca willingly sacrifices her own authority, and perhaps her own happiness, for the sake of her own art, creativity and, ultimately, family. Though she has the power to leave Nicholas and go with a suitor who loves her, Francesca decides to re-embrace the familiar, the family unit, however dysfunctional it might have been.

Feminist critics such as Sue Aspinsall and Pam Cook have emphasized the role of women’s experiences in the previously marginalized Gainsborough Studio films, like *The Wicked Lady* (1945) and *The Seventh Veil*,² and maligned realist films, like *Brief Encounter* (1945), as “conventional.” Aspinsall dismisses Laura’s choice at the end of *Brief Encounter* “as an ambivalent one. The film makes Laura’s return to her husband convincing only by

² The majority of films produced by Gainsborough were lavish, pseudo-historical melodramas and, as such, Gainsborough films are often referred to as “costume dramas.” *The Seventh Veil* was the first of the Gainsborough films set in contemporary times, but is often included in the canon of Gainsborough films because of, as Landy acknowledges, its similar style.

emphasizing the material side of her married life. She has a clean, spacious house, a maid to do the cooking, no apparent financial anxieties” (274). As Christine Geraghty notes, the studies of Gainsborough films have been so influential that they have “come close to constructing a new critical orthodoxy in which Gainsborough women’s films, with their costumes, contradiction and narrative excesses, are deemed (to varying degrees) to be the films of the period that best speak of and to women” (76). This “new critical orthodoxy” has created a gap in the critical literature. While films about wives and mothers embracing their families have been increasingly ignored, there is an unacknowledged correlation between the endings of *The Seventh Veil* and *Brief Encounter* that highlights one of the major choices women had in the post-war period: the choice to (re)embrace traditional roles of wives and mothers. After the war, women faced the dilemma of choice. They could continue to work and enjoy a new-found independence, or return to the home and sacrifice their own employment in order to support the returning troops and raise a family. Many women expressed a desire to return to their homes.

In *Women in British Cinema*, Sue Harper details the role of the Ministry of Information (MOI) in wartime cinema and film production. Recognizing the power of film as a propaganda tool,³ the MOI exerted its influence on producers and studios to make films that boosted morale. In terms of a propaganda philosophy, Harper notes, the MOI initially rejected the idea of appealing to gender differences in films. The all-male “Ministry personnel were attracted by the findings of the International Propaganda and Broadcasting Enquiry; this argued that propaganda bodies should ‘in a stratified society, persuade the dominant group.’” From the outset, therefore, the Ministry was not inclined to

³ Movies theatres were initially closed when war broke out, but were soon reopened, functioning as a venue for both entertainment and social interaction.

give subordinate groups like women any privileged address in its feature films” (31). In *Blackout: Reinventing Women for Wartime British Cinema*, Antonia Lant argues that many in British film production recognized the need to change the way women were represented. In the wake of “total war” women were needed to fill new roles:

Under the conditions of “total war” women were conscripted to “stand in” for men, and men even stood in for women on some occasions (as at the Forces canteen).

Through their arrangement of images and sounds, through their use of point of view shots, voice-overs, lighting, music, casting, and so on, wartime British films, as any other films, sought to address this audience.

(Lant 10)

The shortage of male workers had become a serious concern for Churchill’s government by 1941. A Ministry of Labour survey in July of that year estimated that 2 million workers were needed “for the forces and the munitions industries by the following June. When the manpower [*sic*] budget was added up, there was a deficit of over three hundred thousand” (Calder 267). As a means of meeting this demand for labour, Sir John Anderson’s Lord President’s Committee introduced “draconian” measures, such as extending the age of eligibility for the call-up (eighteen-year olds and fifty-one-year olds could now be called up), imposing a general “national service” for adults of both sexes, and, “for the first time in any civilized nation,” the conscription of women in late 1941 (HMD Parker, qtd. in Calder 267). After recognizing the need to appeal to the patriotism of the female audience, the MOI encouraged films like Leslie Howard’s *The Gentle Sex* (1943) to be made for a predominantly female audience in order to encourage women to participate in the war

effort and to show that “what women must sacrifice in wartime is love, expressivity and sensual gratification” (Harper 34).

Diane Brinton Lee’s 1944 Mass Observation report on whether female factory workers would want to continue working once the war had ended reveals the difficult choice facing the women of Britain and the divided opinions of those women: “the ranks of female labour have always been recruited on a short-term basis from young unmarried women who wished to keep themselves for a few years with marriage in view, and from a minority of women who for one reason or another had been left without a provider” (Calder and Sherdian 177). Although less than a quarter of the women “were ready to continue their present work” (178), there were conflicting attitudes. Some women expressed a desire to continue working after the war, but most acknowledged a desire to return to the home and raise their families when the war ended. Even among those women who wished to remain working, many expressed a willingness to step aside to provide employment to returning soldiers. If, after the war ended, the majority of working women wanted to return to the domestic sphere, how did British film, both mirroring and shaping this “state of mind,” represent domestic British women? How were the complexities of choosing to return home portrayed?

In examining domestic female identity and its treatment in wartime and post-war film, I have decided to abandon the studio-focussed criticism, which examines and contrasts the Gainsborough costume dramas and the realist Ealing dramas, and, instead, adopt “star acting” criticism to explore how two prominent British stars, Celia Johnson and Deborah Kerr, come to embody through their screen performances the complex, multifaceted domestic identities of the time. Both actors made their initial reputations

during the war and both of their screen personae were as solid and reliable domestic, British wives and mothers.⁴ However, Johnson and Kerr do more than simply portray stereotypes of domestic female identities. They both, in different ways, reveal the depths and complexities of women who choose to be wives and mothers. While their films, like *Perfect Strangers* (1945), *Brief Encounter* (1945), and *Black Narcissus* (1947), seem ultimately to support women curbing their private desires in favour of upholding social institutions (marriage, family, the church) for some sense of greater good and security, there is something much more subtle and nuanced than mere manipulation or coercion going on in the performances of the principal actresses. As Robert Warshow argues about the appeal of gangster films, these films allow the audience both the thrill of defying social constraints and the satisfaction of enforcing those restraints. Johnson and Kerr both affirm and deny desire, and emphasize the difficult choices housewives and mothers had to make during and after the war, as well as the strength of character required for those decisions. Johnson's and Kerr's embodiments of these women are challenging and slippery, often aligning the audience's sympathies both for and against the socially "correct" choice.

To understand how the screen personae of Johnson and Kerr address the complexities of female roles in British society during and following World War II, it is necessary to address theories of film and star acting. In *Acting for the Camera*, James Naremore argues that "[a]t its most sophisticated, acting in theatre or movies is an art devoted to the systematic ostentatious depiction of character, or what seventeenth-century England described as 'personation' " (23). Charles Affron, in *Star Acting: Gish, Garbo, Davis*, states: "screen acting need not be limited by the flatness of the screen image. So

⁴ Sue Aspinall notes in "Women, Realism and Reality in British Films 1943-1953" that Kerr accepted the role of Karen Holmes in *From Here to Eternity* (1953) with relief because she was tired of the chaste roles she was offered in British cinema.

much in the film medium conspires to free the actor, to relieve him [*sic*] of the burdens of naturalistic portrayal, to grant him the metaphorical power of great painting and sculpture, to offer him the high style of classical theatre and opera” (3).

In assessing the role of actor in film acting, Stanley Cavell, in *The World Viewed*, suggests an interdependent relationship between the actor and the character she plays.

Rothman and Keane clarify this point in their *Reading A World Viewed*:

If in the movies ‘the character lives and dies with the actor,’ ... the actor also ‘lives and dies with the character.’ There is only one entity on the screen, a ‘human something’ not in principle separable from the being the performer is. And yet this ‘human something’ cannot be separated from, has no existence apart from, the movies in which she or he is present.

(Rothman and Keane 74-75)

Unlike stage acting, which Cavell likens to “a position in a game, say, third base: various people can play it” (28), film acting identifies the performer with the character performed and vice versa. To illustrate this point, Cavell offers the example of “Bogart”: “After *The Maltese Falcon*, we know a new star, only distantly a person. ‘Bogart’ means ‘the figure created in a given set of films.’ His presence in those films is who he is... in the sense that if those films did not exist, Bogart would not exist, the name ‘Bogart’ would not mean what it does” (28). Similarly, the figures “Johnson” and “Kerr” are created through a given set of films. The figure “Johnson,” the strong and reliable wife/mother, is created through her involvement in the films of David Lean and Noel Coward, beginning with *In Which We Serve*, continuing through *This Happy Breed* (1944), and ending with *Brief Encounter*. The figure “Kerr,” who is both solidly domestic and otherworldly beautiful, is

created by her films with the Archers, Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, and Alexander Korda. Kerr's star image carries over to her American pictures where she becomes an idealized *über*-mother, a chaste woman who assumes a maternal role to children not her own: the governess, as in Jack Clayton's *The Innocents* (1960); the stepmother, as in Otto Preminger's *Bonjour tristesse* (1958); or the schoolteacher, as in Walter Lang's *The King and I* (1956)⁵.

Celia Johnson

Celia Johnson came to movies relatively late. Primarily a stage actress, Johnson made her first feature film, Noel Coward/David Lean's *In Which We Serve*, in 1942, playing Alix Kinross, although the year before she had appeared as "The English Mother" in Carol Reed's wartime propaganda short, *A Letter From Home*. Her reputation as the embodiment of an upper-middle-class, English everywoman was established and solidified in her three wartime collaborations with Coward and Lean: *In Which We Serve*, *This Happy Breed*, and, most notably, *Brief Encounter*, which earned Johnson an Academy Award nomination for Best Actress. Later film roles in George More O'Ferrall's *The Holly and the Ivy* (1952) and Anthony Kimmons's *The Captain's Paradise* (1953) affirmed this identity. Most critical attention has been focussed on one role: Laura Jesson in *Brief Encounter*. However, Johnson's ability to interpret "with her face close to the camera the audible progression of her secret thoughts" (*The Daily Telegraph* 11/22 /1945, qtd. in Lant 183) marks all her performances. Johnson became, primarily through her work with director David Lean, the embodiment of the dependable, upper-middle-class housewife whose

⁵ In *The King and I*, though Kerr's character has a child of her own, it is Kerr's relationship to the king's children that becomes the focus of the film. By the second half of the film, her child is noticeably absent.

secret thoughts and desires, though unvoiced, reveal themselves. Johnson is never “simply” a housewife, nor does that identity satisfactorily sum her up. Through Johnson’s ability to reveal subtly to the audience her struggles and desires, her performances in domestic roles suggest a profound struggle within this identity. This is not an easy identity, but one that requires decisions and sacrifice.

Much of the critical literature about *In Which We Serve* focuses either on the masculine community Coward created both in and around the picture⁶ or on Coward’s treatment of class differences and consensus, with little attention to Johnson’s role in the film. The film’s naval setting is particularly conducive to representing both the male group and the class differences within that group. While much of the film details Coward’s portrayal of Captain Edward V. Kinross, it also examines other characters with other backgrounds. The film, told through a series of flashbacks in the vein of *Citizen Kane* (1941), concerns the sinking of the destroyer, *HMS Torrin*. The survivors all cling to a single rubber life raft. While waiting to be rescued, these seamen think more about their home lives and the families they have left behind, and less about whom they fight. The group clinging to the life raft is clearly meant to represent different class experiences brought together through hardships. In *British National Cinema*, Sara Street includes *In Which We Serve* in a group of films about “the male experience of war” (51), while Aldgate and Richards argue that Coward/Lean’s film epitomizes the British navy’s

⁶ Even the making of this film employs a supportive male community. Coward, who had never directed a motion picture before, surrounded himself with some of the best names in British film: Ronald Neame, Bernard Miles, and John Mills. Coward also hired, on the recommendation of John Mills, film editor David Lean to assist with the technical aspects of directing. After discovering that he really didn’t like motion picture directing, Coward turned the film completely over to Lean. This began a filmmaking partnership that Coward and Lean continued for the next few years, making *Blithe Spirit*, *This Happy Breed* (1945), and *Brief Encounter*.

qualities of “comradeship and co-operation, dedication to duty and self-sacrifice” (59). And although Marcia Landy spends much of her chapter on “War Films” discussing the role of family in *In Which We Serve*, she does not acknowledge any real transgressive qualities or ambiguity in the character of Alix or in Johnson’s performance. Street argues for shared “ideological preoccupations” between *In Which We Serve* and Powell and Pressburger’s war film, *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (1943) (Street 54), but I suggest a more fruitful comparison would be an examination of the shared ideological preoccupation between *In Which We Serve* and *Brief Encounter* through the screen identity of Celia Johnson. Though Coward’s main intention in *In Which We Serve* is to celebrate the British navy and draw attention to the war effort,⁷ he and Lean also create a space for Johnson to establish her screen identity as the reliable housewife and mother, the solid figure who sets her own feelings and desires aside in order to hold her family together. Coward anticipates (through the character of Alix Kinross) Laura Jesson’s struggle between duty and desire in *Brief Encounter*, laying the groundwork – in Alix’s highly emotional toast to the new bride – for Laura’s choice between desire and romantic passion with Alec Harvey, and a predictable relationship with her kindly, dull husband, Fred.

In Which We Serve foregrounds the overtly masculine space of the navy – men work together, socialize together, fight together, and, ultimately, help each other to survive. In this way, the film recalls pre-war military films like Zoltan Korda’s *Four Feathers* (1939), which mute the presence of women in the lives of the soldiers, and anticipates the confined male-space of the second generation of war films like *Dam Busters* (1954) and *Ice Cold in Alex* (1958). However, Coward also challenges this idea of a strictly masculine

⁷ Most critics acknowledge the influence of the real-life experiences of Coward’s friend, Lord Louis Mountbatten on the film.

space because of Alix's presence on the ship. *HMS Torrin* is initially defined as a masculine space in the first flashback of the film, which presents the construction of the ship. As in William Blake's poem, "The Tyger,"⁸ the act of creation is loud and violent. Steel plates are heated and hammered into place, rivets are poured and pounded, groups of men hoist and lift. Even the traditional breaking of the champagne bottle over the hull seems an especially violent act when included in the montage of these images. In the next scene, we are first introduced to Alix Kinross, the captain's wife. Kinross is handed a picture of his wife and children by the sailor who is unpacking the captain's belongings, and who then asks, "Shall we have it on the desk or on the shelf, sir?"

In the second chapter of *The World Viewed*, Stanley Cavell writes that a photograph "does not present us with the 'likeness' of things; it presents us, we want to say, with the things themselves" (17). As Rothman and Keane explain, although this statement sounds paradoxical, Cavell illustrates our uncertainty about our relationship to photographs: "we do not know how to place photographs ontologically" (56). Cavell's insight, that when we look at a photograph, "we see things that are not present" is particularly relevant when considering these photographs, which are the audience's introduction to Alix: Alix (or Johnson) is not *present* in these photographs. What is present is merely, as Noel Carroll

7 And what shoulder, & what art
 Could twist the sinews of thy heart?
 And when thy heart began to beat,
 What dread hand? & what dread feet?

 What the hammer? what the chain?
 In what furnace was thy brain?
 What the anvil?
 15a)

William Blake "Tyger, Tyger" (9-15a)

argues in *Philosophical Problems of Classical Film Theory*, a stand-in, a representation for its model (102): Alix-as-mother and Alix-as-wife.

This first picture on Kinross's desk, of Alix bookended by her two children, is not the "usual" picture that Kinross displays. "We'll have the usual one on the desk when you find it." When the "usual" picture is unpacked a moment later it is placed on the desk, in a place of prominence, facing the camera. This photograph, another representation of the real person, is of Alix alone, in her wedding dress. These stand in Alixes are defined in terms of domestic roles: "mother" and "wife." Though Alix is not physically present on the *Torrin* and has no influence on the crew, part of her identity is connected to the navy through her marriage to Kinross and the stand-in photographs. These photographs represent her inactive tie to the ship as well as suggest the limitations of Alix's identity.

When we first encounter Alix herself, it is at home, when she rushes out to meet her husband's car. When Kinross asks her if everything is under control, Johnson's ironic, self-deprecating answer seems to undermine comically her ability to "control" – "Oh, far from it. We've been in an uproar all day, ever since your telegram came." Everything in the Kinross household, however, is very much under control: Alix is dressed up, their dinner is ready, the children are presentable, and the house is clean. So the identities established in the photographs in her husband's office seem to have accurately characterized her during her first few moments on screen. She handles the children and her husband's exhaustion almost effortlessly. As the children sit with their father on the sofa, Alix sits on the arm of the chair, as if ready to go back to work at any moment. It also seems as if she has a preternatural ability to anticipate her family's needs: she knows, for example, that Kinross

would want a “Kinross special” to drink. “It’s all ready. It just wants the ice.” She even foresees that he will think the drink too sweet.

Johnson infuses Alix with a sense of isolation, which begins to reveal itself after the children leave for bed. She asks her husband about the ship and its quick commission. Her questions, while quite general and conversational, have deeper concerns behind them. When Kinross inquires about Alix’s dress, Johnson’s face loses its smile. Only her eyes turn away from her husband and pause. It is a technique that Johnson uses again and again. In breaking or interrupting eye contact and then pausing, Johnson expresses her character’s emotional side, which has been hidden beneath layers of smiles and self-deprecation. Through this technique Johnson reveals the weight her characters live with. Alix’s easy manner and smiles mask her pain and worry. While glancing away from Edward, she asks the question that weighs on her mind: “Is there going to be a war, do you think?” When she is finally able to fix her eyes back on Kinross, he tells her not to be sad. Her answer undercuts the seriousness of her previous inquiry: “I’m not sad, really. I’m just sort of gathering myself together.” Johnson illustrates this idea of “gathering herself together,” of preparing for the worst and putting on a brave face, by reverting to her smiling mask when Kinross asks for another drink. “Yes, of course.” She continues talking about the children and seeing the ship before it sails, despite her unresolved, and largely unvoiced, concerns. However, when Kinross toasts her with “Here we go,” Johnson pauses once more and looks away and back very quickly. Johnson packs within that pause all of Alix’s fears and doubts. Her “Here we go” response is sad and lonely.

Johnson addresses this isolation in her later toast to celebrate Maureen’s engagement, detailing the loneliness and the sacrifices expected of a naval wife. With this

speech, Johnson displays the contrasting emotions of the naval wife: pride, loyalty, love, frustration, hurt. As she will do a few years later in *Brief Encounter*, Johnson runs the full range of emotions in a very short time in order to emphasize the psychological burden of being a wife.

In this scene Johnson is initially framed standing between two officers who are seated on either side of her. They look at her as she delivers the toast. She begins in the same easy, smiling, and self-deprecating style we saw in the first scene. “I’m sure Elizabeth and June will back me up when I say I’m going to deliver, on behalf of all wretched naval wives, a word of warning to Maureen, who’s been unwise enough to decide to join our ranks. Dear Maureen, we all wish you every possible happiness, but I think it only fair to tell you in advance exactly what you’re in for.” At this point she is interrupted by the catcalling of some of the male officers present: “Shame! Shame!” There is a cut to a close-up of Kinross, who suppresses a smile as his wife continues, “Speaking from bitter experience, I can only say that the wife of a sailor is most profoundly to be pitied.” Lean cuts back to Johnson on the word “bitter.” She is also smiling. Johnson is now framed alone in a medium close-up as the rest of the speech, presented in one uninterrupted cut, takes a more personal and honest tone. It is, therefore, fitting that Johnson is shown alone.

She continues her speech: “To begin with, her home life, what there is of it, has no stability whatever. She can never really settle down; she moves through a succession of other people’s houses, flats and furnished rooms. She finds herself having to grapple with domestic problems in Bermuda, Malta or Weymouth. We will not deal with the question of pay. That is altogether too painful. But what we will deal with is the most important disillusionment of all: and that is ...” At this point Kinross interrupts with heckling of his

own: “Stop her, somebody. This is straight mutiny.” Others laugh, but Johnson does not condone this interjection with a smile. There is no cut away as with the previous interruption. Rather we are forced to focus our attention on Alix’s pain and loneliness expressed through Johnson’s expressions. After a slight pause, this one forced by her husband, she repeats the words that Kinross spoke over and continues her toast: “And that is that wherever she goes there is always in her life a permanent and undefeated rival, her husband’s ship. Whether it be a battleship or a sloop, a submarine or a destroyer, it holds first place in his heart.” This admission of being second place in her husband’s life betrays the slightest hint of true emotion and begins a series of revealing and ever lengthening pauses that mark the rest of her speech. “It comes before wife, home, children, everything. Some of us try to fight this and get badly mauled in the process; others, like myself, resign themselves to the inevitable. That is what you will have to do, my poor Maureen.” And then, in anticipation of perhaps her truest and most honest statement, Johnson’s eyes fall to the glass in front of her: “That is what we all have to do, if we want any peace of mind at all. Ladies and gentlemen, I give you my rival.” Johnson raises her head and her eyes, though she does not make eye contact with anyone, not anyone at the table, not the audience. While Johnson never looks directly at the camera, the positioning of Johnson in the frame *suggests* she has been averting her gaze from the audience, as if she has been in conversation with us and has looked away from us in order to express her true feelings. “It’s extraordinary that anyone could be so fond and so proud of their most implacable enemy: this ship.” At this point Johnson resumes eye contact with the people at the table. She never looks at us, and this reveals one final moment of real emotion. As she toasts the *Torrin* – “God bless this ship and all who sail her,” Johnson’s voice almost cracks. As the

scene begins to dissolve Johnson's eyes look down at her glass before she drinks. When she takes her glass from her lips, she continues to look at the glass instead of resuming eye contact with the other guests.

Much of the critical acclaim for *Brief Encounter* has been directed at Celia Johnson's portrayal of Laura Jessing. Johnson "was universally praised (in print) and nominated for an Oscar for her work" (Dyer, *Brief Encounter* 32). Her performance as a middle-class British housewife continues the groundwork established in *In Which We Serve*. Johnson again displays seemingly superhuman abilities to control her household: she easily manages the disputes of her children and all other domestic responsibilities. Again, there is the suggestion that her smiling, easy manner is largely an act of self-will, a "gathering herself together." Again, her silences hide her true feelings from her husband.

In *Brief Encounter*, Johnson not only slips between moments of emotional honesty and her smiling mask, but also slips into moments of out-and-out dishonesty. The notion that the domestic identity is a difficult role that must be enacted is dramatized by the way Johnson "acts" her way out of potentially embarrassing situations: phoning up a friend to corroborate a lie she told Fred and pretending that an old acquaintance must have met Alec and his wife at a dinner party. Laura acknowledges the ease of her deception: "It's awfully easy to lie when you know that you're trusted implicitly. So very easy, and so very degrading." Despite claims that it is easy to lie, the degradation that accompanies the deception makes this domestic role difficult. *Brief Encounter* then becomes a performative text that emphasizes the playing of roles. Johnson pretends to be the good neighbour, the good hostess, the interested friend. She plays each role so convincingly that critics have seemed to overlook the obvious question: if Johnson, whose screen identity is that of the

archetypal British housewife, so overtly plays the role of “good wife,” does that mean the domestic identity is potentially unstable? While the ending of the film suggests that Fred and Laura’s final emotional embrace is genuine, the difficulty of the domestic identity has been exposed through Johnson’s performance. Laura’s life is not easy.

Dissatisfied with a husband who does not listen to her, she contemplates an adulterous relationship with a doctor, Alec Harvey (Trevor Howard). Johnson is nothing short of spectacular; her emotions range from ecstatic joy to near-suicidal delirium, but with an underlying reserve and dignity expected of the British, conveyed through her manners and subtle facial expressions. Johnson anchors the film in the sort of “realism” that had been encouraged by the MOI. Johnson’s expressions, whether tormented or joyful, draw in the audience.

Laura controls *Brief Encounter*’s narrative almost entirely. I use the word “almost” advisedly, as will become clear. The film begins with Dolly, a gossiping acquaintance of Laura’s, interrupting what the audience does not yet realize is the final meeting of a couple, Laura and Alec. Through Dolly’s comments, we learn that Alec is not Laura’s husband. While we can speculate about the nature of the couple’s relationship, we know nothing of the history of their affair or the circumstances of their parting. All we can discern is from Johnson’s suppressed expressions, her distraction: Laura has been deeply affected by the departure of the “nice-looking” doctor. When Laura arrives home, she imagines herself telling her husband, Fred, about the affair as they sit together in their living room: “I am a happily married woman – or rather I was, until a few weeks ago. This [home and family] is my whole world and it is enough – or rather it was, until a few weeks ago.” Laura’s words prompt the flashback that tells the audience the story of her seven-week affair with Alec.

“Even before we see [the film] unfold, her voice effectively gives us a blurb or trailer for it ... in the form ... of a confession” (Dyer, *Brief Encounter* 16).

I am not primarily concerned with whether Laura’s confession is meant to “confess her sins” to either her husband, who seems oblivious to her presence, or to the viewer. What concerns me are the implications such a confession has, coming from Celia Johnson. Johnson speaks with the voice of middle-class propriety. Her almost caricatured accent relates and confesses. But this confession is not heard by Fred. Only the audience can understand the implications of what she says. This confession of desire and love for another man seems to undermine the very core of Celia Johnson’s screen identity as the archetypal British wife and mother. If Celia Johnson can contemplate, let alone continue to have, an affair, then, conceivably, any British housewife can. If Celia Johnson has these emotional depths and passions, then any British housewife may also possess them. The hints of these passions, which were downplayed in *In Which We Serve*, are overt in *Brief Encounter*. And while the ending of the film affirms Johnson’s return to the home and suggests a renewed relationship with Fred, the very stability of the identity of “wife” and “mother” is steadily and consistently called into question throughout the film.

Unlike Alix, Laura controls her own narrative. She presents her story in her own words and highlights the events she believes significant – the library books from Booths, the comical trio of female musicians, the Donald Duck cartoon. She is visually highlighted throughout the film through her placement within frames (usually shown in close up) and the way she is lit (even in the darkened movie theatre, Laura’s face shines out amongst the darkened faces of the rest of the audience).

Alec Harvey, her lover, is surprisingly distant in the narrative, but is still active. Though Alec is *present* for a great deal of the film, Laura often describes the periods of absence once she finds herself alone, after Alec has taken his 5:40 train for Churley. These periods of Laura's loneliness result in depression, anger, and even a suicide attempt. Although Laura controls the narrative, it is Alec, at least in Laura's version of their relationship, who controls their affair. Laura represents herself as a mostly passive participant who questions and worries when they are apart. Michael Anderegg, perhaps aligning himself with Laura's version of the events, suggests that Alec's motives might, at first, appear suspect:

It is he who 'comes on' to her, forcing the issue at every point, keeping the relationship going. But to what end? This question is difficult to answer since we know next to nothing of what he feels and almost never see him away from the train station or apart from Laura.

(27-28)

Alec operates solely within the world of Milford. We are never permitted access to Alec's home life, his interactions with his wife, Madeline, or his children. The few times that we are given any sense of Alec's private life are through Laura's speculations: I imagined him arriving at Churley and giving up his ticket, and walking through the streets, and letting himself into his house with his latchkey. Madeleine, his wife, would probably be in the hall to meet him; or perhaps in her room – not feeling well – small, dark and rather delicate. I wondered if he'd say, "I met such a nice woman in the Karomah – we had lunch and went to the pictures." And then suddenly I knew that he wouldn't. I knew

beyond a shadow of doubt that he wouldn't say a word, and at that moment the first awful feeling of danger swept over me.

While Lean establishes Laura's importance as storyteller and the central figure in the story, he simultaneously undermines Laura's ability to act within her own story, subtly returning the male character, Alec, to a place of prominence. This can also be seen in the way Laura's story resists her authority as narrator. This resistance is most apparent in the one major break from Laura's POV, a scene that calls into question her authority as narrator of her own story: Alec and Charles's argument in Charles's apartment after Alec brings Laura back to his friend's apartment. When Laura has run out of the apartment upon Charles's return, how can she know what Alec and Charles said to each other? Bruce Eder's claim that this scene is a "curious mistake" on Lean's part is unsatisfactory. As Eder himself notes, this error seems too glaring for Lean, who had been one of the best and most sought-after motion picture editors in England before moving to directing. It seems unlikely that Lean would simply overlook such a discrepancy. Equally unsatisfactory is Dyer's claim that this scene depicts Laura's version of what happened. There's nothing, either visual or aural, to suggest that the scene is Laura's recreation. The only explanation that makes sense is that Lean is purposely undermining Laura's dominant position within the film. No matter how much she claims, and the film appears to claim, that she's in control of her own narrative, she's not.

For Lean, the gaze represents authority and punishment. For Celia Johnson, the gaze, eye contact, thwarts honesty. When Laura begins meeting Alec, she fears the stares of others and expresses an apprehension about being seen. Laura associates sight with guilt and the placing of blame – people will be able to assess her "guilt" simply by looking at

her. Her apprehension about gaze occurs in the opening scene of the film, only we fail to recognize it fully. For Laura, Dolly's presence is awkward and her gaze unwelcome. Johnson's stoic face, the reserved "gathered together" face of *In Which We Serve*, reveals in this opening scene something of her distraction and her irritation, but it is not until the second time that we see the final parting of Alec and Laura that we become more sensitive to her expressions' connection to the overwhelming pressure of the gaze. Dolly knows Laura's family, and is acquainted with Laura's friends. Laura cannot betray her feelings about Alec, just as Alix could not betray her anxiety about the war and the safety of her husband.

In *Brief Encounter*, the lovers cannot part with demonstrative emotion because of Dolly's curious eye. Dolly's gaze prevents them from parting as lovers. Dolly certainly notices Alec as an attractive man and she clearly has ideas about the way some women behave with doctors: "I'll never forget that time Mary Norton had jaundice. The way she behaved with that doctor of hers was absolutely scandalous." The irony of this statement only becomes clear the second time we see the scene, once the nature of Laura and Alec's relationship is established. This suggestion of scandal, however, hinders the lovers. For fear of appearing "scandalous" in the eyes of her peers, Laura must suppress her desire to follow Alec and continue their goodbyes without Dolly. Only when Dolly turns her attention to the counter, does Laura rush out to see Alec off.

On the train back to Ketchworth after her first afternoon with Alec, Laura remarks: I looked hurriedly around the carriage to see if anyone was looking at me, as though they could read my secret thoughts. Nobody was looking at me except a clergyman in the opposite corner. I felt myself blushing and opened my library book and pretended to read.

Lean chooses to show the clergyman in a tight close-up, staring directly into the camera. The effect that is created allies the viewer with Laura's apprehensions. The priest is staring at us, as if we have done something wrong. On the way home, after the confession of love, however, Laura comments: "This time I didn't attempt to read – even to pretend to read – I didn't care whether people were looking at me or not." Laura recognizes the performative nature of the gaze, but chooses not to perform, suggesting that she has, with the declaration of love, temporarily moved past the punitive and restrictive nature of the gaze.

Laura, however, cannot find a space to operate within the authority of the social gaze. When Laura flees from Charles's apartment, she finds herself sitting alone on a bench beneath a war memorial, dwarfed by the statue of a soldier, what Dyer calls "a symbol of male sacrifice" (28). Johnson smokes a cigarette, a transgressive act, according to Laura's narration:

I sat there for ages – I don't know how long – then I noticed a policeman walking up and down a little way off. He was looking at me rather suspiciously. Presently he came up to me ... I walked away, trying to look casual, knowing that he was watching me. I felt like a criminal. I walked rather quickly back in the direction of the High Street.

The policeman's stare and the overwhelming statue conspire to reinforce Laura's previous feelings of shame and guilt – "I felt like a criminal" – which prompts her return to her family.

Richard Dyer states that what most people remember about *Brief Encounter* are Celia Johnson, trains, and Rachmaninov. I would like to consider how the train relates to Johnson's performance, providing a space for her fantasies. At the opening of the film

Rachmaninov's second piano concerto plays and a train whistle interrupts it. By allowing the location sound of the railroad station to interfere with the film's score, Lean draws our attention to both the train and the music, and the disruptive power of the train. If we take the ending of *Brief Encounter* to be fundamentally concerned with preserving the state of matrimony, then the train is a disruptive force. Although Johnson must deal with what she interprets as accusing stares of other passengers and Dolly's remark that the train is usually full implies claustrophobia, the train is a space for Laura to reflect on her affair with Alec. Here she can imagine what life with Alec might be like. It is while on the train that Laura has what Dyer refers to as "her school girl fantasy" about life with Alec. She imagines them dancing and attending concerts together. Such a dream seems appropriate for the train because the train is the means by which Laura comes to Alec. It allows, sanctions, if you will, their relationship. Aboard the train, Laura is permitted to imagine life with Alec.⁹

In *Brief Encounter*, the choice to return to the duty of the home is, perhaps, unappealing. For the majority of the film, Lean aligns our sympathies with Alec, while Fred is shown to be inattentive and, worse still, dull. His evenings are spent completing crossword puzzles. Even when the answer to one clue is romance, the significance of the word is lost on Fred, as he wants simply to fit it into the puzzle: "No, it's right, I'm sure. It fits in with "delirium" and "Baluchistan." However, to suggest, as Landy does, that the

⁹ I find Laura's fantasy version of her life with Alec a curious element of *Brief Encounter*, not because it seems out of place in the otherwise realistic drama, but because, when considered in relation to the sorts of post-war lives desired by the working-class women in the Mass Observation reports, Laura's life, or at least the surface of it, represents many of the idealized versions of home life found in these reports. Her nice house, social position and financial stability would be quite attractive to many working-class women. Of course, as shown throughout *Brief Encounter*, Laura's perceived life is as fantastic and false as the ballroom dance with Alec. This emphasizes that these versions of home life are indeed idealized.

film is “symptomatic of how war time cinema did not create new concepts of femininity” is to miss the complexity of the ending. As much as we may desire to dismiss Fred as a suitable partner for Laura, Lean does include a hint of Fred’s transformation to suitable partner at the end of the film, as well as a transformation of Laura. Though Laura’s infidelity has been confessed in Johnson’s almost parodic British voice only to the audience, Lean introduces the possibility that Fred might understand, after all. The weight of Laura’s voice might just be felt by Fred. Possibly he is, or will be, a more suitable partner. While he does not require the “defanging” Nicholas needs in *The Seventh Veil*, Fred needs to show the possibility of attentiveness, which he does in the final scene when he looks up from his ever-present newspaper and recognizes the anguish on his wife’s face. He sets the paper aside and crosses the room to the chair where she sits, lost in painful thought. He kneels beside her and softly speaks her name. Laura turns her head slowly towards him, though her eyes remain fixed off camera. She answers, “Yes, dear?”

“Whatever your dream was, it wasn’t a very happy one, was it?”

Still avoiding eye contact with Fred, she shakes her head and replies, “No.”

“Is there anything I can do to help?” Fred asks.

At this Laura reaches out her hand to hold Fred’s. “Yes, Fred. You always help.” She fights back the tears as Fred observes, “You’ve been a long way away.”

“Yes”

“Thank you for coming back to me.”

With this statement, Johnson’s emotions get the better of her. Her eyes finally turn to meet his, but only for a glance, a brief encounter with his eyes. She drops her head into his shoulder as he holds her. Though it is not a particularly passionate embrace, this marks the

first evidence of genuine affection in the Jesson home. Johnson's emotions, previously reserved for Alec and their affair, are finally revealed to and shared with Fred.

Deborah Kerr

In his autobiography, *A Life in Movies*, Michael Powell reflects on the special relationship he shared with Deborah Kerr: "I realized that Deborah was both the ideal and the flesh-and-blood woman whom I had been searching for ever since I had discovered that I had been born to be a teller of tales and a creator of dreams" (413). Powell's observation about what he perceived as a dual identity – at once ideal and earthly – fittingly characterizes a quality of Kerr's screen identity in British films, which Powell himself helped crystallize: the struggle between two identities to form one complex screen persona.

Deborah Kerr began her film career contemporaneously with Celia Johnson, first coming to the public's attention portraying Jenny in Pascal's *Major Barbara* (1940).¹⁰ Unlike Johnson, who had a significant body of theatrical roles before entering films, Kerr was predominantly a film actress. Even in her first few roles, Kerr's obvious beauty and star quality stood out. A contemporary review remarked:

She certainly attracts the attention of everybody who comes near her, for she is what they call a "Botticelli blonde"---reddish-gold hair, light blue eyes, and a face capable of expressing "spiritual wistfulness."... She is a lovely girl. She is crystal fresh in quality. She has intelligence, and that uncommon quality of common sense which endears the best young American actresses to the world's audiences.

(*Picture Post* 7 December 1940)

¹⁰ Kerr appeared in Michael Powell's *Contraband* (1940), but her scenes were cut from the final film: "Oh, disappointment! When I saw the edited version of the film they had cut out my short scene" (*Picture Post* 7/12/1940).

In comparing her to American actresses, this article alludes to Kerr's Hollywood quality. I would like to consider Kerr's British screen persona, which contrasts two identities – the domestic and independent – and speaks to the sacrificing nature of the mobile woman, who were relocated throughout Britain as part of the war effort. Often these two identities are explored through the explicit mirroring of Kerr's character– the ordinary and extraordinary – either by playing multiple roles (as in *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* [*LADOCB*]), by examining the intricacies of a character's growth (as in *Perfect Strangers*), or by contrasting her with a surrogate (as in *Black Narcissus*). All three films conclude with the two identities being brought into some sort of unity by giving up part of each identity, suggesting a new, non-traditional domestic identity for women who developed skills and self-reliance during the war, but wanted to return home.

Much has been written about Powell and Pressburger's *LADOCB*, their first film to bear the famous signature, "Written, Directed and Produced by Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger." Much of the critical literature focusses on the character of Clive Wynne-Candy, the titular Blimp, or examines Churchill's opposition to this, the Archers' most ambitious, wartime film. In their article "British Film Censorship and Propaganda," Pronay and Croft reassess the role of the now-mythic government opposition to *LADOCB*, particularly Churchill's attempts to ban the film, concluding that the situation illustrates "most clearly and fully the conflicts which could arise, by the middle years of the war, between the expert and sophisticated propaganda policies of the MOI, and the policies of the amateur propagandists outside it" (155). Anthony Aldgate and Jeffrey Richards examine contemporary attitudes of 'Blimpery' and the political climate in which Powell and Pressburger's script, "thought 'defeatist'" (83), was produced. Aldgate and Richards

emphasize the film's sympathetic representation of the "New Army of Britain": "If anything, the filmic rendition of Colonel Blimp singled out the character as being greatly at odds with the times ... but hardly as a representative of any type to be found in the British Army by the advent of World War II" (83).

Powell and Pressburger chose twenty-year old Deborah Kerr to play all three female leads in *LADOCB*: Edith Hunter, Barbara Wynne, and Angela 'Johnny' Cannon. Versatility and maturity were obviously required in order to portray three women, identical in appearance (all three are, after all, Deborah Kerr), but individual characters in three separate time periods: Edith, the intelligent, cosmopolitan governess; Barbara, the caring, class-sensitive wife; and Johnny, the mobile woman. Andrew Moor argues that "[t]he triple casting of Deborah Kerr as Candy's 'ideal' suggests a more engaged attitude to the shifting role of women. It is a radical casting decision and its meanings are ambivalent" (79-80). I propose that in casting Deborah Kerr, the Archers purposely employ Kerr's dual quality that Powell alludes to in his autobiography. She (and the three characters) must be at once ideal and real in order to reflect the shifting roles of women in British society.

Although Richards argues that "[i]n a very real sense Edith, Barbara and Angela are the same woman, the eternal sensible forthright, independent-spirited British woman" (96), I think he misses the subtlety and complexities that Kerr brings to the different women, the differences Candy is seemingly oblivious to, but of which we should be aware. While there are physical features that unite these three women – the striking beauty and the luminous red hair, the colour green, the various hats, as well as the independent spirit that Richards refers to – Edith, Barbara, and Angela display elements of unique independence. It is

difficult to imagine Barbara's speech about the German butchers¹¹ coming from Edith's mouth. Similarly, it is difficult to imagine graceful Edith using the colloquial expressions Johnny employs. They are each portrayed as powerful women who are capable of operating outside the usual societal restrictions for women. However, they also incorporate a domestic identity into their independent identity.

Clive Candy meets Edith Hunter, an English governess living in Berlin, to assist her in combating the anti-British propaganda of Kauntiz that has caused her to lose her job. As Moor states, Candy is "[n]ominally the epic hero" and his "own subjectivity is itself primarily based upon his identification with stereotypes and idealisations" (61). Operating against the expressed wishes of the Foreign Office, Candy characterizes his mission as romantic adventure, "telling his friend Hoppy to make his excuses to Lady Gilpin: 'Say I've gone on some secret mission – make me out the most serious romantic figure'" (Moor 61). Candy sets off for Germany to help Edith Hunter, whom he envisions as a helpless, young, English woman. Once he arrives in Berlin, their roles are dramatically reversed as Deborah Kerr assumes the role of Clive's protector, while Candy finds himself quite helpless and at the mercy of Miss Hunter's assistance.

Powell and Pressburger choose to introduce Deborah Kerr following a dissolve from a close-up of Candy's message informing his friend of his trip to Germany and which

¹¹ When Clive and Barbara visit the German POW camp to see Theo, Barbara reflects, "How odd they are. Queer. For years and years, they're writing and dreaming beautiful poetry. And all of a sudden they start a war. They sink undefended ships, shoot innocent hostages and bomb and destroy whole streets in London, killing little children. Then they sit down in the same butcher's uniforms and listen to Mendelssohn and Schubert. Something horrible about that." The weight of Barbara's statement is undermined by the implied abuses by Britain and her allies, most notably, Van Zijl's looting and methods for "making people talk." As Moor notes, "while it is done by the South African Van Zijl (Reginald Tate), the geographical displacement cannot absolve the British. Van Zijl's looting is, we are told, something 'learnt from the English in the Boer War' (the ghost of that unhappy episode, disturbed by Kaunitz earlier in the film, is still not settled)" (76).

identifies himself as Sherlock. The message, which alludes to Clive's erroneous belief that he is a figure of adventure, specifically master detective Sherlock Holmes, gives way to the striking figure of Kerr. Kerr is alone, framed in a medium shot in a large, ornate, but sparsely furnished, room. She is dressed in an elaborate period costume, but there is a contemporary quality about her. She stands by an open window, watching the snow fall outside. Her poise and strength of character are immediately apparent as she moves through the room. This is not someone who requires rescuing. Kerr moves effortlessly, confidently, in an environment marked by empty space, going from the window to the middle of the room. That confidence of character counters Clive's idea of her as a damsel in distress.

Kerr's dominant role in their relationship is further foreshadowed when Candy approaches her from the hallway behind her rather than from the side. We watch Candy approach in the background with his attention already focussed on Kerr. As he speaks to her, Kerr remains the focus of most of the shots, usually shown in close-ups or medium close-ups. She occupies our attention as much as she occupies Candy's. The only suggestion of susceptibility occurs when the question of her address arises. That the loss of her position as a governess causes her some embarrassment is conveyed by Kerr's glancing down, breaking eye contact with Candy. Prior to this, Kerr speaks to Candy with confidence and authority, maintaining eye contact. She does not glance away at all until she informs him that her address has changed. Like Johnson, for whom breaking eye contact permits emotional honesty, there is great significance when Kerr breaks eye contact. It suggests that while she has great strength and confidence, she is still vulnerable.

As Kerr, through her presence and confidence, undermines Candy's impression of her as one who needs rescuing, the Archers begin to suggest the foolishness of Candy's

romantic delusions. Kerr expresses surprise that Candy is in Berlin at all. When he indicates that he came in response to her letter, she is even more surprised at his impracticality: “You don’t mean you came all the way to Berlin because of my letter?” Though she does not overtly say anything, Kerr’s slightly raised eyebrows reveal that she thinks Candy has acted rashly. Unfamiliar with both the language and customs of Germany, Clive must rely on Edith’s knowledge and understanding. In Candy’s comparison of himself and Miss Hunter to Stanley and Livingston, he confuses the analogy, mixing up Stanley and Livingston. He must be corrected by Edith, which only further illustrates his helplessness.

In the café, Candy learns just how capable Edith is in helping herself. She reveals her entrepreneurial side when she explains her career choice and her future plans, which again suggest the non-romantic, practical mindedness Kerr demonstrated in the previous scene. Edith chose to teach in Germany in order to take advantage of what she feels are her only real abilities: her manners and her command of the English language. “And having learned German,” she intends “to return to England where my German would [command a premium].” She came to Germany against the expressed wishes of her family: “They said that the best place for a young girl is home.” When Candy agrees with this sentiment, Miss Hunter reproaches him for an attribute that comes to characterize Candy throughout the film – ignorance. “How do you know what’s the best place for a young girl? Are you a girl? Have you any daughters? You see, while you men have been fighting, we women have been thinking.”

Here Edith identifies the very lesson that Candy does not fully learn until World War II: he fails to think. Because he has spent all his time in the military, Clive Candy fails

to learn how the world changes around him. While much has been made about the evolution of Theo's thinking throughout the film, it is important to remember that Deborah Kerr – as Edith, Barbara, and Johnny — embodies change and progress.

Following his duel with Theo Kretschmar-Schuldorff (Anton Walbrook), Candy's helplessness is compounded by injuries and other forces work to ensure his dependency on Edith. Edith is falsely reported by officials to be the cause of the duel in order to avoid political embarrassment. So, she falls victim to bureaucracy and diplomacy. She is almost strong-armed into the traditional role of the beloved by the British officials who pressure her to stay with Clive in Germany. When the officials appeal to her social image – “What would people say if you left him now?” – Edith's sense of duty wins out. Again, Kerr's strength and confidence serve the character.

Because she is encouraged to enact the role of grieving lover, Edith's frustration is suppressed. She gives up her return ticket home in order to care for the convalescing Candy. However, it is Candy's duel rival who wins Edith's affections. Powell and Pressburger lay the groundwork for this union in the furtive, yet subtle, glances Theo and Edith share at their initial meeting to play cards. When they are partnered with the cutting of cards, their relationship is sealed. Edith abandons detailed plans for the future and her own independence in order to marry Theo and, as we find out later, raise two sons. However, it is important to point out that Edith does not abandon her independent spirit by marrying a German, choosing to remain in a country hostile to the British. Kerr challenges traditional roles, even when she assumes traditional roles. Rather, the identities of wife and mother incorporate Edith's characteristics of independence that first surprised and shocked Clive.

We first encounter Kerr's second character, Barbara Wynn, in the Convent of the Crown of Thorns, where she serves as a nurse during World War I. Candy arrives at the convent, which has been converted into a hospital, in the hopes of getting some food. As he is led into the dining area by the matron, he spots Barbara sitting off by herself against the wall. She looks down at the table while Candy stares at her. The differences in the way Edith and Barbara are introduced are noteworthy. As Barbara, Kerr is dressed in a simple, white nurse's uniform. Her distinctive hair is almost hidden beneath the hat. Though she sits by herself, the room is crowded with both furnishings and people. Despite these differences, Kerr is immediately recognizable. Though she looks different and is framed differently, the close-up reveals her confidence and strength, this time not in the way she commands our attention in an empty room, but how she commands it in an occupied room.

As the matron shows him to a place and continues to talk, Candy's gaze is set firmly on Kerr. Powell and Pressburger emphasize the importance of the gaze in this introduction to Barbara, because, for Clive, the encounter is marked by visual identification. As a result of her physical resemblance to Edith, Candy makes up his mind to pursue her. He asks the matron if she has ever seen the Indian Rope Trick. He concludes that the "secret" of the trick is convincing someone that they are going to see it. "You hear about a thing, you hope to see it, and then you'll see it." The significance of this reference to the famous, but rarely seen, Indian Rope Trick resides in Barbara's appearance, or, perhaps more accurately, in Edith's (re)appearance in Barbara.

Clive Candy's decision to marry Barbara because of her resemblance to Edith does not mean that Barbara loses her identity wholly. After her death, Clive adopts her surname, "Wynn," as part of his surname in tribute to her: Clive Wynn-Candy. Moor argues that as

Barbara, Kerr “is a conventional support for her husband” (80). However, Barbara’s choice to marry is not simply conforming to a traditional role. The decision to marry Clive reveals a similar challenge to tradition. She not only marries someone twenty years her senior, but someone increasingly out of step with the world. He tells her, “When other people are thanking God the war is over, I’m going to the War Office to ask, ‘Where is another war where you can use me?’”

We catch glimpses of Clive’s MTC driver, Angela (or “Johnny” as she christens herself because she hates the name Angela), in the film’s modern-day prologue where she is identified as “Mata Hari,” alluding to her inadvertent role in betraying General Wynn-Candy’s location to the “New Army.” As Lant and Moor have stated, Johnny is the fully mobilized woman. The conscription of women, which became law on December 10 1941, marked the first time “in British history that women had been called up” (Lant 85). This act, while controversial, had become necessary due to the lack of wartime workers (Calder 267).

We first encounter Angela exiting The Bull after her rendezvous with Spud, though we know nothing of her, including her appearance. Powell and Pressburger delay revealing Angela’s face (which, of course, is Kerr’s face) until two thirds of the way through the film - after Theo’s emigration to England in the late 1930s and Kerr’s face is well established. In these opening scenes as Johnny, Kerr avoids the camera, walking away from it. We know that she cuts a striking figure in her uniform. Despite Pam Cook and Andrew Moor’s arguments about military uniforms enabling cross-dressing and allowing women “to try on masculine drag” (Cook 54), the male soldiers who wait outside for Spud clearly identify

her as female, as they turn to watch her as she passes. She offers a calm “Good afternoon, Sgt. Hawkins” before the soldiers, suspicious of Spud’s delay, begin scrambling.

The Archers finally reveal Johnny’s face, Kerr’s face, and all the implications of that face, when Wynne-Candy has her drive Theo back to his lodgings during a blackout. The brilliance of this scene is in its use of light and shadow to cloak Kerr’s face. Theo talks to Johnny about her life and career before he can see her face. With her in the driver’s seat and him in the backseat, Theo cannot see her. She reveals that she was a model before the war and that her boyfriend taught her to drive so that she could participate in the war effort¹². While the Archers speak implicitly about the changing roles of women during the war years through Edith and Barbara, they overtly address these changes through Johnny. Here Kerr is the contemporary woman, dramatizing the contemporary concerns of women’s fitting into the war effort. As effortlessly as she played historical figures, she represents Johnny as someone who is strong, confident, and independent.

When Theo finally sees Johnny, he recognizes in her face the similarity to both Edith and Barbara. At a stoplight Johnny turns to Theo and explains how excited she was to have been selected by Candy when a bright, illegally used light from off-screen floods her face. Johnny continues talking, but Theo is silent. His face expresses his feelings: first shock, then awe and finally understanding. Having spent the evening discussing Clive’s love for Edith and his search for someone “just like her,” Theo knows why Johnny was chosen out of 700 other girls: like the Indian Rope Trick, Clive has been hoping to see this face, Kerr’s face, again.

¹² Moor comments on Johnny’s altered career: “before the war she was a photographic model and now she is an army driver. Discarding the passivity of her earlier willing objectification, she is now literally at the wheel” (80).

Fittingly, Johnny's transition into a non-traditional domestic role is not yet completed at the end of the film, only suggested. With the examples of Edith and Barbara anticipating Johnny's future development into a non-traditional domestic role, the Archers only lay the groundwork for such a change. Johnny has a boyfriend, but is not yet engaged (she is quick to correct Theo when he uses the word "fiancé"), and, through the influence of Theo, she becomes a kind of caregiver and support to Clive Wynn-Candy, reminiscent of the support Edith and Barbara provided. Theo consciously incorporates Johnny into Clive's personal life. He invites her to sit with them at the dinner table, he asks her to stay longer, insisting that Clive will not mind her presence. While Theo has learned about the changing nature of the world and war first-hand, he recognizes that his friend holds on to out-dated ideals of sportsmanship and fair play. After Candy's broadcast about the Battle of Dunkirk is cancelled by the BBC, Theo challenges his friend's ideas and accuses him of outmoded thinking, thinking that could prove dangerous in the face of war with the Nazis. Theo again encourages Johnny to stay for this conversation, hoping that she, unaware of her connection to the other women in Clive's life, might be able to get Clive to change his mind. She encourages Clive's involvement in the Home Guard. In the end, it is Kerr – and, therefore, all three female characters – who facilitates Candy's final lesson. By revealing his location, Johnny makes possible Spud's humiliating capture of Wynn-Candy in the bathhouse, an act that makes the old Blimp realize that the world has indeed changed profoundly. Candy's sort of soldiering, with its regulations and rules of conduct, is no longer feasible in this new world.

In Alexander Korda's *Perfect Strangers*, Deborah Kerr plays Cathy Wilson who, absent from her husband, carries on a brief flirtation with Richard, the cousin of her friend,

Dizzie. In the opening scene, Kerr is hardly recognizable: the plain, sickly housewife, Cathy, is nothing like the poised, confident screen presence of Deborah Kerr. The black and white cinematography hides Kerr's distinctive features, such as her red hair, for instance, as much as the oversized cardigan and tweeds hide her figure. However, as Cathy comes to discover a renewed sense of life, beauty, and independence in the Wrens, we see her transform into Deborah Kerr. At the end of the film, with the promise of Cathy's and Robert's rebuilt home life, the transformation into Deborah Kerr challenges the stereotype of the plain housewife and addresses the women who desired to return to the home: domestic women do not have to be dull and lifeless; they can be glamorous and independent.

When Cathy first arrives at the Wren barracks, Dizzie offers her a cigarette, which she refuses because Robert does not like her to smoke. Cathy similarly refuses lipstick, but, after Dizzie's chiding remarks, Cathy reconsiders her appearance. She stays behind after Dizzie leaves the barracks to reconsider her appearance in the mirror. Kerr adjusts her uniform hat to a more flattering position, applies lipstick, and finally, fashionably, slings her bag over one shoulder. She becomes Deborah Kerr, the beautiful screen presence. Soon there is little physical resemblance to the housewife from the beginning of the film. One naval officer even expresses surprise that Cathy is married. But this change is more than just physical; Cathy's attitudes, demeanour, and even her preferences change as she becomes more independent and self-reliant. It is hard to imagine the quiet housewife we initially encounter now steering a motorboat through dangerous enemy fire. As she did playing Johnny in *LADOCB*, in *Perfect Strangers* Deborah Kerr recalls the mobile women

of WWII. Her wartime service provides her with new skills and experiences. She returns to her domestic role a different and better person than she was before her service.

Reflecting on her transformation from her former self, she tells Richard that she feels the conflict of two people, two separate identities, within her. “I suddenly realized that I’m two persons and I used to be one. I’m two persons and I don’t like either of them.” Korda uses the image of the mirror to reinforce what Kerr identifies as the two persons she has become. She checks her lipstick in a small compact. She stands in front of a large wall mirror in the pub. While Robert undergoes a transformation of his own.¹³ Cathy’s is more dramatic and the one on which I shall focus.

The mirror is a fitting image to suggest this feeling of duality that she expresses to Richard. In *Literary Theory: an Introduction*, Terry Eagleton explains Lacan’s “mirror stage”: “the image in the mirror both is and is not itself” (143). More than a mere stand-in for the self, the image in the mirror is both the self and not the self. In describing how film operates, Stanley Cavell draws a parallel between mirrors and how film brings us into the presence of the actor: it “relays his presence to us, as by mirrors” (26). Cavell argues that what we see projected on the movie screen is not a real human being, but a “human something.” Similarly, the reflection in the mirror is a “human something,” “not in principle separable from the being the performer is” (Rothman and Keane 74).

Mirrors figure importantly in *Perfect Strangers*, not only visually but structurally. Clemence Dane’s screenplay uses a mirrored narrative structure to chart the development

¹³ The original tagline of the film (“Mr. Chips Is Back in a New Thrilling Romance!”) draws comparisons to Robert Donat’s screen persona, particularly the celebrated role as the beloved, and aged, schoolteacher in *Goodbye, Mr Chips* (1939). I find it interesting that Donat’s transformation reverses the aging process so praised in *Goodbye, Mr Chips*. When *Perfect Strangers* begins, Donat resembles a middle-aged Chipping, with his bushy moustache. When he shaves off the moustache, Donat appears dramatically younger, looking much like the young Mr Chipping who first arrived at Brookfield.

of Cathy and Robert. Robert's scenes frequently dissolve into Cathy's. What happens to Robert is mirrored, usually in the next scene, by what happens with Cathy: Robert is called up to the navy, Cathy joins the Wrens; Robert shaves his moustache, making himself look younger, Cathy uses makeup and pays more attention to her appearance; Robert becomes enamoured of his nurse (Ann Todd), Cathy begins a relationship with Dizzie's cousin, Richard. In fact, even the break-ups with these other people mirror each other as both take place in a dance hall. However, there is a subtle difference in these two break-ups, a difference that emphasizes Cathy's importance in the story and the cost of sacrificing her new independence, which is greater than the cost to Robert. Robert's nurse is not really interested in him. They flirt and carry on, but she loves her recently deceased husband. As much as he may want to pursue this nurse, Robert cannot compete with the idealized memory of her late husband. However, Richard really loves Cathy and it is suggested that he understands her. Like Francesca and Laura, Cathy has a choice.

The most obvious example of this mirrored narrative comes at the end of the film, when Cathy, along with Dizzie, goes to meet Robert and his friend Scottie (Caven Watson) at their old flat. After a three-year absence from her bookkeeper husband, Robert, who has undergone a similar transformation, Cathy agrees to meet Robert at their old flat. Both confess their sense of dread of meeting the other to their respective friends. At first, they resolve to continue on with the relationship, both believing that they are the partner who keeps the other one going. Cathy claims that she needs to "wind Robert up"; Robert calls Cathy "a helpless kitten" and characterizes his importance in their relationship as starch to a collar. Eventually both decide that divorce is the best course of action. Robert and Cathy

each think that they themselves are too different from their pre-war selves to continue on in a marriage that was characterized by routine and monotony.

Cathy and Robert's reunion does not happen in their familiar old flat, but in the blacked-out streets of London. When Cathy approaches the door of the flat, she is willing to revert to her old life, but is unable to go inside. She retreats to the street, where she calls Robert from a telephone box and asks him to meet her outside. Unable to see the changes in each other because of the blackout conditions, unable to see Deborah Kerr, Robert first identifies his wife's cough, the cough that had been so persistent in their married life. The physical differences, which are so apparent in the following scene when they move to the pub, are hidden at first by the darkness of night, allowing both Robert and Cathy to hold on to their set images of the other. After a brief argument they agree to the divorce, still unaware of the significant changes in the other.

The entry into the pub is a dramatic shift from the blacked-out streets to a well-lit pub. Equally dramatic will be Cathy's and Robert catching sight of each other, but Korda opts to delay this: Robert, believing he knows what his wife looks like, goes to the bar for the drinks; Cathy goes to find a seat. Not until Robert returns with the drinks does he realize that this striking beauty checking her makeup in her compact is his wife. Cathy, in turn, sees a different Robert standing before her. In their mutual disbelief, Robert knocks over her glass and is met with further evidence of Cathy's transformation and the breakdown of his perception of her. She orders a pink gin. Robert replies to this with surprise: "Pink gin? You?"

The Wilsons come to understand two things: that they have both changed a great deal in their three years apart; and also that they did not really know each other before.

Robert was unaware of Cathy's trips to the travel agent and the collection of travel folders; Cathy was unaware of Robert's dislike of his job and his hatred of their only vacation destination, Clacton-on-Sea. Both are surprised at the other's dancing ability and enjoyment of dancing. Cathy objects to Robert's view of her as boring and mundane; Robert objects to Cathy's view of him as stuffy and predictable. Just as they cannot agree on the layout of their street after the destruction of the air raids, they cannot agree on their assessment of themselves or the other. Not only are Cathy and Robert forced to re-examine their new selves, but their subsequent conversation forces them to re-examine their previous perception of the other. Neither the post-war nor the pre-war partner is really known to the other. This uncertainty, however, is not presented as a frightening prospect, but as hopeful possibility.

At the end of the film, Robert returns to the flat to pick up his belongings. Kerr, who has opened the curtains to the window overlooking the street, sits in profile, looking at the city stretched out before her. She remarks that the building that had blocked their view of the city has been destroyed by the German bombs. Robert walks to the window, his back to the camera and says, "Well you've certainly got the view you've always wanted."

CATHY: Oh, Robert. The desolation.

ROBERT: Poor old London. Well, we've just got to build it up again.

This discussion of the physical rebuilding of London carries the weight and undertones of rebuilding their own marriage relationship. In the pub, Cathy tells her husband, "I think a woman's place is in the home. Just not our sort of home." While this line is somewhat troubling, Kerr's transformation operates against the implications of women simply returning to the same old domestic roles. Cathy has dramatically changed,

so too “home” must dramatically change. Her identity will be neither the mousy housewife she was before the war, nor the independent mobile woman she has become. It will be built by merging these two identities and will perhaps result in a partnership of equals. When Cathy remarks that such rebuilding “will take years and years,” Robert asks, “Well, what does that matter?” With this, he places his hand on her leg and turns to her, adding, “We’re young.”

In his biography of his grandfather, Emeric Pressburger, Kevin MacDonald notes that the Archers had tried unsuccessfully to cast Deborah Kerr in their films immediately following *LADOCB*, *A Canterbury Tale* (1944), and *I Know Where I’m Going!* (1945).¹⁴ Bound by an MGM contract received largely on the success of *LADOCB*, Kerr was unable to commit to these other Archers productions. After acquiring the rights to, and adapting Rumer Godden’s *Black Narcissus*, Michael Powell recalls asking Pressburger “who was going to play Sister Clodagh? Answer: Deborah Kerr, said Emeric” (Powell 576).

Black Narcissus tells the story of Sisters of the Order of the Servants of Mary who attempt to establish St. Faith, a school and a hospital, in the remote village of Mopu amidst the Himalayas. The sisters are placed under the leadership of Kerr’s character, Sister Clodagh, a young nun whose readiness is questioned by their Mother Superior (Nancy Roberts). The title – Sister Superior – and the duties of the position suggest that Kerr enacts another domestic role. The palace that the nuns have been given was originally a “House of Women,” where the former general’s concubines lived. The confusion about what type of “ladies” these sisters are arises when Angu Ayah (May Hallatt) becomes excited at the news that ladies are coming to occupy the old house. The Old General (Esmond Knight)

¹⁴ With Kerr bound by her MGM contract, the Archers cast unknown Sheila Sim as Alison Smith in *A Canterbury Tale*; they cast Wendy Hiller, whom, incidentally, Kerr had replaced in *LADOCB*, in the role of Joan Webster in *I Know Where I’m Going!*

corrects her: “They are not that kind of lady.” This illustrates the film’s major dichotomy, the relations between pleasure and servitude, between sexual desire and repression. This dichotomy manifests most clearly in the relationship between Sister Clodagh and Sister Ruth (Kathleen Byron). Ruth falls for the British envoy, Mr Dean (David Farrar), and becomes gradually eroticized throughout the film. She accuses Clodagh of trying to steal Dean from her. The tension between Clodagh and Ruth culminates when Sister Ruth refuses to renew her vows and abandons Saint Faith in order to pursue Mr Dean. When Dean rejects her, Sister Ruth returns to Saint Faith and tries to push Sister Clodagh from the cliff beside the bell. In the struggle, Ruth falls to her death. Soon afterwards, Saint Faith closes down. The Himalayan weather too inhospitable, the trust of the locals broken irreparably, the nuns return to Calcutta.

A rich film that displays an inventive juxtaposing of styles and genres,¹⁵ *Black Narcissus* is typically interpreted in one of two ways: as an exploration of female sexuality and desire or as a post-colonial work that questions the effectiveness of the Empire and anticipates Great Britain’s withdrawal from India. Sue Harper argues in *Women in British Cinema*, that the film “should be interpreted as an intense meditation upon female sexuality” (59). Natacha Thiery argues that “*Black Narcissus* is probably the film in which female desire finds its fullest realisation. In contrast to the nun’s position and the demands of convent life, everything in the film suggests sensuality” (226). In comparing *Black Narcissus* to other British films set in colonies, Priya Jaikumar examines the film in terms of empire in “‘Place’ and the Modernist Redemption of Empire in *Black Narcissus*.” Jaikumar specifically notes “the operation of the colonial ‘place’ - while engaging the other modes to highlight variations within British cultural narratives of imperialism during the

¹⁵ The film shifts, almost seamlessly, from colonial story to love story to thriller.

decline of the empire.” (58) Jean-Louis Leutrat contrasts and compares Kanchi’s (Jean Simmons) and Sister Ruth’s reaction to the Young General’s (Sabu) perfume, *Black Narcissus*. The perfume, which gives the film its title, was purchased in London and is, thus, loaded with colonial imagery. Leutrat explores “themes traditionally associated with perfumes” and their relationship to desire. Acknowledging the important post-colonial concerns of the film, I prefer to concentrate on the role of Sister Clodagh as a further extension of Kerr’s screen persona, one that also addresses contemporary concerns about women and their place in society. In doing so, I focus primarily on the complicated relationship between Sister Clodagh and Sister Ruth.

Just as the Archers employed Kerr to play three roles in *LADOCB*, Kerr seems again to be playing two roles in *Black Narcissus* because of the way the characters of Clodagh and Ruth are connected and the striking resemblance between her and Kathleen Byron. Onscreen, Clodagh and Ruth function both as antagonists and sisters, rivals and co-conspirators. Moor suggests in the role of “Clodagh, Deborah Kerr is proud cold and officious” (194), while Byron’s Ruth is wild and passionate and rebellious. Ruth enacts Clodagh’s desires. Kerr’s natural poise and strength reveal a suppression of the kind of desire that Sister Ruth represents. Though they are separate characters, Clodagh and Ruth represent two parts of a whole identity and must symbolically struggle to forge a new identity that incorporates elements of both identities.

The Archers take great pains to draw parallels between Clodagh and Ruth. While Mother Dorothea is giving out the assignment of establishing Saint Faith to Sister Clodagh, there are only two sisters about whom the Reverend Mother expresses concern: the absent Ruth, whom she calls “a problem,” and Clodagh herself. The Reverend Mother believes

that Sister Ruth “badly wants importance” and suggests that Sister Clodagh has importance to spare.

The introduction of Kerr thwarts the audience’s expectations of Kerr’s screen identity, of who she is. As with the Cathy Wilson at the beginning of *Perfect Strangers*, most of Kerr’s distinct features are covered by her costume. The nun’s habit hides all but Kerr’s face, which must, as a result of the confining costume, bear the weight of her performance. Her face must express the whole of her screen identity: her strength of character and independence, as well as her vulnerability, her desire, and her uncertainty. The wimple acts as a kind of costume close up: the white that surrounds her face serves to emphasize her expressions while hiding the rest of her. When Mr Dean turns up drunk to the Christmas service, for example, Kerr’s anger and disappointment is contained within the space of her face. The stark white of the nun’s uniform hides rather than accentuates Kerr’s non-facial features, especially her red hair, and removes her from associations with various colours, a technique Powell and Pressburger used previously in *LADOCB*. When we finally see Kerr without the habit, in flashbacks, the colours she is associated with (red and green) have already been extensively associated with Ruth and her passion. The Archers delay the introduction of Ruth; initially she is only talked about by the other nuns. When she finally rushes into Clodagh’s office, she is covered in blood from a patient in the hospital. Red, representative of desire and passion, is first associated with Ruth. Whenever Ruth and Clodagh confer in Clodagh’s office they are filmed as if they are mirror images of each other.

Much of the doubling of Ruth and Clodagh is in relation to Mr. Dean, the overt object of Ruth’s desires as well as the covert object of Clodagh’s. At one point, while Dean

and Kerr are talking at the top of the large staircase, Ruth stands between them. She stands slightly behind them and is partly in the shadows, which gives her an almost menacing appearance. Dean reminds Clodagh of her former love. Her attraction to Dean recalls the suppressed desires for Con, who had abandoned her. Sharing a smile with Dean triggers Clodagh's memory of carolling with Con. In these flashbacks, the officious Kerr gives way to the passionate and lively Kerr. When Clodagh calls Ruth in to see her for the last time before Ruth falls to her death, she instinctively knows about Ruth's infatuation.

Ruth's death does not signify the "death" of Clodagh's desire. Clodagh's desire is not wholly lost, as she retains the memory of her desire for Con. What she loses is the unhealthy, all-consuming passion of Ruth. Ruth's desire prevents her from fulfilling her duties and responsibilities and causes her death. Moor argues that the emotion Clodagh displays following Ruth's death is quickly stifled. However, I suggest that the very presence of this emotion challenges Moor's assertion that Powell and Pressburger are suggesting women must kill their desires outright. Desire must be controlled and managed, not eliminated, in order for Clodagh to continue her work.

Although the death of Ruth suggests a necessary sacrifice of the unhealthy, near mad, desire that Ruth represents, Kerr's healthy display of emotion at the end of the film dramatizes a balance between duty and desire, as does her renewed strength of character, which can be seen when the nuns leave Mopu. Defeated in their plans to serve the native inhabitants, the nuns descend the mountain. Kerr, maintaining her dignity while sitting astride a small donkey, looks up to the mountain to see the mist rise and cover their former school. Rather than simply turn away from the mountain, Kerr bows her head, looks to the ground and then to the path ahead. The medium close-up, which typically shows Kerr's

beauty and strength, reveals the wear of the hardships of this difficult assignment. This is, however, not the face of defeat.

Kerr's determination when she speaks to Mr. Dean a final time, further reveals that Sister Clodagh has not been defeated by her failure at Saint Faith: "I shall be sent to another convent with less responsibility. I shall be superseded as sister-in-charge." Clodagh's choice is not an obvious one and will, no doubt, be difficult for her. Other options suggest themselves at the film's finale. Dean's speech and manners in this final scene betray his romantic intentions toward Clodagh, aligning him with attractive alternatives in earlier romantic war and post-war films, like Alec Harvey in *Brief Encounter* or Richard in *Perfect Strangers*. Clodagh could easily depart the order, as the sisters are only required to make a year-long commitment. And while there is something attractive about the idea of these two characters coming together, Clodagh's choice to continue on with her work is as admirable as Laura's decision to stay with Fred or Cathy's to stay with Robert. Clodagh is "married" to the church. And, like Laura's and Cathy's, Clodagh's decision to remain faithful, while not an easy choice, is not suggested to be confining, stifling, or limiting. There is the suggestion of a better, more complete life. Through her experiences at Mopu, Clodagh will, perhaps, become a more effective sister and leader. Kerr embodies this idea by the way she offers her hand to Dean as a departing gesture. She has learned from her experience. The "ghosts" will remind her, which will make her a better leader, a better sister, and a better woman.

Kerr's manner here is one of dignity, bordering on the type of self-importance the Reverend Mother accused her of having at the beginning of the film. As she speaks to Dean, her posture is formal and rigid; she stares defiantly ahead. It is not until Dean calls

her a “stiff-necked, obstinate creature,” that a smile appears on Kerr’s almost regal face. With the smile comes her admission of her former pride and the suggestion that Clodagh will not run away from the order, as Ruth did, but will continue the work she started. The smile, which is accompanied by eye contact with Dean, indicates the new strength of Clodagh’s character through the contrast of this more confident, more human Kerr with the early close-up that displayed the weight of her painful time at Mopu.

The majority of the critical reflections on the role of women in wartime and post-war British film have compared and contrasted films of different studios, particularly the Gainsborough and Ealing Studios. This approach, which favours the more subversive Gainsborough films, has, as Christine Geraghty has argued, resulted in previously marginalized films, like the costume dramas of the Gainsborough Studios, being presented as more accurately indicative of British femininity. There has not been much consideration of the actresses who represent British women. By examining two recognizably British actresses whose screen identities are intimately tied to wartime and post-war representations of women, Celia Johnson and Deborah Kerr, I would like to refocus the critical perspectives on the role of domestic women in wartime and post-war British film. While Johnson and Kerr regularly portray a return to home it is too simplistic to dismiss their body of work as coercing or manipulating women, as some critics have argued, back into the home.

Though Aliprin and others argue for the superiority of the Gainsborough films’ representation of femininity and female desire, there is much connecting the choice at the end of *The Seventh Veil* (the most famous Gainsborough production) and the choices made by Johnson and Kerr in their respective movie roles for other studios. Though we may

suspect Nicholas will be disqualified as Francesca's choice because of his past cruelty, we desire her to choose him, as he is the only suitor with any life. At the end of the film, Nicholas is not "defanged." Only the potential of his defanging is suggested. To clearly assert that Nicholas has changed would undermine the weight of Francesca's choice. The choice only has weight if it might be the wrong choice. As a result of her psychological breakthrough, Francesca may enter into a more equal partnership with Nicholas. However brutal Nicholas may have been in the past, he does not desire to take care of Francesca as a doll or a pet, as do the other suitors. As he encouraged her artistic development in the past, he continues to want her to be strong and productive. Similar to the "new" Francesca, Johnson and Kerr, whose screen identities are of British domestic women, portray the strength needed to assume or resume that domestic identity.

With their subtle mannerisms, silence, and dutiful stoicism, both Johnson and Kerr show how confining and limiting the role of housewife can be, which further complicates the return to the home that many British women wanted at the end of World War II. As Laura in *Brief Encounter*, Johnson's archetypal domestic identity that had been established in *In Which We Serve* becomes a self-conscious act. Deborah Kerr is almost unrecognizable as frumpy, sickly Cathy at the beginning of *Perfect Strangers*. And while these films ultimately support these women's conventional return to the home, both Johnson and Kerr show that returning to the home, whether an actual home or figurative home, is not an easy or necessarily attractive choice. Both actors show how the experience of war has affected women's opportunities for change. The dramatic problem of "place" is hardly resolved in any definitive manner. The choice to return to the home is neither necessary nor a discernibly better choice than the other options. Despite the *suggestion* of Fred's

redemption at the end of *Brief Encounter*, there is no clear evidence that he has changed. Laura may have made the wrong choice in staying with Fred. After all, Alec still seems to be a more interesting and attentive partner for Laura. Likewise, Dean might be more suitable option for Clodagh than the celibate nun's life she chooses at the end of *Black Narcissus*. Nothing in the narrative definitely demonstrates that remaining in the order will be a better choice for Clodagh. However, both Johnson and Kerr demonstrate the capacity for improvement and the promise of a more successful and emotionally complex future.

Chapter Two:
Performing the Masculine:
Duty, Confinement, and Stiff Upper Lips
in the Performances of
Michael Redgrave and Alec Guinness

*[Michael Balcon's] favourite productions deal
exclusively with men at work, men engrossed in
a crisis, men who communicate with their women
mainly by postcard. A wry smile, a pat on the head,
and off into the unknown: such is Ealing's
approximation to sexual contact.*

~ Kenneth Tynan

*What makes every Englishman
A fighter through and through?
It's just a little thing they sing to one another:
Stiff upper lip! Stout fella! Carry on, old fluff!*

~Ira Gershwin, "Stiff Upper Lip"

In terms of identifying masculine identities in British film, little critical attention has been given to either Michael Redgrave or Alec Guinness. As with representations of female identities in British film of this period, a disproportionate amount of attention has been given to the lavish Gainsborough costume dramas, and, in particular, their most popular star, James Mason.¹⁶ Andrew Spicer notes in "Male Stars, Masculinity and the British Cinema, 1945-60" that Gainsborough's costume films permitted "license to

¹⁶ Mason's roles in *The Man in Grey* (1943) and *Fanny by Gaslight* (1944) established him as a sex symbol and set the tone for future roles that "converted the traditional villain of stage melodrama – dark, menacing, deep voiced – into a Byronic figure, often cruel and vindictive but also thrilling, fascinating and highly erotic" (Spicer, 2001, 94). Mason also starred in Britain's top-grossing films of 1945 and 1946 – *The Seventh Veil* and *The Wicked Lady*.

construct flamboyant, erotic male figures” like Mason and Stewart Granger (94), as opposed to reflecting contemporary British representations of masculinity. Almost without exception, British men in non-Gainsborough productions are desexualized and unromantic. This muted sexuality is part of the screen personae of Redgrave and Guinness,¹⁷ who often seem to be bachelor uncles.

In their introduction to *Manful Assertions*, Michael Roper and John Tosh outline the importance that late 19th- and early 20th-century British educators and social critics placed on clarifying and defining the virtues of masculine identity. From the Victorian period to the mid-1930s, “the proper definition of ‘manliness’ as a code of conduct for men was a matter of keen interest. . . . Emphasis was variously placed on moral courage, sexual purity, athleticism, and stoicism, by pundits who ranged from Thomas Arnold through Thomas Carlyle, Charles Kingsley and Thomas Hughes, to Robert Baden-Powell” (2). In “Knowing Your Place,” Kelly Boyd examines the changing concepts of manliness in the popular boys’ story papers published between World War I and World War II. These stories shifted the masculine virtues of courage, purity, athleticism, and stoicism from aristocratic to middle-class protagonists. Boyd characterizes this interwar period as a time when “manliness was an ideology almost invisible to the naked eye, and few men considered their own gender to be problematic” (145). Despite this general lack of interest in gender questions, the boys’ story papers reflect an interesting shift in class focus and in masculine identities, from the Victorian-era narratives dominated by “aristocratic boy heroes who held sway by virtue of their arrogance or superior class position, while selfish impulses dictated their actions,” to the stories of the first two decades of the 20th-century that

¹⁷ The bisexuality of both Michael Redgrave and Alec Guinness could, in part, account for this muted sexuality.

introduced middle-class protagonists and tensions between “individual endeavours and community requirements” (145). Boyd draws attention to the greater emphasis these interwar era stories place on the role of the individual operating within a social structure. The interwar years saw aristocratic characters disappear from these stories. They were replaced by “ordinary boys learning to fit into a society over which they had little control. ... Interwar heroes had to learn to be obedient, to compromise, and to submit to the greater knowledge of their elders and their community” (145).

It is in light of this shift to a more community-minded ideal of middle-class masculinity, characterized by Boyd as both compromise and submission, that I wish to explore the representations of British middle-class masculinity and maleness in a number of post-war films. In the immediate post-war period, there is a sustained portrayal of the complexities inherent in the British middle-class masculine identity. As in the preceding chapter, I have chosen to abandon the studio divisions typically associated with critical analyses of British film of this period, and, instead, focus on “star acting” theory to examine the work of two actors whose screen personae are intimately connected to ideals of British middle-class masculinities: Michael Redgrave and Alec Guinness.

In American films of the post-war period, the possibilities for transformation abound.¹⁸ The prosperity that America experienced after the war resulted in the rejection of wartime community-mindedness for more individualistic expressions. “It’s my turn” replaced “We’re all in this together.” This transformation leads to self-improvement,

¹⁸ In “‘Feminizing’ the Song-and-Dance Man,” Steve Cohan argues, for example, that musicals authorize the feminizing of masculine identities through “a highly self-conscious and theatrical performance that constructs his masculinity out of the show-business values of spectatorship and spectacle. In “Mama’s Boy: Filial hysteria in *White Heat*,” Lucy Fischer refers to the transformation of James Cagney, who played both tough criminals and “the more benign role[s] of [the] hoofer” (75).

making characters better and larger than they were before. Post-war British film does not offer such diverse possibilities for transformation. For British men, the avenues for masculine assertions are controlled by the institutional altruism needed to cope with post-war realities.

As Richard Dyer argues in *Stars*, the most significant reason for an audience to identify with stars is typicality (53). Writing specifically about British film and stars in *British National Cinema*, Sarah Street argues along similar lines:

For a film industry which was formed so much in the shadow of Hollywood, home-grown stars provide a fascinating insight into the industry's self-perception in particular periods and reflect cultural assumptions about Britishness. Of course, most of the top box-office stars were American, but Britain was not without its film stars, and because of the British cinema's inferiority about Hollywood competition, home-grown stars were often invested with a patriotic imperative as bearers of British national culture.

(119)

Michael Redgrave and Alec Guinness are, I believe, interesting choices for this study. Both actors were primarily theatre actors, both expressing their preference for the stage throughout their careers. Despite their often ambivalent attitudes towards film acting, Redgrave and Guinness became identified with middle-class British masculinity, embodying "important beliefs about power, authority, nationality and class" as well as reflecting the "changing construction of masculinity" (Spicer "Male Stars" 93).

Michael Redgrave's performance in Basil Dearden's *The Captive Heart* (1946) lays out the post-war demands on middle-class masculinity, by illustrating the need for the

personal quality of continued determination in the post-war period. When compared to the elasticity suggested by Redgrave's role in Alfred Hitchcock's *The Lady Vanishes*, his role in *The Captive Heart* suggests that masculine identity must be rigid and stoic to overcome the hardships Britain was facing. As a ventriloquist who loses his identity to his dummy in Cavalcanti's entry "The Ventriloquist's Dummy" in *Dead of Night* (1945), Redgrave demonstrates the internal pressure of maintaining that calm, rational demeanour. Redgrave shows the limits of living without such an external release in Anthony Asquith's *The Browning Version* (1951).

Alec Guinness's eight roles in Robert Hamer's *Kind Hearts and Coronets* (1949) establish his remarkable versatility as a character actor, but also emphasize the performative nature of masculine identity, an idea that continues throughout Guinness's career. Guinness can be anyone: Victorian Jew, Arabian sheik, Russian general, or Jedi master. Guinness's performing middle-class masculine virtues in Charles Crichton's *The Lavender Hill Mob* (1951) and Alexander MacKendrick's *The Ladykillers* (1955) extends Redgrave's difficulties with the middle-class masculine identity. As Walter Kerr says about Charlie Chaplin:

The moment he wishes to become a boxer, he becomes an extraordinarily deft one.

The moment he wishes to put on roller skates, he becomes Nijinski on wheels. The moment he wishes to become a rich man, he becomes a rich man ...

The secret of Chaplin, as a character is that he can be anyone.

That is his problem. The secret is a devastating one. For the man who can, with the flick of a finger or the blink of an eyelash, instantly transform himself into absolutely anyone is a man who must, in his heart, remain no one. (85)

By easily transforming from one character to another, Guinness suggests that there might be nothing behind the identity of middle-class masculinity, and that it is all just an act. These performances highlight the performative nature of Guinness, subtly reminding the audience of the elusiveness of Guinness and the characters for which he stands.

At the heart of the middle-class masculinity portrayed by Redgrave and Guinness is always the British stiff upper lip. As linguist Geoff Nunberg argues, “the images of British pluck and fortitude are particularly hard to resist. They have deep roots in the language itself. ... The phrase has been associated with a particularly British sort of phlegm since World War I and it became a cliché during the London blitz.” The stiff upper lip as a characteristic of British fortitude, according to Raymond Durgnat in *A Mirror for England*, “implies, at best, a dutiful stoicism, at worst, a docile acceptance of one’s role as a cog in a machine. At best, it honours selflessness and sacrifice; at worst, it glorifies facelessness” (130). Through the calculated action of assuming and maintaining the stiff upper lip, one creates the illusion of passive acceptance. Therefore, while it is the appearance of inaction, there is a physicality implicit in the stiff upper lip – restraining the lip at all cost – that requires the active internalizing of emotions and fears. As an action, as the exertion of energy to keep the stiff upper lip in place, there is also implied fatigue. Actions cannot be kept up indefinitely. The stiff upper lip represents the sort of rigid masculine identity put forward in *The Captive Heart*, a suppression of emotion in a time of crisis, but it also suggests performance. In post-war cinema, the stiff upper lip is rarely mocked or disparaged. Its evocation is usually a saving grace for even the most broken and humiliated of men, but there is an implied cost to the internalization of outward expressions, a cost of holding those emotions in for too long.

In *British Cinema in the Fifties*, Christine Geraghty suggests that British films of the 1950s create a space for the triumph for masculinity. During the 1950s, Geraghty argues, British male stars “such as Jack Hawkins, Kenneth More, Dirk Bogarde, and John Mills dominated British productions and, despite Hollywood’s counter-attractions, held their own in polls and fan surveys” (175). Geraghty focusses her examination of the representations of masculine identity on the war films of the mid- to late 1950s, “because it was a hugely popular genre that was aimed specifically at the male audience and because its narratives overtly take masculinity as a theme and specifically examine how challenges to male strength, endurance, and courage might be worked through and resolved” (175). Most war films foreground questions about British masculinity, but I am interested in films that pose these types of questions more subtly.

Andrew Spicer’s *Typical Men* is noteworthy for its thorough examination of various types of masculinities featured in British films of the war and post-war years. Looking at types of men, Spicer argues, “allows us to understand gender in Foucauldian terms, as a cultural ‘performance,’ which does not reflect ‘reality’ but is a discursive construction, the product of variable and historically specific set of relations within particular contexts, and with a complex relationship to social change” (2). Although Spicer analyzes some performances by specific actors, notably Kenneth More, John Mills, and Jack Hawkins, his primary focus is on male types. He does not theorize much about actors who embody different types, particularly someone like Alec Guinness, whose diverse performances in post-war film seems worthy of more than Spicer’s six mentions.

Michael Redgrave

Michael Redgrave came to the filmgoing public's attention with his portrayal of Gilbert Redman in Alfred Hitchcock's *The Lady Vanishes* (1938). The role closely identified him with the interwar ideals of British middle-class masculinity: courage, honesty, and self-sacrifice. Redgrave's natural good looks, articulate speech, and easygoing manner created an almost archetypal British character: wry, self-deprecating, and, most importantly, dutiful. Unlike Mason, whose Gainsborough roles permitted dark sexual overtones, Redgrave's persona lacks overt sexuality. Redgrave's first duty to Iris in the film is to help her solve her mystery, not to make love to her. Even as he develops feelings for Iris, the presence of sexuality is largely muted and cast in terms of marriage. Despite their initial hostility towards one another, Gilbert is there when Iris is in trouble. He stands by her and assists her, even when he does not believe her story, framing his resolve in terms of marriage (and the typically self-effacing suggestion of his own illegitimacy): "My father always taught me, never desert a lady in trouble. He even carried that as far as marrying Mother."

In "Rematerializing the Vanishing 'Lady,'" Patrice Petro argues, "Gilbert adopts the posture ... of the quintessential British investigator: he plays Holmes to Iris's Watson and appropriates the investigating gaze while she remains the less privileged, if still inquisitive, sidekick" (129). Gilbert's Britishness is further enforced when, investigating the baggage car with Iris, Redgrave mimics two classic British characters: Sherlock Holmes and a befuddled headmaster. Redgrave's ability to "adopt" various guises is quite telling of the type of elastic masculinity authorized by the film, which suggests the different kind of transformation available in American films. Redgrave can be almost anyone he is

required to be: musician, detective, even husband. He can be charming, wry, and, in his own words about Iris, “a bit of a stinker, too.” The different roles he assumes make him better. However, this elasticity that allows such transformations is rejected in Redgrave’s post-war performances, as he firmly adopts his stiff upper lip.

A less elastic male identity began with the reality of life in post-war Britain. In *Trauma and Recovery*, Judith Lewis Herman describes the experiences of returning soldiers:

Returning soldiers have always been exquisitely sensitive to the degree of support they encounter at home. Returning soldiers look for tangible evidence of public recognition. After every war, soldiers have expressed resentment at the general lack of public awareness, interest and attention; they fear their sacrifice will be quickly forgotten.

(70)

The condition of post-war Britain, however, has been described as “one of austerity and general gloom” (Morgan, *Short History* 63), not necessarily conducive to such expressions of interest. There was widespread destruction from the German bombings and a considerable economic strain as a result of the large post-war debt:

There were continuous shortages of raw materials and of basic food supplies, made worse by the lack of dollars which led to severe imbalance of trade with North America. There were moments of near-panic like the run of sterling, following convertibility of the exchanges, in July 1947; the decision to impose devaluation of the pound against the dollar in September 1949; and the balance of payment

difficulties during the Korean War in July-August 1951. Rationing of food, clothing, petrol, and many domestic commodities survived until 1954.

(Morgan 63-64)

Gerhaghty refers to the hardship faced by returning soldiers: “For many, there was a disillusion as they found that new skills [they had learned in the military] were not needed, that their old jobs were not available on their return or that, if they were, the work was tedious” (176). As a result of these conditions, the immediate post-war period required the British to continue making the types of sacrifices that were necessary during the war. As Boyd argues, middle-class masculinity submits to the community well-being. The masculinity put forward as a post-war ideal in Basil Dearden’s prisoner-of-war film, *The Captive Heart*, argues that the middle-class male virtues of duty and sacrifice associated with the war must continue in the post-war period to maintain some semblance of the British way of life.

In *Best of Britain: Cinema and Society from 1930 to Present*, Anthony Aldgate and Jeffrey Richards argue that *The Captive Heart* “deal[s] with the problems posed by post-war reintegration of returning prisoners of war” (150). In America, returning-soldier narratives, like William Wyler’s *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946), were popular and successful, but there are few British examples of such narratives. *The Captive Heart* was one of the late entries in a cycle of war-themed movies that petered out by the late 1940s. It was not until the mid-1950s that filmmakers returned to the war as a source of nationalistic narratives: “Few war films were made in the immediate aftermath of the war, and when they were - as with Ealing’s memorable exploration of undercover operations in Belgium, *Against the Wind* (1948) - failed to attract an audience” (Murphy “War”). *The Captive*

Heart, released only a year after the war ended, employs the wider class scope of the wartime war films. In *British Cinema in the Fifties*, Christine Geraghty cites *The Captive Heart* when contrasting the different focuses in prisoner-of-war films made during the war and those made in the later post-war, 1954 and on: “The prisoner of war films that emerged in the 1950s present a rather different emphasis. Here there is a break with the wartime conventions exemplified in the 1946 POW film *The Captive Heart*, which included the experience of working class characters in its narrative and focused on the prisoners’ emotional relationships with their wives and families at home” (Geraghty 183).

In *The Captive Heart*, Michael Redgrave plays Karel Hasek, a Czech soldier who assumes the identity of an English officer, Geoffrey Mitchell, when capture seems imminent. In order to be sent to a German prison camp rather than the German firing squads, Redgrave steals the papers of the dead Mitchell and passes himself off as British to the German authorities. *The Captive Heart* addresses post-war Britain’s need for middle-class males to continue to show the dutiful, stiff upper lip masculinity of films made during World War II. The film goes on to suggest the need to extend that masculine identity. As a Czech, Karel should not possess “Britishness” or an affinity for British values, but, as Michael Redgrave’s Britishness is well established, Karel comes to embody those values. The film suggests that Britishness is not something inborn, but claimed, believed, and lived out.¹⁹ Through his relationships with a group of actual British prisoners, Karel adopts and internalizes British mannerisms, determination, and sense of duty. As he is Michael Redgrave, this Britishness seems natural. Karel/Redgrave is both a means of commenting

¹⁹ Several of the British prisoners, for example, must learn to live up to the Britishness of Karel. Also, the real Geoffrey Mitchell was brutal to his wife and family and, it is suggested, is better off dead.

on the Britishness of the other prisoners and an example of how one can live these British virtues. Karel does not perform his Britishness superficially, as if he were simply playing a role; instead, Britishness functions as a type of religion to which he is converted.

Karel realizes that in order not to arouse suspicions, he must respond to the letters of Mitchell's widow. After winning over Mitchell's fellow countrymen with his genuine honesty and determination, he must now win over Mitchell's widow. Realizing his handwriting will betray him to Mrs. Mitchell, he decides to have his hand broken in order to explain his penmanship. While another prisoner hammers a large stake in the ground, Redgrave braces himself and stoically places his hand in the hammer's path. Redgrave's brave face, his stiff upper lip, undercuts the brutality of the act. The bandaged hand becomes, in the subsequent scenes, a symbol of his determination and sacrifice and a reminder of his fortitude. It becomes what James Naremore identifies as an accessory: "Part of the actor's job, therefore, is to keep objects under expressive control, letting them become signifiers of feeling" (87). The hammer's blow, while painful, is necessary in order to survive and endure. The tightly wound bandage that protects Redgrave's hand signifies the tight stiff upper lip that will protect the British way of life.

Dearden frames the bandaged hand in a medium close-up of Redgrave, as he writes a letter to Mrs. Mitchell. The pen held awkwardly in his left hand, he stares off to his right, deep in thought. This shot of Redgrave anchors the following shots of the British soldiers' smaller acts of determination. As the foregrounded hand represents Redgrave's determination to continue at any cost, the letter he writes, narrated in a voice-over, describes the determination of the other British prisoners to continue their way of life: "From where I sit I can hear the sound of a piano. It is my friend, Steven Harley." We cut

to Harley (Derek Bond) playing the piano, then to outside, where the prisoners have planted a large vegetable garden beside their barracks. Redgrave continues, “I wish you could hear this music. It describes our life here better than I could ever do with words. It tells of men emerging from the twilight, turning their faces inwards from the wire, creating in miniature a world of their own.” The garden represents a communal effort to create a British world “in miniature.” When Redgrave continues his voice-over, we are shown how these prisoners individually achieve this same goal. First, we cut to one soldier tailoring. “It tells of men who have come to terms with the present and found it far from empty.” Then, Evans (Meryn Johns) fixes a doll’s head onto its body. “Men who no longer lie down to fate ...” Another prisoner hangs a picture of the King on the wall of the barracks: “... but face it and ...” The British prisoners stage a boxing match: “... and find their own ways to beat it.” As Redgrave’s voice-over pauses, we are presented with various shots of the prisoners “beating fate,” making a normal life for themselves in the German prison camp: running a library, painting portraits, holding and betting on races, playing sports, and forming a choir.

Having Redgrave express awe at the way the other prisoners have shown resolve in beating the circumstances of their shared fate, the film addresses the concerns of the post-war British audience. By contrasting the reminder of Redgrave’s extreme determination (his bandaged hand) with images of smaller, more manageable, examples of the soldiers’ attempts to maintain some sort of normal life, the film suggests that however dire the circumstances seem, the resolution of British middle-class masculinity can sustain a version of the British way of life. While not everyone is required to make as extreme a

sacrifice as Redgrave, everyone must exhibit the determination of the prisoners, the determination to continue on in the face of adversity.

The prison camp of *The Captive Heart* is analogous to Britain itself. Regarding the psychological impact of imprisonment, Herman states: “Prisoners, even those who have successfully resisted, understand that under extreme duress anyone can be ‘broken’” (84). Though the country may be impoverished and the cities in disarray, though the empire may be collapsing and goods may be rationed, a stiff upper lip and the desire to maintain traditions can see the British through their “psychological degradation” (Herman 85). To avoid being broken under the weight of the circumstances, the community must steel its emotions and work together.

If Redgrave’s performance in *The Captive Heart* reveals the need to internalize emotions and maintain the expressions of duty and honour, then his performance as ventriloquist Maxwell Frere in the Ealing horror anthology *Dead of Night* examines the limits and cost of such internalizing.

In his detailed study of the Ealing Studios, Charles Barr says of *Dead of Night*, “This omnibus film of the supernatural is possibly, after the comedies, the Ealing film most frequently revived and remembered” (55). *Dead of Night* is unique in the body of films produced by Ealing Studios. Not only is it Ealing’s only work of horror, anticipating the Hammer Horror films by almost a decade, the film also brought together four of the studio’s top directors: Alberto Cavalcanti, Charles Crichton, Basil Dearden, and Robert Hamer. As each episode of the film was overseen by a different director, *Dead of Night* offers some interesting and varied representations of masculinity, in particular the return of

Redgrave's *The Lady Vanishes* co-stars, Basil Radford and Naunton Wayne²⁰ in Crichton's entry, "A Golfing Story," as perpetual schoolboys/men who value sports and fair play above anything else. Radford and Wayne represent "a familiar and respectable English type" (Yacowar 242). While comically self-interested, they hold fast, as Yacowar argues, to the "naïve confidence that all is well and orderly in the world. ... rooted in a conviction that there is a unifying order in the world" (243).

"The Golfing Story" episode is a lighthearted look at responsibility, as two dedicated golfers play a round for the affection of a young lady. The winner (Radford) gets the girl, while the loser (Wayne) steps aside, both figuratively and literally, walking into a pond and drowning himself. In heaven Wayne discovers that Radford committed the unpardonable sin of cheating and decides to haunt his friend, refusing to allow a decent young lady to be "bound to a cad." At the root of the story is Radford's and Wayne's sense of honour, responsibility, and fair play taken to a comical extreme. When Radford is accused of cheating, he quickly recants, "Yes, yes, it's true. Everything you said." He agrees to give up his fiancée and golf if Wayne agrees to stop haunting him. However, when Wayne is unable to remember the hand gestures that allow him to disappear, Radford changes his mind, vowing to go through with the marriage because Wayne could not hold up his end of the bargain: "a promise is a promise." With its connection to *The Lady Vanishes* and its exploration of Radford's and Wayne's simplistic schoolboy masculinity,

²⁰ The teaming of Radford and Wayne as Charters and Caldicott proved to be so popular that they reprised the roles in four subsequent films: Carol Reed's *Night Train to Munich* (1940), which was written by *The Lady Vanishes* screenwriters, Sidney Gilliat and Frank Launder; *Crook's Tour* (1941); *Next of Kin* (1942); and Gilliat and Launder's *Millions Like Us* (1943). Following a dispute with Gilliat and Launder, which prevented them from using names Charter and Caldicott, Radford and Wayne portrayed Charters and Caldicott-like characters in *A Girl in a Million* (1946); *Quartet* (1948); *Passport to Pimlico* (1949); *It's Not Cricket* (1949); *Helter Skelter* (1949); and *Stop Press Girl* (1949).

“The Golf Story” provides a comic context for an examination of British middle-class masculinity in “The Ventriloquist’s Dummy.”

“The Ventriloquist’s Dummy” is told through a series of complicated flashbacks and multiple narrators, and recounts Frere’s descent into madness as he becomes unable to separate his sense of identity from his dummy’s. Redgrave shows the cost of the internal pressure of maintaining the dutiful façade that he embodied in *The Captive Heart* and the need for an external release.

Spicer cites Maxwell Frere in *Dead of Night* as an example of the “Post-war Psychotic.” I quote at length:

In ‘The Ventriloquist’s Dummy’ episode, Maxwell Frere suffers from a schizophrenia which becomes increasingly uncontrollable. He is possessed by his dummy, Hugo, whose leering sexuality and jeering contempt express the dark emotions which the introverted Frere suppresses. They turn on his own insecurities and weaknesses, a constant neurotic jealousy that Hugo will leave him and go to some other man. This has been interpreted as a homosexual relationship; but it could also be understood more generally as the eruption of a range of forbidden desires, including the license to be sexually provocative to women, to bully and dominate, which Frere can articulate only through an interlocutor. In this case the outcome is tragic. Frere’s attempt to break free from Hugo/Hyde leads to imprisonment for the attempted murder of his rival and to his breakdown. He becomes a limp castrate able to speak only in Hugo’s strangled falsetto. Redgrave’s performance, aided by a visual style which makes frequent use of Expressionist lighting and intense close-ups, was extremely powerful. The actor

became ‘identified as a specialist in the nerve-wracked, split-minded casualties of civilization, men haunted and obsessed.’

(*Typical Men* 175-176)

Notions of duty and responsibility assume increased significance in “The Ventriloquist’s Dummy” with the casting of Michael Redgrave. Understanding the performance in terms of Redgrave’s larger body of work contextualizes the “neurotic jealousy” Spicer mentions. As heroic as Redgrave’s commitment to Iris in *The Lady Vanishes* is, his equally unwavering commitment to Hugo is frightening. Redgrave needs Hugo to relieve temporarily the pressure of maintaining the unwavering face of duty and obligation. He comes to identify himself so closely with the dummy that the idea of severing that relationship and losing that means of relief becomes too much to bear.

We are introduced to Redgrave in a police station after the crime has already occurred. Though van Straaten’s voice-over narration calls his sanity into question, Redgrave carries himself with an air of reserve and dignity. He enters and sits at the table across from van Straaten. The first visual indicators of his disturbed mental state come from Redgrave’s eyes, which occasionally open a little too wide, and from his hands, which he wrings as he talks. When van Straaten admits to having seen Frere perform once, Frere interrupts: “A doctor, eh? A brain specialist!” He stands up suddenly and continues, “You want to psychoanalyze me, don’t you? You want to look inside my head and see how the wheels go around.” These words – particularly “A brain specialist” – recall Redgrave’s lines in *The Lady Vanishes* when he meets Dr. Hartz. Redgrave immediately and naturally defers to Hartz’s superior authority in the diagnosis of Iris because he is a “brain specialist.” This seemingly obvious deference proves nearly disastrous when it is

discovered that Hartz is part of the conspiracy against Iris. This time Redgrave says the words with more suspicion and a repressed intensity. Under the gaze of psychoanalysis himself, the very sense of duty and responsibility that characterized Gilbert comes under scrutiny.

As the film shifts to the flashback of Sylvester Kee, we see the pre-breakdown Redgrave performing with his dummy at Chez Beulah's Nightclub in Paris. The dichotomy between the dominant personality of the dummy and the reserved dutifulness of Redgrave is established. Though they are dressed alike, they have different roles. Hugo is the one in the spotlight, the star of the show. Redgrave stands back at the edge of the spotlight, holding Hugo up. While Hugo's need for Redgrave is apparent, Redgrave's need for Hugo – the freedom from the confines of duty and civility – becomes clear.

The relationship between Redgrave and Hugo functions as a critique of the middle-class male trying to hold himself together under the pressure of keeping up the appearance of duty. As is typical in ventriloquist acts, Hugo functions a release for Redgrave, permitting him to do things outside the rigid limitations of middle-class masculine decorum. Hugo can speak loudly, often rudely, to people. Hugo can flirt with the female patrons, demonstrating a sexually aggressive behaviour more associated with James Mason than with Michael Redgrave. After flirting with one female patron, Hugo exclaims, "You know me. I might bite her." Hugo can also be physically aggressive. He baits, insults, and humiliates others, including Redgrave. When he identifies Kee as an American, Hugo goads him: "One of our American friends: strong, speechless type. Well, Mr. Dumbcluck, you as dumb as you look or do you cluck? Cluck, cluck, cluck." The audience's attraction to Hugo and his brashness depends on the reassuring, dutiful presence of Redgrave.

Redgrave's presence mediates Hugo's insults and venom with the gentle reassurance, "It's all part of the show." In the bar in London, when Redgrave is too drunk to fulfill his role in the partnership, Hugo's insults result in the situation breaking down into violence.

Redgrave's descent into madness follows Hugo's threat of removing the source of this release. Hugo dismisses Redgrave's contribution to the act: "I'm just about through with this cheap ham." The suggested partnership of Hugo and Kee, which Kee does not take seriously, threatens to make the dutiful Redgrave obsolete. Despite the dutifulness and respectability that make Redgrave "Redgrave," the tenuousness of his position is reinforced throughout the film as Hugo continues to propose a partnership with Kee. As the "Golfing Story" suggests that a golfer who cheats is no golfer at all, this episode raises questions about the nature of performance and partnership. What is a performer who does not perform? What is a ventriloquist who has no dummy?

The positioning of Redgrave in the frame during the initial interview between Hugo and Kee is noteworthy. As the ventriloquist, Redgrave is ostensibly the lesser member of the act. The dummy is the star of the show, despite the fact that the ventriloquist does all the work and makes the show happen. While Kee and the dummy are positioned in the foreground, Redgrave sits back, just behind Hugo. Kee talks primarily to Hugo, as is the convention of ventriloquism. In the background, Redgrave appears emotionally detached from the conversation until he responds to Hugo's intention to be through with him with a slap across the dummy's face. The violence of the act shocks the audience, but shocks, I think, Redgrave even more.

Hugo's quiet but threatening admonishment, "Temper, temper. You'll be sorry for that later," prompts a shift in Redgrave's demeanour. It suggests that Hugo is fully aware of

Redgrave's dependence. Redgrave's posture stiffens as he stifles his emotions, regains his composure, and remarks, "Yes. I suppose I will." Almost immediately, without further comment, Redgrave resumes the act and continues to fulfill his duty to the audience. It is the threat to his position that prompts his (subdued) emotional outburst and precedes Redgrave's subsequent uncharacteristic outbursts: being rude to Kee, accusing Kee of trying to steal Hugo, and finally shooting Kee. As destructive a force as Hugo can be, Redgrave's identity is intimately tied to him. The thought of losing Hugo and the release he offers becomes more than Redgrave can bear.²¹

While Frere is in prison for shooting Kee, Dr van Straaten has Hugo brought into the cell. When he first sees Hugo, Redgrave gasps. He jumps up and presses his body against the cell wall, as if trying to distance himself from the dummy. He then sits down, picks up the dummy, and says almost in a whisper, "I knew you wouldn't leave me, Hugo. I knew you'd come back." When Hugo responds, it is with his typical insults. Redgrave's face assumes its stoic detachment, as he tries to reason with the dummy. However, as the potential loss of Hugo has already exposed Redgrave's suppressed emotions, Redgrave is unable to "hold it together" and his emotions begin to surface again. His voice cracks as he pleads with Hugo. He tugs at the dummy's lapels and insists, "You don't mean that. You're joking."

HUGO: Like hell I wouldn't. I have my career to think of.

FRERE: You wouldn't run out on me now. You wouldn't do that to me.

HUGO: Wouldn't I?

²¹ The nationality of Kee is noteworthy. If we consider the dummy to be a symbolic representation of power, then the threat of losing that power to an American assumes an intriguing political significance. As I will argue in Chapter 3, British anxieties about Americans displacing them as world leaders are evident in British film noirs.

The cut to a close-up of Redgrave's face while Hugo is talking serves to heighten the intensity of his emotional state as his position and role are threatened. Redgrave's agitation and anger are expressed both in his eyes, as we have seen before, and in his lips. As Hugo continues to speak off-camera, Redgrave's lips begin to tremble. The significance of this is twofold: first, Redgrave's quivering lip signals the threat to his character's identity as a ventriloquist, as one thing a good ventriloquist never does is conspicuously move his lips. Second, it makes physical the idea of the stiff upper lip. Here, Redgrave's lip is visibly shaking as his identity comes undone. The film does not mock the stiff upper lip, but acknowledges that without some form of external release, the internalizing of emotions associated with the stiff upper lip cannot hold. When Redgrave's lip wavers and he is unable to contain his emotions any longer, he responds with the same violent aggression Hugo so often displayed. He grabs a pillow and begins to smother Hugo. Van Straaten calls for the guard to open the door, but by the time it is opened, Redgrave is standing over the dummy and stomping its head.

This physical breaking of the dummy is not, however, a restorative act. The destruction of the dummy does not free Redgrave from his obligations. Duty and responsibility go much deeper. When Kee is brought to Frere's room to "give him a hell of a jolt" and "get his brain working again," he hears, to his horror Hugo's voice coming out of Frere's mouth: "Hello, Sylvester. I've been waiting for you." The close-up of Redgrave used here heightens the impact of the ending. Redgrave's mouth moves as a dummy's would, not forming the words with his lips, but only moving his jaw. The image of the polite and mannered Redgrave as a conduit for Hugo's shrill voice creates a disturbing impression of a man unable to escape his duty or his own chaotic impulses and who

continues to perform his duty at the cost of his own individual identity. He continues to use Hugo as a means of indecorum even through the physical loss of the dummy. It is at this moment that we fully grasp the complexity of the relationship. Though it is clear that Hugo is a crippling and destructive force, Redgrave's need for the release that force allowed, and his inability to release that force without the dummy, is absolute.

As Redgrave explores the importance of an external release from the pressure of upholding the polite, charming face of duty in *Dead of Night*, his performance as Andrew Crocker-Harris in Anthony Asquith's *The Browning Version* shows a man whose life has always lacked such release.²² In *The Browning Version*, continued adherence to the middle-class masculine ideals of duty and obligation becomes rigid conformity to rules and timetables. Redgrave challenges and questions the ideals of British middle-class masculinity by portraying a man whose relationship to authority and commitment to duty are shown to have been hollow and meaningless. Despite realizing this at the end of his tenure, too late for the possibility of transformation, Redgrave's demonstration of the stiff upper lip ultimately redeems him, suggesting that self-awareness, even self-awareness that comes too late to allow for change, is worthwhile.

The Browning Version looks at the very male English public school system that Boyd discusses in her article on boys' stories. Boyd states that the British public school was a prominent setting for the boys' adventure stories, "since the publication of Thomas Hughes's *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (1857)" (150). During the interwar years, these [boys'

²² Much of the praise for *The Browning Version* has been directed at Michael Redgrave's wonderfully understated performance. Redgrave's son, Corin, cites the role as the best performance his father ever gave: "In the climactic scene my father is really crying. That's not a difficult thing as it may sound – it's not really difficult to cry on stage – but to cry again and again, and to be so clearly distraught, I mean really *physically* distraught as this long film scene required him to be, called for real artistry" (228-29).

story papers’] were “increasingly dominated by the educational system” (150). Boyd also contrasts interwar schoolmaster characters in the stories and their more menacing or more comic Victorian counterparts:

The dazzling schoolmaster was a common feature of these stories. ... Unlike Victorian school stories, where schoolmasters functioned only as the butt of schoolboy derision, or as bullies to be rebelled against ... [interwar schoolmasters] served as models for their pupils and by extension for readers. Even though they might be situated in outlandish plots, they functioned as exemplars within the stories. At once it is notable that there was no obsession with proving their manliness or masculinity on the part of any of these characters. For the most part they remained at ease with their place in the world, certain of their ideas and did not deign to discourse on manliness.

(153)

Based on the successful stage play by Terence Rattigan (who also adapted and expanded the screenplay), the film rejects the nostalgia for bygone days. With its focus on such a traditional upper-middle-class institution – the public school – one might almost expect the film to be an elegy for the lost values of upper-class English education, but what is found instead is a statement about the kinds of cruelty and pettiness found there.

As retiring Classics master, Andrew Crocker-Harris draws comparisons to Mr. Chipping, the beloved master from James Hilton’s 1934 novel and Sam Woods’s 1939 film *Goodbye, Mr. Chips*. Though Mrs. Crocker-Harris calls her husband “Mr. Chips,” it is with bitter indignation: Redgrave is no Mr. Chipping. The film introduces familiar tropes of nostalgia – the retiring schoolmaster, students going to the master’s house – to undermine

such tropes. The film ironically links Redgrave's Crocker-Harris to the image of Mr. Chips to show that he is not beloved, either by his students or by the school.

Beyond the overt allusion to Mr. Chips, the film is structured as a kind of ironic version of that earlier film. In *Goodbye Mr. Chips*, through the guidance and encouragement of his loving wife, Mr. Chipping becomes a beloved and effective teacher. He instructs future members of parliament, lawyers, and leaders. Chips is not only a respected and gifted instructor, but he becomes something of an institution unto himself, the vibrant heart of the school. Crocker-Harris, on the other hand, is more, as Bruce Eder suggests, a part of the infrastructure of the school. Redgrave manages to alienate and terrify his students instead of nurturing and "fathering" them. Alison Platt recalls Chips's claim that he had many children, "and all of them boys." Crocker-Harris cannot make this claim and "this recognition of his inability to 'father'... causes him such regret" (101).

Bruce Eder argues that the only legacy Crocker-Harris passes on to the school is the time schedule he has worked so hard on – the carefully crafted schedule of efficiency of a man whose time is up. However, if one looks closely at the film, there are other things that Andrew Crocker-Harris leaves the school: cruel-mindedness and his strict adherence to rules. As an instructor of boys, Crocker-Harris imparts a warped and dysfunctional masculine identity, one based on cruelty and a rigid, uncompromising understanding of rules and guidelines. The headmaster jokes, for example, that the students have been known to set their watches by Redgrave's comings and goings. He marks one student absent from chapel for being a few minutes late. And, despite the common practice among the faculty of informally giving the students their grades early, Redgrave does not. Redgrave employs the same notions of duty and obligation he embodied in the other

performances I have mentioned, but with a more rigid, militant understanding of rules. As Crocker-Harris, Redgrave's idea of fulfilling his role as a teacher becomes reduced to strict, emotionless man with an unwavering adherence to the rules.

As Redgrave's dutifulness is reduced to merely following rules, other middle-class masculine virtues become twisted. Redgrave is constantly emasculated throughout the film by both his wife and the school. In an interesting twist on the desexualized persona of middle-class masculinity, Mrs. Crocker-Harris symbolically castrates her husband, openly belittling and mocking him, all the while carrying on an almost public affair with one of his colleagues, Frank Hunter. The most striking example of Redgrave's emasculation by the school comes when Frobisher decides to usurp Crocker-Harris's rightful place in the order of speeches at the end-of-the-year ceremony and put Fletcher, a young teacher who is leaving to play cricket for England, in his place.

In *Englishness Identified*, Paul Langford examines the place of sports and the sports-mindedness of the British public school system. The emphasis on sports was something that other countries and cultures remarked upon with great surprise. The idea of British men playing games in public was the cause for amusement on the continent (165). Roper and Tosh identify athleticism as one aspect of the code of conduct for manliness. Frobisher's belief that the boys would have a stronger connection with Fletcher is particularly curious in a film undermining the education system. The cricketer's inability to connect with the boys further undermines the authority of Frobisher. Not only are the headmaster's assumptions about Fletcher wrong, so are his assumptions about Crocker-Harris. Redgrave portrays the determination of the stiff upper lip. Despite coming to the realization that he is a hated fool and that few respect him, Redgrave's insistence on his

rightful place as the final speaker signals the admirable resolve that ultimately redeems him. His speech is an apology and confession of his own shortcomings. While he has been a poor example to the boys, his reserve, honesty, and determination – his stiff upper lip – redeem him in the end.

Redgrave sits almost stone-faced through the assembly, his eyes fixed forward. His formerly menacing gaze now seems somewhat lost. The dramatic tension of his speech is created throughout Fletcher's speech, which includes a mild joke at Redgrave's expense: "So just let me say what I have to say in a single sentence and then let me relax and enjoy myself with you listening to Mr. Crocker-Harris's gilded and classical epigrams." The close-up of Redgrave's face shows only a slight faltering in stoicism. Only occasional twitches and glances betray his emotional state: His eyelids flutter slightly as the other man talks about him; a slight strain of Redgrave's face precedes the laughter of the boys, who expect little from the "Himmler of the lower Fifth."

When Redgrave gets up to speak, there is no more than a scattering of applause. Only Taplow shows any excitement. The other boys shift uncomfortably in their chairs and half-heartedly clap. Arms clasped at his chest, Redgrave begins with a stiff and halting voice. He refers to Plato's *Apology*, which causes several boys to cross their arms, anticipating boredom. Before he can expound on the word *brevitas*, Redgrave stops suddenly and, his eyes fluttering quite noticeably, looks to his left. His hand comes up to adjust his collar. When he continues, his voice is much higher, less assured: "It is, I think, of some small interest..." Redgrave pauses again. This pause is emphasized by close-ups of the sympathetic Taplow and Frank Hunter. Redgrave looks down, briefly, at his replacement and then, very subtly, shakes his head. The pretence of formality leaves

Redgrave's face as he tries again. His voice is halting, but this time the pauses are not awkward silences as he tries to remember the words of his highly literate speech. They are pauses where Redgrave struggles to find the right words to express the emotions that constantly threaten to take over.

This second start also begins with an apology, not Plato's *Apology*, a learned text to cite and allude to, but an honest, heartfelt apology, which I shall quote at length, indicating the various cuts.

You must excuse me. I had prepared a speech, but I find now that I have nothing to say. Or, rather, I have three very small words, but they are most deeply felt. They are these: *[quietly, almost ashamed]* I am sorry.

[CUT to a shot long shot of the audience]

I am sorry because I have failed to give you what you had the right to demand of me as your teacher:

[CUT back to Redgrave]

sympathy, encouragement, and *[pause, searching for the word]* humanity. I'm sorry because I have deserved the nickname of "Himmler."

[CUT to the new teacher replacing Redgrave, who looks down embarrassedly]

And because, by so doing, I have degraded the noblest calling that a man can follow: the care and molding of the young. I claim no excuses. When I came here, I – I knew what I had to do, and I have not done it. I have failed. And

[CUT to Frank Hunter, who looks both stunned and awed by this confession]

miserably failed. But I can only hope that you ...

[CUT back to Redgrave]

...and the countless others who have gone before will find it in your hearts to forgive me for ... having let you down. I shall not find it so easy to forgive myself. That is all. Goodbye.

When Redgrave sits down, the applause begins. The boys shout, "Good old Crock."

Redgrave's face continues to show the character's emotional fragility. He glances left and right, uncertain where to look. He breathes through his mouth, as if steadying his emotions.

In "Boys, ballet and begonias," Alison Platt suggests that the relationship between Taplow and Crocker-Harris is the means to the teacher's redemption. Arguing that Taplow's passing grade represents a type of quest narrative, Platt states that Taplow's desire for promotion "represents more than a simple graduation from one class to another (the sign that Crocker-Harris's private tutoring has paid off), but comes to signal a kind of fatherly bequest" (102). I think that Redgrave's redemption comes through his recognition of his failures, his admission of his those failures, and his proper use of the stiff upper lip. In recognizing his failure, Redgrave's only course of redemption is to adopt the stiff upper lip in its purest sense, not as a consistent way of life, but as a temporary response to an emotional crisis. Of course, the cathartic apology that signals Redgrave's new sense of self-awareness comes too late for the possibility for change. As his final address to the students, Redgrave has no opportunity for transformation. Perhaps the film suggests that this self-awareness and the strength to regret are enough for a final demonstration of true fortitude and determination: writing one's epitaph.

Alec Guinness

Alec Guinness might seem to be an odd choice for a star acting analysis. His eclectic body of work challenges the idea of a dominant screen persona. Guinness is one of the very few character actors who managed to command star recognition. However, he is often absent from critical writing on post-war British film. Harper and Porter acknowledge the popularity of Alec Guinness with the British filmgoers in the early years of the 1950s. Guinness was the only actor listed by both *Kinematograph Weekly* and *Motion Picture Herald* as one of Britain's most popular actors and a British star who "could compete with their American rivals" (250).²³ His first two film roles, as Herbert Pocket and Fagin in David Lean's adaptations of *Great Expectations* and *Oliver Twist*, respectively, demonstrated Guinness's ability to transform himself. Guinness made a name for himself through his wide variety of detailed characterizations, as opposed to the recognizable types of a Cary Grant or James Stewart: "Guinness was a master interpreter of comic scripts and could undertake a wide range of roles as proven by his finely delineated performances as a family of doomed aristocrats in *Kind Hearts and Coronets*. Subsequent comedies cast him as a timid bank robber (*The Lavender Hill Mob*); a naïve scientist (*The Man in the White Suit*); a detective-priest (*Father Brown* 1954); and a psychopath (*The Ladykillers*)" (Dacre 236).

In several key performances by Guinness between 1947 and 1955 a crisis in the representations of appropriate British male virtues takes a different turn than with Redgrave. Redgrave's challenges explored the difficulties and costs of maintaining dutiful stoicism. Through his chameleon-like abilities, Guinness explores the dangers of assuming

²³ In addition to Guinness, *Kinematograph Weekly* listed Trevor Howard, Stewart Granger, and Glynis Johns as the most popular British actors; *Motion Picture Herald* listed Guinness, John Mills, Anna Neagle, and Jean Simmons (Harper and Porter 250).

the stoic mask again and again: he demonstrates that there is nothing of any permanence behind it. Guinness's performance is not about elasticity. There is nothing in his characterizations to suggest improvement or betterment. By emphasizing the performative nature of middle-class masculinity in Guinness's roles, we are confronted with the idea that he may be a figment, with no enduring ties. Guinness appeals, on one hand, to the post-war society's desire for the fantasy answer of transformation, as seen in American films. However, with Guinness such transformation maybe deceit and deception. It does not suggest evolution or improvement, only nothingness. Because Guinness is forever absent, even to himself, there is no opportunity for self-reflection. Each character is new, different, and random, appearing with no knowable origin.

When considering the career of Alec Guinness, I was encouraged to consider Henry James's short story "The Private Life."²⁴ The narrator of the story and Blanche theorize about the private life of Lord Mellifont, who seems to disappear when alone and materialize in the presence of an audience. Blanche advances her idea about Mellifont: "There isn't so much as one, all told, of Lord Mellifont" (James, "The Private Life"). Without an audience, Lord Mellifont is truly non-existent, even to himself. When he is alone, he ceases to exist. We get much the same impression of Alec Guinness. When he leaves our presence, he ceases to exist, an idea suggested by Guinness's death scene in George Lucas's *Star Wars*. When Darth Vader's lightsaber strikes him, Guinness vaporizes and his robes fall to the floor, empty. This empty robe is the essence of Guinness's screen persona.

In an interview with Joseph Gelmis, director Lindsay Anderson described the films of the early 1950s as "completely middle-class bound," and "emotionally quite frozen,"

²⁴ I am indebted to my advisor, George Toles, for suggesting this story.

citing *Kind Hearts* by name (qtd. in Barr 119). Charles Barr interprets that film primarily through Louis's desire to assume his rightful place in the aristocracy, and argues that the d'Ascoynes family represents "a monstrous father-figure whose power is belatedly encountered as Louis emerges, mother-dominated, into manhood and who recurs with the same face time after time, Hydra-like, as if in his nightmare. ... They are not merely cruel fathers to this one individual, but caricatures of a whole patriarchal culture" (127). Barr does not, however, have much to say about the class distinction inherent in Guinness or about Guinness's shifting masculine identity, which the original theatrical trailer for the film highlighted: "And ... in an astonishing eight-role performance as the Blue-Blooded victims of some wholesale homicide." In "A Song and Dance at the Local: Thoughts on Ealing," Tim Pulleine argues: "Crucially ... this is a film that centres on that most English, but generally un-Ealing, preoccupation of class distinction" (82).

Guinness's portrayal of eight members of the d'Ascoyne family – Duke Etherel; the Banker; Reverend Lord Henry; General Lord Rufus; Admiral Horatio; Young Henry; Lady Agatha; Lord Ascoyne d'Ascoyne – reinforces his lack of permanence or consistency. He effortlessly transforms from an elderly parson to a young aristocratic, from a bluff Admiral to a female suffragette. We are struck with the knowledge, through this impressive body of work, that we are denied access to Guinness's true face, his true voice, and his true age. He can be anyone and, therefore, as Kerr says of Chaplin, he remains no one.

I am particularly interested in his portrayal of young Henry d'Ascoyne. Though a member of the d'Ascoyne family, Henry has created a middle-class life for himself and his wife, Edith (Valerie Hobson). He is neither arrogant nor superior about his position, as is Lord Ascoyne d'Ascoyne, Henry's closest relation in terms of age. Despite his family's

wealth, Henry lives relatively a simple life, contenting himself with photography and his wife's "views." As Henry, Guinness portrays a timidity and reliance on appearance that will serve him in *The Lavender Hill Mob*. We are unsure what to make of Henry and how many of his opinions are real and how many are an act.

Our introduction to the young Henry comes first through Louis's voice-over, which pronounces him "the next candidate for removal." Henry is described as "twenty-four years old, recently married, [and] as yet, without issue." The first appearance of Henry comes second-hand: from a photograph that Louis has in his d'Ascoyne scrapbook. The photo shows Alec Guinness preparing to take a photograph of his own. The role of Henry does not require Guinness to use the heavy make-up required by the characters in the d'Ascoyne family. In fact, he looks like Guinness's Herbert Pocket in *Great Expectations*. We might be tempted to assume that this is the "real" Guinness, but the photographer-as-subject picture suggests a sort of performance – the photographer posing for a picture by pretending to take a photograph. In Henry's middle-class sensibility, he tries to be all things to all people. Henry's dual nature is further suggested in his first meeting with Louis, when Louis sees him upside-down through his viewfinder. We see him upside-down as he exits the inn,²⁵ then right-side up.

Despite Louis's claim that his method of approaching Henry (via the camera) is "an instantaneous success," we discover that it is not really Henry's motivation for speaking to Louis. For all his intelligence, Louis fails to see through Guinness's performance. While he may be genuinely interested in Louis's Thorton-Pickard, the real reason for Henry's

²⁵ The importance of the pub in British society addresses, like Hugo in *Dead of Night*, an external release from the internal pressure of sustaining the stoicism of middle-class respectability. Pubs represent a space where people can be themselves and socialize. Guinness complicates that outlet for the "real self" by frequenting the village inn.

interest is to ask Louis not to develop the picture of him at the inn. After inviting Louis to see his potting shed-cum-developing room, Henry admits that his wife does not approve of the inn. Attempting to broach the delicate subject with a stranger, Henry appears the very picture of timidity. He averts his eyes, stutters over his words, and awkwardly removes his cloth cap. He offers a number of disclaimers and apologies before explaining the situation: “I’m sure you’re a good fellow. I shouldn’t like to ask.” When Louis agrees, an elated Henry suggests they drink on it. He reaches for the glasses and bottles (cleverly mislabelled as developing chemical to fool Edith), but suddenly stops. With an almost panicked expression on his face, Henry says, fearful of having assumed too much about Louis, “Unless you have views yourself, of course.”²⁶

Guinness’s performance of masculine virtues is especially noticeable in regard to his sometime adherence to Edith’s tee-totalling “views.” While appearing to be the enactment of duty, Henry’s adherence to his wife’s beliefs is actually ironic: something he keeps up only in her presence. Henry feels comfortable drinking in the local pub and confessing the fact to Louis, a complete stranger. Though he confides to Louis that he does not share his wife’s beliefs, Henry performs the role of abstainer in Edith’s presence. For Henry, appearance is everything. As long as he appears to be abstaining from alcohol for the sake of his wife, he feels comfortable going to the local inn, run by his former coachman, and hiding alcohol around the house. Henry’s duty to his wife is hollow, and, like Guinness’s identity, without substance. Henry’s sacrifice and obligation are merely temporary, minor inconveniences that can easily be gotten around. This lack of substance lays the groundwork for Henry’s death in *Kind Hearts and Coronets* and Guinness’s later

²⁶ This is not to suggest that Henry’s deception should be considered worse than Louis’s serial killing. Louis’s crimes are more obvious.

performances as Henry Holland in *The Lavender Hill Mob* and Professor Marcus in *The Ladykillers*, where middle-class masculinity, the masculinity of reserve, duty and respectability, is more overtly suggested as something to be performed.

In Charles Frend's *A Run for Your Money* (1949), released the same year as *Kind Hearts and Coronets*, Guinness plays Whimple, a gardening correspondent for a London newspaper. Although the film has been dismissed as "a considerable anticlimax," with "not much of a role for Guinness" (Barr 200), this film does suggest something of the performative nature of Guinness's portrayal. In dealing with the con-artist Jo, Guinness reveals the false politeness of the middle-class British man. Although he suspects Jo's falseness, Guinness's respectability prevents him from bluntly telling Jo to go away. His approach for getting rid of Jo is civil deception, asking if he can drop her off somewhere. Jo's act is equally deceptive, but at least she is aware of it. The laws of civility are far removed from Whimple's true feelings, yet he does not acknowledge the falseness of his own behaviour.

In *Typical Men*, Andrew Spicer places Charles Crichton's *The Lavender Hill Mob* within a larger group of films that focus on "the Lower-middle-class fool," or, in the words of Michael Balcon, "ordinary people with the stray eccentric among them – films about day-dreamers, mild-anarchists, little men who long to kick the boss in the teeth" (qtd. in Spicer 108). Henry Holland is "the archetypal suburban worm turning. His resentments about his dull job and lack of promotion shape an imaginative and daring scheme" (108). What Spicer fails to note is that the film presents two almost completely different Guinnesses: the South American Guinness of the framing narrative and the London Guinness. While it could be argued that the film expresses the fantasy of transformation,

when one considers Guinness's tendency to transform, something else is suggested.

Although the two are the same "person," the film clearly outlines their differences in mannerisms and attitudes, *suggesting* the performative nature of masculine identity.

Although both personae look like Alec Guinness, the South American Guinness is a popular extrovert, the centre of attention, whereas the London Guinness is shy and unassuming. Both are equally convincing Guinnesses. Neither one of them is more "real" than the other. And yet, we leave *The Lavender Hill Mob* with no real sense of who Alec Guinness is. He could just as easily be someone else.

We first encounter South American Guinness in a restaurant in South America at the beginning of the film. Light Latin jazz plays while a couple enjoys their meal on the patio. A waiter brings a message to the front desk on a silver platter, identifying with a nod the "Senor Ingles" for whom the message is intended. We cut to a smiling Alec Guinness, who turns and nods, indicating that he is the "Senor Ingles" in question. This Guinness first appears dressed in a fashionable, light-coloured suit and wearing dark-framed glasses. In the subsequent exchanges with the customers and staff, Guinness portrays a confident, popular, and generous man: he tips the waiter, donates money, gives Manuel a bonus for "riding a good race," and gives Chiquita (Audrey Hepburn) money to get herself a "little birthday present." There is no clear indication that Chiquita is using Guinness simply for his money: after he gives her some, Chiquita affectionately nuzzles Guinness's ear. This exchange with Chiquita is particularly noteworthy as it suggests that in South America, away from the monotonous humdrum of London, this Guinness possesses some sexual prowess, perhaps increased (or helped) by his wealth.

The London Guinness lives the life of a typical middle-class British man. He describes himself as “[m]erely a non-entity.” To emphasize this visually, Crichton fades into a London street teeming with traffic and people on their way to work. While lorries and buses travel in all directions, all the people, mostly men dressed in dark overcoats, walk in the same direction, suggesting uniformity and monotony, suggesting a lack of individuality. The Guinness of South America wears very different clothing from the Guinness of London, who wears almost a parody of a middle-class uniform: a bowler hat, round glasses, a dark suit and tie; he carries an umbrella under his arm. Costumes, James Naremore argues, “serve as indicators of gender and social status, but they also shape bodies and behaviour” (*Acting in the Cinema* 88). London Guinness’s costume denotes the confinement of the middle-class masculine identity he is expected to perform. He is as stereotypical as the “artefacts of British culture” that Pendlebury (Stanley Holloway) manufactures.

This costume hides Guinness when he and Pendlebury are on the run from the police. The ordinariness and respectability of their appearance cloak them in a crowd of other people wearing the same type of costume. They are able to evade capture by looking like everyone else. Even when they steal a police car, they are able to blend into the groups of bowler hats, umbrellas, and dark business suits. On the one hand, the ease with which Guinness blends into the crowd appeals to us, as it addresses our desire to transform and become something different. Guinness’s chameleon nature is attractive because it suggests defying the confines of expectation. On the other hand, because of the speed at which he changes, the frequency of his transformations, we soon come to understand that there is nothing to him at all. Also, given the commonness of the costume that London Guinness

wears, the lack of opportunities for transformation available in post-war Britain is strongly suggested.

Henry Holland's criminal tendencies, wrapped in their proper British middle-class appearance, anticipate Professor Marcus of Alexander Mackendrick's final film for Ealing, *The Ladykillers*. In comparing the shift from the early Ealing comedies, which are more or less aligned with the Labour government program for social reforms, to more cynical later comedies, Aldgate and Richards draw thematic links between *The Ladykillers* and *Kind Hearts and Coronets* in *Best in Britain*: "*Kind Hearts and Coronets*, in which a shop assistant wipes out all those who stand between him and a ducal title, becomes *The Ladykillers*, in which a group of criminals fail to wipe out a little old lady and polish each other off instead" (157).

Much of the critical material on *The Ladykillers* explores the failure of the criminals and the triumph of Mrs. Wilberforce as a commentary on contemporary British politics. In *Ealing Studios*, for example, Charles Barr argues that the criminals represent the post-war Labour government, and Mrs. Wilberforce, with her many associations to Victorian ideals, stands for the Conservative government:²⁷

Taking over "the House," they gratify the conservative incumbent by their civilized behaviour (that nice music), and decide to use at least the façade of respectability for their radical programme of redistributing wealth (humouring Mrs. W and using

²⁷ Aldgate and Richards also discuss director Mackendrick's disappointments with what he perceived as the limitations in both Ealing and in Britain itself: "It is hard, in the light of Mackendrick's career, to see *The Ladykillers* as anything other than an irreverent farewell to England – that England of the Conservative mid-1950s that has been characterized by Arthur Marwick as suffering from 'complacency, parochialism, lack of serious, structural change' – and to Ealing, the well-run 'Academy for Young Gentlemen' with its resident nanny [Michael Balcon]. It is a sardonic recognition of the impossibility of change in either institution" (159).

her as a front). Their success is undermined by two factors, interacting: their own internecine quarrels, and the startling, paralyzing charisma of the ‘natural’ governing class, which effortlessly takes over from them again in time to exploit their gains (like the Conservatives taking over power in 1951, just as the austerity years come to an end).

(171-72)

In *Best of Britain*, Aldgate and Richards also align the inflexibly moral Mrs Wilberforce with the values of Victorian England, describing her as “all lavender and old lace and faded gentility” (161). Leaving the well-argued political interpretation of the film, I wish to focus on Alec Guinness’s portrayal of Professor Marcus, and consider it as further highlighting Guinness’s performing ideals of British middle-class masculinity, such as duty and respectability. In *The Ladykillers*, Guinness adopts the guise of another “respectable” middle-class professional: the professor, “complete with straggly hair, buck teeth, black-rimmed eyes, long scarf and fluttering tiptoe movements” (Aldgate and Richards 160). However, Guinness further complicates the idea of performing middle-class masculine identities. Rather than playing a banker, as he does in *The Lavender Hill Mob*, Guinness plays a criminal performing the part of professor.

Marcus’s respectable mannerisms are presented as much more of a disguise than Henry’s or Holland’s, and the performative nature of his character is more clearly emphasized throughout *The Ladykillers*. His introduction is a particularly useful scene in which we observe the formlessness of Guinness and the way he performs this version of middle-class masculinity. As one of Mrs. Wilberforce’s parrots squawks, the camera shifts to the front door. The foreboding music anticipates the arrival of something sinister, and we

see from Mrs. Wilberforce's hallway the ominous, silhouetted form of a man in a hat, ascending the steps. When Mrs. Wilberforce answers the doorbell, Guinness delays revealing his appearance even longer by holding his hat over his face as he is removing it. It is as if he materializes as Professor Marcus from the formless black void.

He cunningly adopts, as Barr notes, "the façade of respectability" in order to gain entry into the home of Mrs. Wilberforce, who is as honest and forthright as Guinness is deceptive. His polite manners and charming conversation hide the true nature of his intentions, but Mrs. Wilberforce accepts Guinness and his story at face value. Like Holland's employers, Mrs. Wilberforce makes assumptions about Professor Marcus's honour solely on his appearance and credentials, believing he is a gentleman because he looks like a gentleman. He listens patiently to her stories about her late husband²⁸ and pets, all the while considering the suitability of the house and the lady to his plans. He ingratiate himself into her house by trying to straighten a picture on the wall. The attempt at order, which fails due to the damage the house suffered in the war, anticipates the Professor's own inability to maintain the order of his performance. Once the truth is known, he cannot straighten things out, no matter how he tries.

In *The Ladykillers*, Guinness not only performs middle-class masculinity, as he does in the previous films, he creates the plan and the back story for the gang. Guinness's acting and creating appear tied to the middle class, as he prefers to portray characters with respectable middle-class occupations. When Harry (Peter Sellers) enters Guinness's rented rooms for the first meeting, he wonders about the plan and calls Guinness "Doc." "Not Doc

²⁸ It is noteworthy that the portrait of the man whom Mrs. Wilberforce identifies as her husband is actually Guinness as the admiral in *Kind Hearts and Coronets*. The story she tells about him going down with his ship describes Admiral d'Ascoyne's death. In a film about Guinness portraying the role of a (supposedly) respectable, middle-class professor, such reminders of Guinness's multifaceted screen identity are indeed noteworthy.

this time, Harry: Professor.” Similarly, when he tells Mrs. Wilberforce about his associates, he describes them as fellow musicians, “a string quintet,” knowing that such a respectable woman would respond to the idea of having a string quintet playing in her home. He is so convincing in his story, so adept at playing this part, that Mrs. Wilberforce not only anticipates the ending, but interrupts to finish his sentence: “You want them to practice here?” Of course, the practice itself is a deception. When the men arrive, they carry empty instrument cases – again, reminders of their own hollowness. They are, after all, in large part the creation of Guinness’s imagination, and introduced with names that Guinness improvises on the spot. Finally, in order to continue to convince Mrs. Wilberforce that the ensemble is genuine, a record player creates the sounds of their practice. The sound of the recorded string instruments satisfies their landlady just as Guinness’s stories satisfy her.

Once the money is discovered, however, and Mrs. Wilberforce suspects that things are not as they appear, the limitations of the Professor’s performative powers begin to surface. His improvisation, which had been so easy and natural, falters. The Professor attempts to answer questions that Mrs. Wilberforce has not yet asked about the presence of the money in One-Round’s cello case: “You’re wondering about the music. You’re wondering how Mr. ...” Unable to immediately recall One-Round’s created name, Guinness giggles, “... Mr. Lawson was able to play – ha ha – without a cello.” Because he cannot think up an answer on the spot, Guinness laughs to try to cover up his lack of response. Here we see the limits of his transformative powers: once the façade of middle-class respectability is compromised, the Professor’s ability to perform suffers.

When the middle-class masculine identity has been compromised, we see the Professor shift awkwardly among different identities, never with much conviction. When

explaining about the money and insurance, Guinness plays a servant, enacting a domestic identity while trying to convince Mrs. Wilberforce not to contact the police. He follows Mrs. Wilberforce into the kitchen, dirty teapot in hand, and tries to explain, “Mrs. Wilberforce, I don’t think you understand the intricacies of this particular situation. Let me try to explain, Mrs. Wilberforce. You see, in this case, it would do no good to take the money back. As strange as it may seem to you, nobody wants the money back.” Then, he returns to the middle-class masculinity he first used to gain access to her house by referring to duty: “There is not one amongst us who is not burdened with responsibilities to others.” When this fails, the final identity he tries to assume is tough guy, as he tries to oversee Mrs. Wilberforce’s death. This too fails. The Professor is shot by one of his own gang while he is above the railroad tracks. His body falls into an open-topped car and he disappears back into the darkness. While it is not as dramatic a death as Guinness’s death in George Lucas’s *Star Wars* (1977), in which Guinness evaporates, it conveys a similar idea about the nothingness, the no-one-ness at the heart of Alec Guinness.

In the performances of Michael Redgrave, the ideals of British middle-class masculinity are both upheld and undermined. In *The Captive Heart*, Redgrave portrays a Czech who “converts” to the British middle-class values. The film suggests the adaptability of those values at a time when Britain faced considerable hardships in the aftermath of the war. In *Dead of Night*, the idea of responsibility becomes an all-consuming force, as the extremes of duty and the need for release are explored. And, finally, in *The Browning Version*, Redgrave portrays a man who has failed to live up to the expectations of his profession. The duty and responsibility of *The Captive Heart* have manifested in Redgrave’s Crocker-Harris as cruelty and a rigid adherence to rules. As this failure is

realized, Redgrave's redemption comes in the form of the stiff upper lip. Though he is too late to make an effective change, he admits his failures and shortcomings to his students and colleagues. He braves their scrutiny and judgement in order to apologize publicly.

Alec Guinness's roles a middle-class male lends itself to more challenges and questioning, suggesting that the sort of middle-class male extolled in *The Captive Heart* is, to borrow the title of Ronald Neame's 1956 film, *The Man Who Never Was*.²⁹ Guinness's work is generally more subversive than Redgrave's, suggesting that the middle-class masculine identity that Redgrave explores is best understood as a performance, a mask, with no real substance beneath it. In *Kind Hearts and Coronets*, Guinness's portrayal of young Henry d'Ascoyne establishes a pattern for questioning the appearance of this middle-class respectability. By pretending not to drink as a means of appeasing his wife, but, in actuality, not-so-secretly drinking, Guinness suggests that duty and responsibility are something for show. The middle-class male virtues of honesty, duty, and obligation are directly challenged and satirized, as are notions of community-mindedness in *The Lavender Hill Mob* and *The Ladykillers*, where the characters often mistake the appearance of respectability for genuine respectability.

²⁹ Neame's film details Operation "Mincemeat," a deception by the British Intelligence during World War II to supply the enemy with erroneous military plans about the location of a British invasion. A body was planted with secret papers and identification, and left near enemy lines. Knowing the enemy would look into the history of this body, the British Intelligence created a convincing identity.

Chapter Three:
Towards a Reading of British Film Noir:
Expatriates & Ancient Cities
in Carol Reed's *The Third Man* and
Jules Dassin's *Night and the City*

*The War dwarfed us and made us morally uncomfortable,
and we could see no reason why it should ever stop.*

~Elizabeth Bowen, "The Mulberry Tree"

*If the American vice is ferocity, the British is stalemate and
stagnation. Both creeds have their own kinds of complacency
(the American: "conflict never hurt anyone unless they really
deserved it," the British: "conflict doesn't really exist, you
know, and if it does we shouldn't make it worse by admitting it").*

~Raymond Durnat, *A Mirror For England*

In *Film Noir*, Mark Bould describes the lack of critical attention to the peripheral offshoots of film noir:

[O]utside of the main period of American film noir the terrain is still lacking any kind of consensus. There is still work to be done on film noir before noir, film noirs after film noir and film noirs in other national, linguistic and international contexts ... Questions of omissions and additions inevitably return to questions of definition, and any attempt at definition restructures the genre, drawing in or casting out particular titles. It is through such complex feedback processes that genres form and reform.

(3)

Certainly the greatest challenge in examining film noir is the lack of consensus about what actually constitutes film noir. As Bould states, "When we approach film noir, we are faced with neither an objectively existing object out there in the real world nor some ideal to

which particular films more or less conform” (2). Mark T. Conrad addresses the various approaches of defining film noir in “Nietzsche and the Meaning of Definition of Noir”:

Is [film noir] a genre (like a western or romantic comedy)? Is it a film style constituted by the deep shadows and odd scene compositions? Is it perhaps a cycle of films lasting through a certain period (typically identified as 1941-58)? Is noir a certain mood and tone, that of alienation and pessimism? Each of these answers, among others has been given as an explanation of just what film noir is. And, given that there is widespread disagreement about what film noir is, there is likewise disagreement about which films count as noir films.

(8)

In revealing the complexities of defining film noir, Conrad outlines the arguments of critics such as Foster Hirsch and James Damico, who argue that film noir is a genre, “because of the constituent tone and the story telling and visual conventions running through the films of the classical noir period” (10), and critics such as Raymond Borde, Etienne Chaumeton, and Andrew Spicer, who challenge these limited generic readings³⁰: “Any attempt at defining film noir solely through its ‘essential’ formal components proves to be reductive and unsatisfactory because film noir, as the French critics asserted from the beginning, also involves a *sensibility, a particular way of looking at the world*” (Spicer, qtd. in Conrad 11,

³⁰ Paul Duncan further complicates the argument of noir as genre by listing 1028 films he considers to be film noir, many of which belong to other genres. This list includes 5 German expressionist films, 26 American precursors, 8 French poetic realist films, and 7 American “noir westerns” - films like *Pursued* (1947), *Ramrod* (1947) and *High Noon* (1952) (qtd. in Bould 3-4). Andrew Spicer, while acknowledging that there “is as yet no definitive filmography of British film” (175), lists 18 “Antecedents/Experimental” British film noir and 79 “Classical British Noir (234-35).

emphasis added). I propose to consider film noir to be defined by a particular sensibility or mood, one of alienation, pessimism, and uncertainty.

One of the few consistencies in the widely divergent critical work on film noir, however, is the emphasis placed on the American roots of film noir – the novels of James M. Cain, Raymond Chandler, and Dashiell Hammett – and the American classic film noir – e.g. John Huston’s *The Maltese Falcon* (1941), Billy Wilder’s *Double Indemnity* (1944), Edward Dymtryk’s *Murder, My Sweet* (1944). Bould recounts the development of the term “film noir,” first used in France, “usually in the right-wing press to derogate left-wing culture” and later applied to these “pessimistic, misanthropic American films” by French film critics, such as Jean-Pierre Chartier (15). Though the term was applied to these films in France, by French critics, there is little doubt about the nationality of the films themselves. These are American films, with American protagonists making their way through modern American cities. But what about non-American film noir? Do British films traditionally defined as film noir, like Carol Reed’s *The Third Man* (1949), consider different problems from their American counterparts? Does a unique British film noir exist?

This chapter will speculate on characteristics unique to British film noir, first summarizing the influence of film noir on the look of post-war British cinema and then theorizing the existence of a unique British film noir. British film noir is less concerned with the detectives and femme fatales of American film noir, but more concerned with the alienation, pessimism and isolation of life in post-war Britain, as well as Britain’s own sense of displacement from being one of the world’s most influential and powerful nations. This “particular way of looking at the world” recontextualizes film noirs made in Britain to consider British anxiety about their own increasing isolation within the global community.

In working towards a definition of British film noir, I examine how two celebrated film noirs – Carol Reed’s *The Third Man* and Jules Dassin’s *Night and the City* (1950) – employ two conventional elements of classic American film noir: isolated male protagonists and the city. Reed and Dassin place the American male protagonists within European cities to represent this alienation and pessimism of post-war Britain. In British film noir, the alienation typically associated with film noir is a cultural alienation. The American protagonists cannot understand these British worlds. Their alienation is less personal than national. Finally, I briefly address the literary precedents of and influence on film noir, before suggesting that the adaptation of the wartime stories of Elizabeth Bowen could have been used to further the development of a more complete vision for a distinct British film noir style.

The Influence of Film Noir on British Cinema

While American film noirs were very popular in Britain, there remained a relatively small but important number of British film noirs. Carol Reed’s *The Third Man*³¹ was an international success:

English reviews could scarcely have been more adulatory, and for the third time running Reed won the British Film of the Year Award. In the United States, the movie traveled into movie theatres under a downpour of critical accolades. ‘This is a full-blooded, absorbing story ... which reflects credit on all concerned,’ said

Variety. ... At the *New York Times*, Crowther pronounced *The Third Man* an

³¹ *The Third Man* won the Palm d’Or at the Cannes Film Festival, tops the BFI Top 100 British Films list, and is regularly cited as one of, if not the best, British film ever made. Landry states: “[It] was incredibly successful. Its theme music was a hit record, and [Orson] Welles also did a spin-off of the film for BBC radio” (183).

‘extraordinarily fascinating picture,’ though with typical Crowtheresque obtuseness he cautioned his readers to expect merely a ‘first-rate contrivance in the way of melodrama.’ (Moss 179)

Crowther’s caution anticipates that of Raymond Durgnat, who in *A Mirror for England*, calls Reed’s film “over-celebrated,” “an admirable mood-piece, sensitively characterized, although a second viewing reveals the conventionality of the themes” (167). Despite such critical reservations, *The Third Man* was something of a triumph both for Reed and British cinema, though there were few attempts to capitalize on its success with the production of subsequent British film noirs.

Marcia Landry, in her *British Genres*, interprets film noir primarily as a generic description and includes a brief section on film noir in her chapter “Tragic Melodramas.” Landry identifies “a respectable number of films that feature a male protagonist victimized by a femme fatale in claustrophobic settings that highlight the instability and paranoid atmosphere of the environment,” which she calls film noir (266-67). She cites only two films with such plots: Compton Bennett’s *Daybreak* (1948) and Arthur Crabtree’s Gainsborough melodrama, *Dear Murderer* (1947). Landry also acknowledges what she calls the “noir style” of films like *On the Night of the Fire* (1939) and *The Third Man*. Landry examines Reed’s film separately from the other films she identifies as film noir, but she treats it as an example of a Cold War film in her chapter on British war films. Landry’s rather vague definition of what constitutes film noir results in confusion about what she believes constitutes British noir. The definition she does offer – a genre that revolves around a male protagonist brought into a world of violence through the figure of the femme fatale – is too limiting. Even in the classic period of American film noir, the femme fatale,

while a memorable figure, is not universal. The term itself demonstrates a reduction of the possibilities of nuanced psychology in female characters seeking power and authority.³²

Without a clear understanding of film noir, Landry briefly analyzes British films that mimic only a type of American film noir and does not consider the possibility of a unique British interpretation of film noir.

In contrast, Andrew Spicer devotes an entire chapter in his study, *Film Noir*, to British noir. Spicer is much more inclusive in his use of the term “film noir” than Landry. He divides the films he considers to be examples of British noir according to their year of production. Of interest to this study are films made between 1938 and 1945, which Spicer labels “The Experimental Period,” and films made between 1946 and 1951, which represent “High Noir.” To account for the discernible influence of the look of American film noir on British cinema, Spicer further divides “High Noir” into four separate categories: Gothic noir, psychological thrillers, topical crime thrillers and semi-documentaries. Of these sub-categories, only Gothic Noir seems questionable as a sub-category, because of its use of the historical past as setting. Although Spicer argues that films like David Lean’s *Great Expectations* (1946), *Oliver Twist* (1948), and *Madeline* (1949) and Robert Hamer’s *Kind Hearts and Coronets* reveal a noirish sensibility with “rebellious, morally ambivalent and obsessive young protagonists, with their dark secrets and double lives” (183), he fails to explain sufficiently why, with the historical distancing used in these films, he considers them to be examples of film noir – “noirish sensibility” does not seem a sufficient enough reason. Most critics, however, stress that film noir is an

³² Andrew Klevan, for example, argues that Fritz Lang’s *The Woman in the Window* (1944) does not have a femme fatale character at all, but rather “evokes and exploits elements of a genre – film noir incorporating a femme fatale – while avoiding too slavish an attachment to attitudes normally associated with it” (16).

exclusively contemporary style that represents the problems and alienation associated with the modern world, such as the loss of individual identity in an increasingly homogenized culture. While I believe that these films are intimately concerned with contemporary issues (as I will show in post-war Dickens adaptations, the subject of the following chapter), the displacement of those contemporary concerns into the historical past is, at best, problematic. And though I think Spicer is overly inclusive in categorizing British films as film noir that merely show the influence of noir style, there can be little argument about the influence of the film noir style on post-war British cinema.

Perhaps the most recognizable feature of the American classic film noir style is the look: the under-lit scenes; the unique natural lighting of lamps and headlights that contrasts light with the dark shadows, creating rich patterns on the urban streets. Tracing the roots of film noir to gangster pictures and German expressionism as well as to the limited resources and economic realities in wartime Hollywood, Sheri Chinen Biesen challenges claims that World War II impeded the development of film noir in America.³³ Film noir's distinctive look, Biesen argues, is the result of artistic influences – the films of G.W. Pabst, Robert Wiene, and Fritz Lang and the influx of émigré directors - and of the limited resources available to filmmakers during the war:

At the most practical level World War II accelerated film noir's development because essential materials such as lights, electricity, and film stock had been rationed, and other materials needed for sets and props were often in short supply.

Citywide blackouts, enclosed or tarped sound stages, limits on location shooting,

³³ In "Notes on Film Noir," for example, Paul Schrader argues that "were it not for the war, film noir would have been at full steam by the early forties. The need to produce allied propaganda abroad and promote patriotism at home blunted the fledgling moves towards a dark cinema" (qtd. in Biesen 3).

censorship of film content, and a severe labor shortage, as employable men departed for military duty, constrained production in unprecedented ways.

(6)

These constraints suggest that film noir's visual style (though not necessarily its thematic elements) is partially an artistic response to practical limitations. It is not surprising, then, that various films made in Britain, under the weight of similar, or even greater, constraints on film production, adopted film noir's visual style as a necessity.

Jeffrey Richards draws a connection between the look of the British Gothic films and Hollywood film noir in his analysis of post-war adaptations of Charles Dickens's narratives. He does not, as Spicer does, argue that these films *are* noir, only that they bear evidence of noir's influence: "Hollywood film noir had created a vogue for stories with a visual style of shadows, darkness chiaroscuro and spiritual bleakness" (340-41). The directors of these adaptations –David Lean, Alberto Cavalcanti, and Brian Desmond Hurst – all employ stark lighting common in film noir to create a shadowy "Victorian society that is dark, menacing and predatory" (Spicer, *Film Noir* 183) that is quite different from earlier Dickens adaptations. Lean's *Oliver Twist*, in particular, makes effective use of the look of film noir to show the darkness and loneliness of Oliver's world: in the workhouse, wide-angle shots suggest the cold, impersonal nature of the place; in the city, shots are framed to look up at Oliver and show imposing buildings and people looming over him, suggesting his smallness and fragility; in Fagin's room, the minimal lighting and dark shadows reveal the corruption and immorality of the place.

In addition to the visual influence of film noir, some British cinema displays a "noirish sensibility." Mark Bould cites, as examples, the Graham Greene adaptations,

Brighton Rock (1947) and *The Fallen Idol* (1948), as well as the dark Ealing comedies, *Kind Hearts and Coronets* and *The Ladykillers*. With their morally ambiguous characters, with their anti-heroes and focus on crime and criminality, Bould argues, these particular Ealing comedies, display this noirish sensibility, “although it is worked out in a thoroughly British manner derived from a tradition of grotesque and gothic comedy about social class” (93). While I would suggest that both *Brighton Rock* and *The Fallen Idol* could be accurately categorized as examples of British film noir as I understand it, the Ealing comedies, with their deep suspicion of authority and the patriarchal structure, merely reveal a noir influence. This influence, however dark and sinister, is ultimately tempered with comedy, an “un-noirish” characteristic. They resolve with the punishment of immorality and the restoration of order. *Kind Hearts and Coronets*, for example, ends with the impending exposure of Louis’s crimes. *The Ladykillers* concludes with the criminals duly punished and the spoils of their crime in the hands of a triumphant Mrs. Wilberforce.

Expatriates and Englishmen

The main protagonists in both *The Third Man* and *Night and the City* are outsiders, not like the detectives who operate on the peripheries of the law and lawlessness in classic American film noir, but cultural outsiders. Harry Lime, Holly Martins, and Harry Fabian are all American characters in decidedly British environments. Their isolation is characterized by their inability to find a place within the larger social structure found in the post-war worlds they inhabit. Nicholas Christopher wrongly asserts that *The Third Man* is significant as a film noir only because of the involvement of American actors Orson Welles and Joseph Cotten (69), whose influence, Christopher argues, eclipses the input of both the

English director and the English screenwriter. However, it is the culturally isolated characters that Welles and Cotten play, not the nationality of the actors, which sets *The Third Man* apart from the body of American film noirs. Similarly, while the reputation of Richard Widmark lends noir credibility to Jules Dassin's *Night and the City*,³⁴ it is the decision to cast an American in a British narrative (that is directed by American) and that American's portrayal of Harry Fabian that distinguish that film as different from the classical American noirs. Americans are alienated by virtue of their place outside the culture of Britain. The alienation and marginalization of these protagonists is intensified as they are shown trying to function within the closed and, to their minds, peculiarly foreign world that British audiences would have found familiar.

Angus Calder and others have noted that much of the British wartime propaganda emphasized the importance of British citizens working and pulling together in the face of unprecedented adversity. The British social structure, with its rigid and prescribed relationships, relaxed in order to facilitate this unity. Even royalty were not exempt from pitching in to help. During the war, then then Princess Elizabeth registered to help on the home front, hoping to serve as a nurse in Blitz-damaged London, but eventually joining the Auxiliary Territorial Service, where she learned to drive and to repair heavy machinery.

Calder describes the so-called "American occupation" of Britain following the United States's entry into the war, which saw London overrun with American GIs. While British propaganda stressed the importance of togetherness, solidarity, and common British values, the streets were populated with foreign soldiers, particularly American soldiers.

³⁴ This is not to undermine the credentials of director Jules Dassin. Dassin had previously directed three important noir films: *Brute Force* (1947), *The Naked City* (1948), and *Thieves' Highway* (1949).

“The GIs formed the vast majority of the 1,421,000 allied, Dominion and Colonial troops who were somehow accommodated in the United Kingdom by the late spring 1944” (308). The British greeted the GIs with mixed reactions:³⁵ while the American entry into the war provided much-needed support to the Allied forces, many British found them to be unruly and their presence disruptive. Calder notes, “Wherever they went, they brought closer the dreaded prospect, not infrequently realized, of alcohol famine. They packed the pubs, appalling the locals by a strange custom of pouring whiskey in their beer” (308). Seemingly oblivious to their surroundings, the Americans, who were paid more than their British counterparts, also brought with them many items that the British, who had been living under rationing for some time, could no longer purchase: chocolate, razors, nylons, cigarettes, and contraceptives.³⁶ These items, impossible for British citizens to obtain legally, sometimes proved too tempting for the British. In *The Enemy Within: Hucksters, Racketeers, Deserters & Civilians During the Second World War*, Donald Thomas describes how British citizens would steal rationed items from American troops: “Most British thefts from the US Army were small scale but persistent” (235).³⁷

³⁵ Powell and Pressburger’s wartime films are generally considered to be supportive of Anglo-American cooperation, particularly *A Canterbury Tale*, which depicts an American GI (played by amateur actor and actual GI, John Sweet) participating in the modern-day pilgrimage, and *A Matter of Life and Death* (1946). Sweet was credited as Sgt. John Sweet, US Army.

³⁶ Calder describes the recollections of one former G.I. whose sergeant informed his troop, “‘we’ve got thirty thousand rubbers in the supply room. I want you people to do something about this.’ A litter of used contraceptives in shop doorways was a common testimony to the American presence” (309). Many British referred to the GIs as “overpaid, overfed, oversexed and over here!”

³⁷ Thomas lists some of the items stolen from the US Army: boots, sheets, tins of pears, and tins of meat (235-36). Thomas also notes that the British authorities, mindful of not appearing lenient to their American allies, issued harsh punishments for such thefts.

More seriously, the GI's brought with them racial tensions, particularly racially discriminating policies with which, according to Calder, the British were not familiar. The United States Army maintained a policy of segregation, encouraging white troops to use one public house and Afro-American troops to use another. However, these attempts to segregate did not always work. Incidents of violence between the two groups of American soldiers were reported: "There was at least one violent flareup between white and coloured troops, and reports of lesser incidents found their way into the British newspapers" (Calder 309).

As the British, who understood the importance and necessity of working together, felt the disruptive influence of these American soldiers, it is interesting that these films portray American characters operating outside the safe and secure social order. The effect of this is twofold: firstly, it allows for the anxiety of individual alienation to be dealt with in a uniquely British manner: in a second-hand, displaced fashion. As Christine Geraghty argues, British film often "deals with social issues indirectly" (134). For British audiences, Harry Lime's racketeering and Fabian's schemes would have held considerable interest. A strong black market had sprung up in Britain during the war to get around strict government rationing. This black market had an impact, in one way or another, on most of the population. Thomas writes in his introduction to *The Enemy Within*, "By determined exploitation of shortages, the frontiers of crime would be extended throughout a thriving civilian black market. Men and women who might have never broken a law in peacetime would find themselves linked, distantly but inevitably, to the thief and the racketeer" (xi). Lime, Martins, and Fabian are characters who do not fit in, and who work outside of social norms, authorities, and governing bodies, often in morally questionable ways. By making

these characters Americans, the filmmakers displace this alienation from society onto characters already excluded from the organized British social structures in which they operate. Displacing the criminal activities onto Americans Lime and Fabian allows the filmmakers to address socially relevant fears, such as the black market, in a safe, distanced manner.

Secondly, and perhaps more interesting, these two films in particular project isolationist anxieties onto the American leads: Harry Lime and Holly Martins in *The Third Man* and Harry Fabian in *Night and the City*. This suggests a deeper and more disturbing cultural isolation – Britain against the world – mirroring Britain's loss of empire and place of importance in terms of world politics. British society is depicted as closed and exclusionary. By drawing national distinctions between the characters and emphasizing the non-Britishness of the lead characters, the filmmakers acknowledge, however subtly, Britain's own displacement as a major player in world affairs. As many of the important identifiers of what it meant to be British were eroding away – the Empire, prestige, security – these films depict British society as closed off and under attack from crafty, childish Americans who, having no regard for conventions or order, disrupt the social stability in their attempt to enact the most American of dreams: upward mobility.

Holly Martins is represented as a helpless cultural outsider since his arrival in Vienna. He tells the officer at the train station that he has come to Vienna because his old friend, Harry Lime, has given him a job. Martins's need to be looked after characterizes his entire trip to Vienna as he proves unable to take care of himself. He could not afford his ticket to Vienna so Lime purchased it for him. He is forced to stay with Lime and needs Calloway to arrange accommodations when he discovers his friend has died. He cannot

speak the language. He is unable to pay for anything himself, not even his much-needed drinks, and must rely on others to buy him things.

Director Carol Reed also included dependent cultural outsiders in his previous films, *Odd Man Out* (1947) and *The Fallen Idol* (1948). In *Odd Man Out*, Reed's subject is the Irish resistance movement. As Irish national leader Johnny McQueen (James Mason) tries to make his way to safety after being shot in a botched bank robbery, Reed explores the contradictory political tensions that exist in Belfast: characters we expect to be sympathetic to the plight of the nationalists betray them; others, whom we expect to turn the nationalists in, do not. Johnny is clearly out of his element. Having only recently been released from prison, McQueen's ideas about how best to proceed in the Irish fight for independence do not really coincide with anyone else's, not even his colleagues who abandon him after he has been shot. As the "Odd Man Out," McQueen is as out of his element, both in his ability to comprehend his surroundings and his naïve assessment of his supposed friends, as Martins is in *The Third Man*. Nursing a gunshot wound and hiding from the police, Johnny is largely helpless and, like Martins, must rely on the care of others.

In *The Fallen Idol*, Phillipe, the young son of a French diplomat, is similarly out of his element. Here Reed, as he does in *The Third Man*, presents a non-British central character in a decidedly British environment. Phillipe's innocence is on-par with that of Martins. He discovers the affair between his butler and friend Baines (Ralph Richardson) and Julie (Michele Morgan), but is unable to understand what he has discovered. The adults talk in coded language – adding another layer to the child's alienation – to conceal their relationship from him. After Mrs. Baines falls to her death, following an argument with her

husband, Phillipe imagines that Baines has killed her. In an attempt to remove suspicion from his friend, Phillipe tries to fool the police with an invented story, which has the opposite effect: the police begin to suspect Baines. Although Baines is eventually cleared of the murder, the circumstances echo Martins's attempts to clear Lime's name only to bring him under the gaze of the police.

Critics have been unduly harsh in their assessment of Holly Martins. John Anderson asks: "Is there an uglier American than Holly Martins? The ostensible hero of Carol Reed, Graham Greene, and Orson Welles' classic tale of post war corruption and strangers in a strange land, he might once have seemed the innocent abroad—instead of the ill-informed, blundering yahoo, big-footing it around a ruined Vienna, getting ensnared in a world he can't possibly understand and trying to bend that world to his will." Martins is criticized for his foolishness and his bravado, as critics and scholars, aware of the film's plot twists and revelations, attempt to highlight their own intelligence by suggesting that only a great fool would make Martins's mistaken allegiances and mistaken conclusions. The mistakes that Holly makes are not so unusual – who, after all, could have foreseen Harry being alive? As unduly harsh as they have been about Holly, critics and audiences alike have been unusually kind in their assessment of Lime.

The traditional approach to *The Third Man* aligns the audience's sympathies with the sympathies of Anna. Harry Lime, a figure who stoops so low as to steal medicine from children and replace it with a harmful substitute, is seemingly forgiven solely because of his charm. Lying, stealing, even endangering the lives of children are nothing compared to that charm. The character was so appealing that Orson Welles reprised his role as the enigmatic racketeer in a series of radio prequels that chronicled the early adventures of

Harry Lime. There was even a television spin-off in which Lime (played by Michael Rennie) deals in art and *solves* crimes, rather than committing them.

As redeemable as Harry Lime is, Holly Martins, on the other hand, holds no apparent appeal. No matter how hard he tries to do the right thing or how honest his intentions are, Martins is characterized at best as a bungler, at worse as a Judas who betrays his closest friend to the authorities.³⁸ He is left standing alone as both Anna and the camera pass him by after Harry's second funeral. There is, apparently, no crime Lime can commit as unforgivable as Martins's "crime" of naïve blundering. But is Martins's resolute belief that his old friend, Harry Lime, has been wrongly identified as a racketeer cause for such a complete dismissal? Is his attempt to look after Anna's welfare so despicable?

I suspect that some critics are predisposed to their negative assessment of Martins because they read his character through Graham Greene's harsh treatment of Americans in other works, particularly Alden Pyle in *The Quiet American*. Pyle's apparent innocence masks a cunning agenda, and Greene uses Pyle to comment on, and as an indictment against, America's involvement in Vietnam: Pyle "venerates York Harding, author of *The Advance of Red China*, an American diplomatic correspondent and cold warrior whose ideas about Southeast Asia will inspire Pyle's own intervention, in the name of a Third Force in Vietnam, with its tragic results. (Pyle supplies explosives to a Vietnamese warlord, which are subsequently used for a terrorist bombing in which civilians are massacred)" (Kerr 97). Reed's film clearly identifies Martins as an American in the prologue: "an American, Holly Martins." Like Pyle, he is an American abroad. But where

³⁸ Andrew Sarris, for example, argues that Martins "first betrays" Harry Lime "and then executes him" (qtd. in Moss 183). This harsh assessment seemingly ignores the fact that the death of Lime, who is guilty of betraying Anna, arranging the death of the porter, and murdering children, is justified. Nicholas Christopher actually labels Martins "Judas" for turning against Lime and siding with the police (72).

Pyle's innocence and cultural naïveté mask his covert involvement in the Vietnam conflict, Martins's innocence does not mask anything. He had no hidden agenda in Vienna. It is also important to note that Greene had originally conceived Rollo Martins as a British citizen, and, in both his published screenplay³⁹ and the novelization based on the screenplay, describes Martins as Canadian, suggesting that Greene's intention for Martins was not to comment on growing American involvement in international politics. As Greene, who did not shy away from criticizing Americans, does not make Martins an American, it seems to me to be a warning against putting too much stock in examining Martins with the same critical gaze normally applied to Alden Pyle.

Abrams argues that *The Third Man* is a kind of detective story with Martins as the detective. Martins attempts to play the part of what is a traditional noir protagonist, but soon finds himself out of his element and depth. Martins sets himself in opposition to the official police in order to restore his friend Harry's posthumous reputation. By setting himself against the system as he does, Martins tries to enact the American ideal of the individual sleuth or lawman. For Americans, systems are to be challenged in order for the individual to "make something" of him/herself. This aligns Martins with Lime, whose own challenge to the system, however monstrous, has made him a successful and powerful figure in Vienna.

Believing the police to be wrong and corrupt, Martins insists he will reveal Major Calloway's corruption and error by proving Lime's innocence. However inept he is in this role, Moss argues, Martins "is assaulted by ever more shocking revelations – that Lime may have been murdered, that Lime is actually alive, that Lime is a racketeer whose

³⁹ In fact, Greene's screenplay introduces Holly (called Rollo in the script) Martins by highlighting his nationality, with an insert of his Canadian passport.

watered down penicillin has crippled innumerable children” (180). One must remember, though, that Holly Martins writes pulp Westerns, not noir narratives. The title of one his novels in particular – *The Lone Rider of Santa Fe* – suggests the lone protagonist against a corrupt system, a figure commonly found in film noir. It is this title that Martins evokes to describe his intentions to Sergeant Paine: “Ever read a story of mine called “The Lone Rider of Santa Fe”? Story about a rider who hunted down a sheriff who was victimizing his best friend. ... I’m gunning just the same way for your Major Callaghan.” Unlike film noir with its morally ambiguous characters, heroes and villains are easily distinguishable in Martins’s world of cowboys. Moss dismisses Martins’ “adherence to obsolete Sunday school pieties” (181). This adherence is more explicit in Greene’s screenplay, which describes Martins as believing in a code of behaviour of which he has no first-hand knowledge: “an unsuccessful writer of Westerns, who has never seen a cowboy” (7). Though some scholars have traced a progression from Westerns to film noir, this very different moral dimension is important. Perhaps this confusion is the result of the film itself. Martins himself seems to blur the lines between noir and Western when he challenges Major Calloway: “You some sort of policeman? ... I don’t like policemen. I have to call them sheriffs.” Playing both the detective trying to uncover the evidence to clear Lime’s name and the lone rider trying to thwart what he believes to be a corrupt sheriff, Martins searches for the “truth” throughout the film.

However, by trying to be the noir detective, Martins is confounded by his Sunday school pieties and his inability to understand the corruption around him. In the morally ambiguous world of post-war Vienna, with its crime and corruption, Martins’s “truth” seems childish and naïve. While he can “read” Lime’s associates as criminals, he cannot

recognize his friend's part in their crime. Despite acknowledging Harry's penchant for making trouble, Martins wholeheartedly believes in his friend's innocence. Lime's accomplices are easily seen as criminals even by the naïve Martins, because they fit into his black-and-white, right-and-wrong understanding of the world. The shady appearances of "Baron" Kurtz, Dr. Winkel, and Mr. Popescu denote their shady characters. Lime, however, falls outside such a simplistic understanding. He charms Martins as he charms Anna, and as he charms the audience.

Peter William Evans suggests a link between Harry Lime and childhood, arguing that "there's something in Lime, not untypically for a Reed character, of the hidden child" (100). There is certainly evidence in *The Third Man* to support such a claim. In addition to the shared boarding school history with Martins, Evans cites Anna's claim that Lime "never grew up. The world grew up around him." But "childish" might also be a fitting description of Holly Martins, who fails to understand the consequences of his actions. Though he realizes that Lime's associates are lying about the circumstances of Lime's automobile accident and suspects them of double-crossing and murdering Harry, Martins reveals to them that the porter's account of the accident contradicts their own. The porter's death, ritualistic silencing, fails to make Holly appreciate the precariousness of his own situation. Though he understands that the porter died as part of a larger conspiracy, the significance of the possible danger to himself is lost on Martins. When Lime is finally revealed from the shadows, for example, Martins fails to acknowledge any danger. Alone in the wide Vienna streets, Martins hears a noise and turns confidently around. He taunts and mocks the unseen figure: "What kind of spy do

you think you are, satchel-foot? Can't you answer? Come out, come out wherever you are!" Despite the porter's death as an immediate warning, Martins behaves as if he believes himself to be invincible, calling and taunting the unseen figure with a phrase from a child's game.

Throughout *The Third Man* Martins is shown to be child-like in his quest to clear Lime's name. When he tries to strong-arm Major Calloway and meets with Sergeant Paine's fist, Calloway treats Martins like a child who wants to play make-believe: "This isn't Santa Fe, I'm not a sheriff, and you aren't a cowboy." Paine's reaction after knocking Martins down further suggests Martins's childishness. The sergeant picks Martins up as one would pick up a child who has fallen and speaks to him in a calm, reassuring voice: "Up we come."

When we first see Martins upon his arrival in Vienna, he exits the train and, oblivious to the presence of the Military Police officer, tries to leave the station. The officer stops him and asks for his passport and about where he will be staying during his time in Vienna. Martins tells the officer that his friend will be putting him up, and then, glancing around, says almost sheepishly, "I thought he'd be here to meet me." Later, when Martins arrives at Lime's apartment, his helplessness increases as he is unable to understand the porter's initial account in German of Lime's death. Reed places the porter on the landing on the floor above Lime's apartment and shoots at extreme angles to get them both in the frame. The porter looks down on Martins, their spatial relationship representing the porter's authority and control in this situation. Unable to understand the common language of Vienna,⁴⁰ Martins can only look up after the porter has laid out the whole story and ask,

⁴⁰ The narrator establishes German as the common language of Vienna in the prologue. He claims that while the various nationalities cannot communicate to each other in their own

“Speak English?” Packed into his question is a request for the porter to accommodate his inexperience and, essentially, to take care of him, which the porter tries to do.

Although Greene’s screenplay includes a scene of Martins taking a cab to Lime’s apartment, Reed opts to dissolve from the train station to a shot of Martins walking up to Lime’s apartment, as if to suggest that he has been unable to ask for a ride or figure out public transportation. Similarly, Martins is shown walking to Lime’s first funeral. So, until Major Calloway offers him a ride back from the funeral, we have the impression that Martins has been left to his own means and has had to walk everywhere in the city. Calloway’s offer of a ride signals his assuming responsibility for Martins. As Lime is, apparently, no longer able to take care of Martins, Calloway gives him money and has Paine take him to the Sacher’s Hotel, the military hotel for the night. Even as Martins is threatening to expose Calloway’s incompetence and clear Lime’s name with all the vigour of a rebellious child, Martins’s inability to look after himself is highlighted. Though he (loudly) positions himself against the authority of the military police, Martins is housed in the military hotel. Similarly, after all his lofty threats to expose Calloway, it is through the intervention of another military figure, Crabbins of the Cultural Reeducation Section, that Martins is able to remain in Vienna and investigate his friend’s death.

The idea of Martins-as-child is made explicit in the film through the inclusion of Hansl, the round-faced Austrian child who accuses Martins of murdering the porter. Hansl is a grotesque parody of a child with his round, stoic face and piercing scream. Moss is particularly harsh in his assessment of Hansl, stating, “There is delicious perversity in the way the film-makers deny the boy any traditionally loveable ‘movie moppet’

language, they all know a “smattering of German.” By not speaking the most common of the many languages of Vienna, Martins is unable to understand much of what goes on around him.

characteristics, using him instead as a source of mordant fun. With his pudgy torso and a face as circular as the ball he plays with incessantly, he is reminiscent of a goblin child, someone eerie, disquieting, not quite human” (183). Hansl functions both as “goblin child” and as a means to further demonstrate how far Martins is out of his element. Martins’s self-created persona of lone rider/detective comes crashing down as he is outmanoeuvred by a literal child as the only child we see (until the scene in the hospital), Hansl stands in for all children.

Evans argues that Hansl functions as a projection of Lime. When Hansl accuses Martins, Lime symbolically accuses Martins. Through this accusation, “the child becomes the agent through which Greene and Reed indicate the complicity of Martins in the murder, a prefiguring of the killing of a friend that will later be his fate” (101). This, however, ignores the literal content of the scene: Martins is outdone by a child. While I agree that Martins is responsible for the porter’s death, I think Reed highlights Martins’s obliviousness to what the child is saying, to that of which he is being accused. This lack of understanding echoes the earlier scene with the porter when Martins could not understand what was being said. This lone gunman is unable to defend himself against, unable even to understand, the accusations of a child. The crowd gathers outside Lime’s apartment and Hansl begins to shout, “Papa, papa.” He tugs at his father’s⁴¹ coat sleeves. Moss notes that “Reed even allows the boy’s squealing to arouse a certain revulsion in the audience” (183). Though we are struck by the child’s cries, Martins is not. He continues talking to Anna, failing to realize that he has seen this child before and that the child is talking about him.

⁴¹ Moss misidentifies Hansl as the son of the murdered porter; however, in Greene’s screenplay, which translates the child’s accusations into English, it is clear that the man Hansl speaks to, the same man who informs Martins of the porter’s death, is the boy’s father.

This is more than simple ignorance of the German language. The meaning of Hansl's accusation can be easily discerned by non-German speaking audience members. Martins did not learn from his encounter with the porter and, again, makes no effort to understand. Once Martins finally realizes that the group's attention has been directed at him, he tries to lead Anna away. It is, however, Hansl who leads the charge in following Martins.

In arguing that *The Third Man* ostensibly operates as a detective story, Abrams does not call into question Martins's (in)abilities or explicitly note that, throughout the film, Calloway, the professional police officer, proves to be a much better detective than Martins. Martins only pretends to be a detective, eventually coming to recognize a truth antithetical to his assumptions. In the three "shocking" discoveries that Moss attributes to Martins – "that Lime may have been murdered, that Lime is actually alive, that Lime is a racketeer whose watered down penicillin has crippled innumerable children" (180) – the first is wrong, and the second and third are revealed *to* Martins. He does not discover anything on his own. In Greene's published screenplay for *The Third Man*, however, Calloway's credentials as detective are clearly established: he is "[i]n charge of the British Military Police in Vienna. A man with a background of Scotland Yard training" (8). When Martins consults Calloway after the very much alive Lime seemingly vanishes into thin air in the Vienna streets, Martins is baffled and apparently content to remain so. Calloway, on the other hand, reasons how Lime made his escape. As Martins stumbles around expressing his disbelief,

Calloway is thinking now, and *then*, suddenly, *Voila! He's got it!* The inference looks like this: The surprising fact occurs that Lime disappeared into thin air. But, if it were true that a trapdoor is nearby, then Lime's vanishing would follow. Hence,

there is reason to suspect a trapdoor nearby. Calloway then tests his guess and finds that he's right. (80)

While Martins can *narrate* the details of the disappearance – including the positioning of shadows and the absence of doorways – he cannot reason or speculate about what is unseen. Calloway can discern what is hidden to Martins.

Major Calloway has slipped largely undetected beneath the critical radar as the obvious connections between Holly and Harry, which Evans remarks “grow steadily clearer” (97), dominate critical responses to the film. Nicholas Christopher connects Lime and Martins based on the established working relationship of Welles and Cotten, particularly their pairing in Welles's *Citizen Kane* (1941), which Christopher characterizes as “Quixote/Panza” and puts forward as a template for understanding the relationship of Lime and Martins (71). Christopher, however, does not consider the role Major Calloway plays in the events of the film, leaving the police officer out of the equation altogether. Moss, though, does draw a connection between Calloway and Martins, as they must work together in order to bring Lime to justice:

Calloway's professional apparatus is tough and efficient, yet he is unable to apprehend Lime on his own. Evil remains more resourceful than goodness throughout most of the film. Lime's downfall occurs only when Martins allows the police to exploit the credibility he still enjoys with his friend.

(186)

Evans, like Christopher, emphasizes the connections made between Lime and Holly (again evoking the previous pairing of Welles and Cotten in *Citizen Kane*); however, Evans does suggest an interesting visual link between Calloway and Lime through Calloway's clothing

at Lime's first funeral: "he wears a black patent leather full length overcoat that in some sense aligns him with the villain he pursues and thinks he has just buried" (98). Evans's suggestion, however, is compromised by the fact that, at this point in the film, the audience does not know what Lime looks like, and ignores the fact that Calloway is dressed (with the exception of the patent leather) almost identically to Martins. Reed seems to emphasize this connection both by framing Calloway, leaning against a tombstone, in a medium close-up and having Martins enter the frame alongside him, and also by cutting back and forth between the two characters throughout the funeral. To this end, I suggest re-examining the traditional dichotomy of Lime and Martins, putting forward a more complicated trichotomy: Lime, Martins, and Calloway. Throughout the film, the British Calloway is contrasted with the Americans Lime and Martins. Sometimes their purposes are united, other times they are not: Calloway and Martins search for Lime; Lime and Calloway look after the naive Martins; Lime and Martins operate outside the acknowledged authority of the law, which Calloway represents. Major Calloway is part of the culture that alienates Lime and Martins. He operates within the security of a defined system – as part of an international policing community Calloway represents law, order, and social stability. Unlike Martins and Lime, who remain outsiders in Vienna, Calloway is not an outsider in divided Vienna. He has a place within this social order, which is the clear advantage (as well as the limitation) of such a social structure. He has a defined relation to his colleagues, of which we catch a glimpse in his interactions with Paine and as he attempts to help Anna with her passport, and a defined role within the structure of the multinational police force operating in Vienna. He performs his job without thought of reward, ceremony, or acknowledgement.

Calloway does not act on his emotions, as Martins does. He does not seek his own reward, as Lime does. He approaches his duties with typical British determination, efficiency, and detached thoroughness. He is not the corrupt sheriff that Martins imagines him to be, with a personal grudge against Lime, but a thoughtful and diligent police officer whose evidence against Lime is meticulously detailed and exhaustive. But, despite having witnessed all the atrocities of crime and the black market, Calloway is not unduly bitter. He is reserved, cautious, and skeptical, but maintains a general trust in humanity, as is evident in his treatment of Martins. He is neither as cynical as Lime, who, in the celebrated Great Wheel sequence, equates human life with dots to be extinguished for profit, nor as trusting and optimistic as Martins. Calloway sees everything that Martins has seen, sees the horrific consequences of Lime's illegal activities, but considers it all with sober reflection and reserve. He exemplifies the British "stiff upper lip," placing duty and responsibility above emotions and sympathy.⁴² In this respect, Calloway functions as a middle way between the extremes of both Martins and Lime.

Calloway is the veiled hero of the narrative whose value and effectiveness is displaced by the presence of a couple of grandstanding Americans.⁴³ As the British detective, Calloway should take his place alongside figures like Sherlock Holmes or Bulldog Drummond. Despite his success in unravelling the mysteries of the narrative,

⁴² This is most clearly evident when Calloway refuses to help Anna with her passport: "She's no concern of mine, Martins. It's Lime I want." Compared to Martins, who is almost completely emotional, Calloway's reservation and focus on what he has to do are noteworthy.

⁴³ Much of the critical response to *The Third Man* has placed Carol Reed in the role of Calloway, muting his own involvement in the film in favour of trumpeting the involvement of Orson Welles, and attributing the look and style of the film to Welles. For example, consider John Anderson's quotation about "Carol Reed, Graham Greene, and Orson Welles' classic tale."

Calloway lacks the recognition given to Holmes. Even Holmes's enemies acknowledge his superior abilities and prowess. No one acknowledges Calloway or Paine, his Watson. That Calloway does not occupy a more prominent role in the film suggests that *The Third Man* assesses Britain's new position in the American-centric post-war world. Like Calloway, Britain takes its place in the background, working without hope or expectation of recognition.

Calloway draws attention to his own nationality when he corrects Martins, who calls him "Callaghan" – "Calloway. I'm English. Not Irish." I would argue that Calloway, in asserting his Britishness, suggests a connection between his clearly defined place within the framework of Vienna law enforcement and the British class system, with its similar attention to order and place. Like the structure that supports Calloway, there was a certain stability to the British class system with its definition of roles and relationships. His connection to the class system is further suggested by the dutiful Sergeant Paine, who is clearly Calloway's subordinate, functioning as both assistant and, when needed, physical reinforcement. While Calloway certainly seems to be secure in his position within the larger structure of Vienna law enforcement, *The Third Man* does reflect certain post-war anxieties about the class system by revealing some flaws in the seemingly secure system, particularly through the presence/absence of Paine (Bernard Lee).

If Calloway's presence in the critical literature is understated, Paine's is almost non-existent. He identifies and aligns himself with British values – when Martins tells Paine that he is gunning for "his Major Callaghan," Paine expresses shock: "Sounds anti-British." However, Paine knows who Holly Martins is and is a fan of his writing, unlike Calloway or the literary group Martins addresses. Paine admires Martins's work, though he never allows

that admiration to get in the way of his duty to Calloway. As a character who both reads Martins's novels and works under Calloway, the likable Paine functions as a possible go-between or bridge between Calloway and Martins. He moves easily between Calloway and Martins. He is Calloway's subordinate who carries out orders, but Martins also identifies with Paine. Reed and Greene only include Paine in a few key scenes, so he becomes almost background, as if muting the significance of the role he could potentially play in mediating between Calloway and Martins. Even his death at the end of the film is muted, occurring quickly and without commentary. This particular muting seems all the more noteworthy when one considers that Harry gets two funerals. The death of Paine indicates that the distance between Calloway and Martins can never truly be bridged. Any chance of understanding between the American Martins and the British Calloway is lost with Paine's death. The cultural alienation cannot be reconciled.

Most historians conclude that the strains of the war and post-war years undermined Britain's rigid class system, as the German bombs fell on rich and poor alike. Citizens from all classes were evacuated from their homes, housed together, and expected to work together to rebuild. The election of the Labour government in the immediate post-war years reflected a more balanced social plan. The Beveridge report, for example, argued for the institution of programs like Welfare, Child Allowances, and National Health to meet the needs of all classes. I believe that Reed and Greene reflect this rethinking in *The Third Man* by showing Calloway's limitations and suggesting that such rigidity is not wholly adequate for the changing post-war world. Despite his superior skills as a detective, despite the authority of the law, and despite Holly's limited role at the end of the film, Calloway fails to bring Lime to justice.

While the system Calloway operates in provides stability, it is shown to be unable to stop a criminal who operates outside the system. Calloway's limitations are first suggested in his refusal to act independently to prevent Anna's deportation, but are more concretely demonstrated in the actual apprehension of Lime, where Calloway must use the trickery and deception associated with Harry. As Moss argues, "In the final analysis it is impossible to defeat Lucifer without adopting Lucifer's methods – trickery and deceit. Fair play, however dogged, is not sufficient in itself" (186). Calloway has the situation well in hand, having both discovered Harry's whereabouts and organized a large search party. But it is Holly who shoots Lime. For all the endorsement of Calloway's methods, Holly Martins and the adoption of Lime's own techniques finally stop Lime.

As well as suggesting Britain's new unassuming and acknowledged role in world politics, Major Calloway's absence at Lime's death speaks to the film's larger and more troubling displacement of heroism in the post-war world. In *The Third Man*, the conventional and self-styled heroes fall short. Our traditional understanding of moral investment and truth is countered by the alluring charm of Harry Lime. Calloway *should* be the hero of *The Third Man*. He has the credentials and competence, but, throughout the film, he remains unacknowledged and in the background. Calloway modestly, invisibly calls the shots. Holly *tries* to be the hero, but fails. Although Calloway allows Holly to participate in the final chase to gain some measure of credit, Holly does not deserve it. Holly is too much bound to the American notion of heroism, wanting to prove himself in order to "win" Anna. It is the villainous and charismatic Lime who, despite very little screen time, holds our attention and interest. Holly's good intentions and Major Calloway's rationality are subverted by the charming self-interest and anarchy of Harry.

Dassin's *Night and the City* is regularly absent from critical literature on British cinema because of its strong suggestion of American authorship, in Jules Dassin, the (exiled) American director, and Richard Widmark and Gene Tierney, the American stars. However, the film, based on Gerald Kersh's novel of the same name, was made in England as the first Anglo-American co-production of the British division of 20th Century Fox. Fox's vice-president in charge of production, Darryl F. Zanuck, wanted to make "dramatic and entertaining films which would have a direct bearing on the great problems of the post-war era" (Harper and Porter 124). This American co-production allowed, in Durnat's opinion, a much "harder edged" exploration of the tensions between America's ideological glorification of "ambition, competition and conflict" and the overwhelming feeling in British culture "that all these things must be kept in check by responsibility, co-operation, and compromise" (245-46).

Fox released two different versions of *Night and the City*, one for American audiences and another for British audiences. The British version features not only a separate musical score by British composer Benjamin Frankel, but six minutes of additional footage,⁴⁴ including a scene in which Nosseross (Francis L. Sullivan) spots his wife, Helen (Googie Withers), and Harry Fabian in a passionate embrace. In his commentary on *Night and the City*, Glenn Erickson praises the American cut for giving the impression that Nosseross has second sight regarding the activities of Fabian and Helen. And while Dassin claims the American version to be nearer his vision, the British cut, in providing grounds for Nosseross's suspicions and explaining Nosseross's reasons for aligning with Kristo

⁴⁴ This longer British version was edited by Sidney Stone. The American version of the film was edited by Nick De Maggio and scored by Franz Waxman. The Criterion DVD of *Night and the City* features the shorter cut of the film, but contains a documentary "Two Versions, Two Scores," which compares and contrasts the different musical scores. This documentary features the six minutes of additional footage used in the British release.

against Fabian, further highlights Fabian's isolation in this world. He is a small-time hustler disturbing the Nosserosses' marriage and does not realize who has seen through his lies and who might be working against him.

Harry Fabian's isolation and alienation may, in part, be the result of director Jules Dassin's own life. At the time he was making *Night and the City*, Dassin found himself in the position of cultural outsider after leaving the United States when he was named to the House of Un-American Activities by blacklisted director Edward Dmytryk:

When [Dmytryk] accused Dassin of being a communist, Dassin ... denied the charge vehemently. He refused to cooperate with HUAC, who offered him a deal if he, too, fingered other filmmakers. He said he felt completely betrayed by Dmytryk's accusation, but was unable to refute it since it boiled down to his word against Dmytryk's. ... The upshot of all this was that Dassin was forced into permanent exile at age thirty-eight at the height of his creative powers.

(Christopher 76)

Jules Dassin has said that *Night and the City* was rushed into production by Zanuck when Dassin's blacklisting appeared inevitable. Dassin recalls that Zanuck sent him to London with instructions to shoot the most expensive scenes first, believing that would make it harder to remove Dassin from the picture. As someone who, by necessity, discovered himself an outsider in a strange city, Dassin's attraction to *Night and the City* seems obvious. Christopher notes, "It is not surprising that the very next thing Dassin chose to 'say' should be *Night and the City*, a film about a man on the run through a particularly odious labyrinth, paved with duplicity and mendacity" (77). Like Harry Fabian, Dassin

found himself in the role of a British film noir protagonist: on the run, alone in the world, and outside the comfort and security of a stable system.

In *Typical Men: The Representation of Masculinity in Popular British Cinema*, Andrew Spicer categorizes Widmark's Fabian as a "spiv," a petty criminal who lives by his shady dealings. Fabian is "a small-time fixer who longs for that 'big break' which will give him the lifestyle and admiration he craves" (128). Durnat argues that while Fabian is the lone "rounded" character in Dassin's film, Widmark is "ruinously miscast, being always the clever, intelligent 'King Rat', never the ambitious slightly cunning little git, quite out of his class" (142). I find Durnat's assessment of Widmark's portrayal of Fabian to be curious. While it is true that Fabian devises an especially brilliant scheme to control London's wrestling racket, he is not smart enough to make it work. His downfall comes as a result of his inability to outsmart established underworld figures like Kristo and Nosseross, characters who are secure in the London underworld. Fabian is really able to con only people who are especially trusting and gullible, characters who operate outside the social structure the film portrays and who are as out of their own depth as Fabian: the three American businessmen, Helen Nosseross, and Gregorious. Of these three separate dupings, the first is innocuous, while the other two prove disastrous. The three American businessmen are taken in by Harry's use of their friend's name and follow Harry to the Silver Fox Club. There are no serious consequences to Harry's deception. They likely lose some money as a result of further deception of the girls at the Silver Fox Club. The deception of Helen and Gregorious, on the other hand, has far-reaching consequences (the ruin of Helen and the death of Phil) and permanently disrupts Helen and Phil's relationship and Gregorious and Kristo's relationship.

Fabian is able to dupe Helen Nosseross when she tries to leave her husband and establish her own club. As she tries to disrupt the security of her own marriage, she enlists Fabian's help and falls for Harry's lies about being able to get a licence. After a police raid on her new club, Helen discovers that the licence Harry obtained is a forgery. She reluctantly tries to return to the security of her previous life, only to find that it has been permanently disturbed. When Helen enters her husband's office at the Silver Fox Club, she discovers his body and learns that his entire fortune has been left to Molly, the Flower Lady.

Harry's deception of Gregorious, which I will look at shortly, is tied to the world of wrestling. The function of wrestling in *Night and the City* has been explored to some degree by Nicholas Christopher in *Somewhere in the Night*. Christopher wisely cites Roland Barthes's famous essay on wrestling in his analysis of Dassin's film. I think, though, that Christopher is too limited in his exploration of the metaphor of wrestling within the film. Barthes writes, "The virtue of all-in wrestling is that it is the spectacle of excess. ... There are people who think that wrestling is an ignoble sport. Wrestling is not sport, it is a spectacle ... a stage-managed sport ... the public is completely uninterested in knowing whether the contest is rigged or not, and rightly so; it abandons itself to the primary virtue of the spectacle" (15). By "all-in wrestling," Barthes is, of course, distinguishing between Kristo's type of wrestling and Gregorious's "true wrestling, wrongly called amateur wrestling" (15). In praising the theatricality, the spectacle of all-in wrestling, Barthes evokes an interesting dichotomy of real/false. Although he argues that the distinction does not matter to the audience, all-in wrestling appears to be, or tries to appear, real. The significance of this in *Night and the City* is telling.

The London of *Night and the City* is filled with characters trying to appear real. Both in trying to raise the capital to begin promoting wrestling and when he is on the run from Kristo, Harry seeks help from various underworld characters whose chief skill is deception: Figler the King of Beggars, who fits able-bodied men and women with crutches and false deformities to make them more profitable beggars; and Googin the Forger, who forges Helen's club permit. Harry, of course, is the most obvious deceiver. Harry makes his living pretending to be a travelling American in order to lure unsuspecting tourists to Nosseross's Silver Fox Club. Harry acts his way through life, putting a spin on everything as if he were trying to perform a role. Most of the characters see through Harry's stories. Kristo, Mary, and Nosseross are not fooled by Harry. Nosseross mocks Harry's "highly inflamed imagination." Later, when Harry tries to explain his plan to align with Kristo's father in order to promote wrestling, Nosseross's overbearing laughter cuts Harry off, making him angrier and angrier. Fabian has a temper tantrum, but threatens to succeed in spite of Nosseross.

Although not as helpless as Martins, Harry Fabian displays childish characteristics of his own that suggest his instability and questionable morals. Widmark is uniquely qualified to demonstrate the implied danger of an adult who responds to the world with a childlike irresponsibility, having established himself in film as the giggling, homicidal Tommy Udo in Henry Hathaway's *Kiss of Death* (1947). While not murderous like Udo, Fabian's self-centredness and lack of compassion for others suggest what D.W. Winnicott identifies as the maladjusted child. Winnicott describes the maladjusted child as being in the grip of the antisocial tendency. The clinical picture is to be observed in terms of :

a) Stealing (lying etc.), staking claims.

b) Destruction, attempting to force the environment to reconstitute the framework, the loss of which made the child lose spontaneity, since spontaneity only makes sense in a controlled setting. Content is of no meaning without form.

(212-13)

If Holly Martins is a child who must be cared for, Harry Fabian is a delinquent child who tells tales to manipulate others and throws temper tantrums when he does not get his own way. Dassin emphasizes this aspect of Fabian's character in his first exchange with his girlfriend, Mary (Gene Tierney). He enters the apartment and calls Mary's name. When she does not immediately appear, Fabian looks around her small flat, eventually turning his attention to her purse. He opens it and is beginning to sift through the contents when Mary enters from another room. She sees Harry with her purse, and, knowing what he is doing, says disappointedly, "You won't find any money there, Harry." The nature of their relationship, which has not yet been clearly established, begins to resemble a mother-son relationship – Harry has been caught in the most juvenile of crimes: taking money from his mother's purse. "Stealing," says Winnicott, "is at the centre of the antisocial tendency, with the associated lying" (125). Lying and stealing are the characteristics at the heart of both the maladjusted child and Harry Fabian.

Harry's reaction to Mary's statement furthers the suggestion of his antisocial childishness. He responds defensively: "What do you mean spying on me?" However, he quickly sees that the evidence is still in his hands. Recognizing that defensiveness and flat-out denial will not work on Mary, Fabian changes his tactics. He smiles his innocent boyish smile and tells Mary that he is merely looking for some cigarettes. Mary's mannerisms reveal that she is not deceived by Harry's attempted deception. Her eyes never move from

Harry as she takes her purse back. He turns away from her gaze, as if embarrassed.

Embarrassment, however, is merely another act, another lie. He drops his shame and smiles again. This smile is confident, as he believes he has “gotten away” with his deception. He begins telling her that he would never steal from her, but Mary interrupts to ask where he has been for the past three days. Fabian weaves a story about a dog track and business opportunities. It is as she expected: Harry came by for money. She refuses, he begs and pleads. Her question, “Why can’t you ever grow up?” is particularly revealing as it prompts Harry to sulk, re-establishing the parent-child dynamic. As Mary tries to explain her position, Harry folds his arms and turns his body away from her like a petulant child.

In regards to Winnicott’s “second clinical picture” – destruction and attempting to force the environment to reconstitute the framework – Fabian’s plan to assume control of London’s wrestling is his attempt to force his way into the established framework of the London underworld. The promotion of wrestling in London is controlled by Kristo alone. When Harry witnesses a dispute between Kristo and his father Gregorious (Stanislaus Zbyszko), himself a former champion wrestler, about the showmanship of Kristo’s brand of wrestling, Fabian sees his opportunity to force his way into the established framework of control. By deceiving Gregorious and aligning himself with the former champion to promote “real wrestling,” Fabian can operate without fear of Kristo. Harry acts according to what Durnat identifies as the creed of American vice. Harry wants to make something of himself, and in order to do that, he must fight for a space within the established structure by disturbing the stability of that structure. The word “disturbed” is spoken in the film by Kristo’s lawyer, when he goes to visit Nosseross: “Mr. Kristo is disturbed. Yes, disturbed.

Word has reached him that a certain Harry Fabian is about to engage in the promotion of wrestling.”

As I suggested earlier, Gregorious falls for Harry’s lies because he is equally out of place in the London of *Night and the City*. A man of intense personal pride but intense gullibility, Gregorious is more concerned with Harry’s story about promoting legitimate wrestling than with assessing his new partner’s reliability. Although Christopher rightly argues that Kristo “has debased his paternal legacy, for the wrestling he promotes – of the histrionic clown-show variety – is far removed from Greco-Roman” (81), the real break between father and son comes as a result of Harry. When Kristo threatens Harry, Gregorious steps between them. Kristo tries to make his father see what Fabian really is, but Gregorious will not listen: “He’s my partner and my friend. Stay away from him, my son. If you lift your hand to him, you hit me.”

Later, Fabian arranges a fight between Gregorious’s pupil, Nikolas (Kenneth Richmond), and Kristo’s top draw, the Strangler (Mike Mazurki), in order to raise capital. He convinces Gregorious, who wants nothing to do with the Strangler’s type of wrestling, to accept the match in order to demonstrate the superiority of his traditional form of wrestling. Fabian is so convincing in playing on the former champion’s sense of honour that when the Strangler mocks Gregorious, the old man accidentally breaks his own protégé Nikolas’s wrist in order to fight the Strangler himself. Duped into defending his noble art against crass showmanship, Gregorious defeats the Strangler, but dies a few moments later. Blinded by his desire to show “real wrestling,” Gregorious is fooled into believing Harry’s lies. And Fabian, in trying to get himself ahead, manages not only to disrupt the stable criminal control of wrestling promotion, but succeeds in turning father against son.

Although Gregorious dies in his son's arms, he dies believing that Fabian has been his friend and partner.

Night and the City is less concerned with representing Fabian's own individual alienation, as we would expect to find in American film noir, then it is with examining his attempt –and ultimate failure –to work himself into a society that is ordered and closed. Unlike the corrupt underworld of American film noir, the London underground of *Night and the City* is a stable society. Nosseross and Kristo operate their illicit businesses in relative harmony, neither infringing on the other's territory. Kristo and Nosseross do not even cross paths until Harry Fabian begins to operate Fabian Promotions. The “organized” crime of Nosseross and Kristo has clearly defined positions and roles. The notion of family and the dependability of familial relationships are also suggested to be stable. Harry destroys or tries to destroy many of these fixed communities: in particular his relationship with Mary, which resembles a mother-son union more than a romantic partnership; the relationship between Gregorious and his son; and the relationship between Nosseross and his wife. Dassin presents Fabian as a disruptive, destructive force for the stable relationships of the film even when he does not mean to be, as happens with his unwilling seduction by Helen Nosseross. With his lies and deceptions, his attempts to get ahead, and his disruption of the social stability, Harry Fabian manifests British fears and anxieties about the American ideal of upward mobility. In order to succeed and make a name for himself, Harry challenges the status quo of the London underworld. For a society that finds its security in order and established relationships, the notion of upward mobility is an often frightening prospect that could potentially lead to irreparable damage to the social

framework. As the American GIs were seen by many as disruptive and unruly, Fabian's refusal to adhere to the rules of the society leads to violence, disorder, and chaos.

The City

Scholars have long argued for the centrality of the metropolis in classic American film noirs. Christopher claims that “[h]owever one tries to define or explain noir, the common denominator must always be the city. The two are inseparable ... the city is the seedbed of the noir” (37). Biesen identifies the connection between the mood and the urban setting of the early film noir *Stranger on the Third Floor* (1940): “Like later classic noir films, *Stranger on the Third Floor* presents a bleak view of its urban environment. Shadowy and cramped, its claustrophobic city is a dangerous and ruthless place where bureaucratic law-and-order institutions have broken down and will inhumanely bring about the demise of, rather than protect, its individual inhabitants” (Biesen 24). Allan Siegel argues that film noir creates a “filmic narrative of urban social space” through the use of “easily identifiable landmarks (free floating, intertextual signifiers)” (148). The narrative of film noir, according to Siegel, both frames the city and its inhabitants and bridges the “the sensory world of everyday reality and its representation” (149). To this end then, the city in film operates as both “a yearning and its displacement/absence” (149).

With classic American film noir and its focus on contemporary urban America, the architecture in these films often reflects this contemporary time. The urban landscapes of these films offer both new buildings (symbolizing both prosperity and unfamiliarity) and old, dilapidated buildings (suggesting a nostalgia for the past and an uncertainty about the future). As American cities grew in the years following World War II, massive building

projects were begun to meet the demands of increased populations. A greater number of buildings and a greater number of people created an environment suited to film noir – unstable and impersonal. Various architectural styles are blended without a sense of proportion, purpose, or authenticity. In Billy Wilder's *Double Indemnity*, for example, Walter Neff comments on the Dietrichsons' Spanish-style home: "It was one of those California Spanish houses everyone was nuts about ten or fifteen years ago." Clearly, the Dietrichsons are not Spanish themselves, but fashionable. Neff's statement also undermines the notion of permanence, suggesting that such homes are no longer desirable.

In major urban centres, where space was already limited, skyscrapers and high-rise apartment buildings created an atmosphere of claustrophobia in their size, and temporal displacement in their relation to the architecture of the past. Dimendberg argues this occurs in Robert Florey's *Johnny One-Eye* (1950):

Juxtaposing a dilapidated older structure in a low-rise neighborhood with the promise of an architectural clean sweep to be realized in a temporally indeterminate future, the film reveals a key characteristic of the post-1939 American centripetal metropolis: the psychic hazards of dwelling in an urban space whose historical mutation yields real spatial gaps and temporal voids between the modern as "yet-to-come" and the urban past as "yet-to-be destroyed."

(Dimendberg 90-91)

Dimendberg traces this anxiety of the modern city, the relationship between the urban past and the urban to-come, to the writings of prominent critics of modernity: e.g. Baudelaire, Walter Benjamin, Siegfried Kracauer, and Marshall Berman. These critics locate this uneasiness "in the Parisian *quartiers* destroyed by Haussmann, the empty streets

surrounding the Berlin *Mietskasernen* (rental barracks), and the no-man's-land of the freeway ribbons traversing countless cities in post-war America" (91).

But surely there is a difference between the old, historical cities of Europe and the relatively new cities of America. London is too old, too established to have the same immediate danger or threat as a New York or Los Angeles. The ghosts and terrors of urban space, so pervasive in American noir, should be too far removed, too historical, in Europe to pose a serious threat. However, the post-war damage to Vienna and London, so well displayed in both films, creates a space for urban anxiety similar in some ways to the newer America's urban anxiety. In British film noir this urban anxiety is demonstrated through an effective use not only of closed, claustrophobic spaces (alleys, doorways, sewers), but even in the wide open spaces – the familiar, almost representative squares and wide streets common in European cities. Martins, Lime, and Fabian find themselves in danger, exposed, or thwarted when they venture into the open spaces, yet effortlessly traverse the bombed-out sections of the cities and sewers.

In her "Preface to *The Demon Lover*," Elizabeth Bowen describes the impact of the bombings on the nation's sense of security: "The violent destruction of solid things, the explosion of the illusion that prestige, power and permanence attach to bulk and weight left all of us, equally, heady and disembodied. Walls went down; and we felt if not knew, each other. We lived in a state of lucid abnormality" (132). Because the dilapidation is the result of physical damage as opposed to mere age and neglect, the uncertainty of the city is made more acute. The bombed-out areas of both Vienna and London intensify the audience's sense of anxiety because the damage creates the sense of arbitrary destruction and, more importantly, defamiliarizes the very familiar architecture of these old cities, undermining

the secure identity of the city and creating fractured spaces that allow these protagonists to operate both in the present and in the future.

The Third Man begins with a prologue, voiced by director Carol Reed, that foregrounds the city in which the narrative takes place: Vienna. Christopher notes that in the post-war years, Vienna “saw an urban reconstruction project that transformed the city from a medieval capital into the birthplace of urban modernism” (Christopher 72). The prologue serves two functions: contrasting contemporary Vienna, in which the narrative takes place, with the old, cultured Vienna, and describing the realities of the post-war city: “I never knew the old Vienna before the war, with its Strauss music, its glamour and easy charm – Constantinople suited me better. I really got to know it in the classic period of the black market – we’d run anything, if people wanted it enough and had the money to pay.” The Vienna of *The Third Man* stands in for post-war London. The opening narration invites comparison between Vienna and “other European cities,” as it is “Bombed about a bit.” Reed included another, more overt nod to London in something that has generally been considered a mistake. As Calloway drives Martins to the hospital to show him the human face of Lime’s crimes, the rear projection includes a familiar London sight: a double-decker bus.

In *Film Noir and the Spaces of Modernity*, Edward Dimendberg establishes a link between the rise of urban reconstruction in America and its cities to film noir. According to Dimendberg, noir’s use of contemporary urban landscapes reflects the feelings of isolation and loss of individual identity that accompanied neon billboards, high-rise apartment buildings and skyscrapers. London, like Vienna, is a much older city than any American city. Vienna had suffered comparable damage to London as a result of the German air raid

campaign. Unlike American cities, which had remained largely untouched by the war, these European cities were rendered almost unrecognizable by the war. In an interview with Adrian Wooton, Richard Widmark recalled coming to London to shoot *Night and the City*: “London in 1949 was still all bombed out. The whole town was a real shambles, so everything was in the process of being reconstructed.” In this tension between the established, historic buildings and the piles of rubble, Reed and Dassin create a noirish anxiety and uneasiness within the city.

In the Reed and Dassin films, this unfamiliarity with the city is intensified by the foreign protagonists’ inability to navigate the parts of the city that are still standing, that maintain their symbolic connection to the past. There are various suggestions of Martins’ alienation in Vienna throughout *The Third Man*. For example, as he approaches Harry’s apartment for the first time, he glances up at the two carved statues that frame the door. Martins’s expression as he opens the door, however brief, is amazement. Martins is unable to get a sense of place in Vienna. In Harry’s building he is out of place. In the theatre where he watches Anna, he shifts uncomfortably in his seat, as unable to understand what the actors are saying as he is unable to understand Viennese culture. Although Lime has managed to exploit the sewers and rubble, he is also out of place *in* the city. In his first appearance in the film, Lime’s presence in the doorway is revealed by the light from an apartment window, as if the street betrays him.

When Martins meets Harry to talk, the location is not in the Café Mozart (where he meets the Baron) or the club (where Martins meets Popescu), but at a most American attraction, an amusement park, on a Ferris wheel. From the Great Wheel, their view of the city changes. In order to communicate with each other, they must transcend the city itself.

It is from this elevated position that Lime compares the people of Vienna with dots. Similarly, Lime operates, and meets his end, in the sewers *under* the city. Moss draws a connection between the city of Vienna and Lime's intricate conspiracy:

[T]he depiction of the conspirators is enriched and complemented by the city around them, whose every shade and reverberation is registered by Reed's cameraman, the invaluable Robert Krasker. Rarely has a locale been used so tellingly. Vienna seems almost sentient, a creature of decayed and ominous beauty. ... Rubble and partially demolished buildings fill nearly every frame of the movie, a constant reminder of the devastation of the war that has just ended. The narrow streets suggest enclosure rather than quaintness – a prison for lives shattered by the war – while the city's architecture and cultural heritage is made to seem onerous, a source of oppression rather than cultural pride.

(187)

Lime is a creature of this rubble. The destruction that robs Vienna of its history and identity protects him and hides him. The rubble works in these British film noirs as liminal space, space between order and chaos. It is space that has lost its definition. At the amusement park, Lime emerges from this rubble. It is only in this liminal space that an outsider like Lime can find a place in Vienna. The demolished buildings that break the cohesive identity of the old Vienna mentioned in the prologue, the Vienna of culture and Strauss, also allow an outsider like Lime the space to carry out his criminal activities.

While Reed deals obliquely with the realities of post-war London, Jules Dassin looks at London directly. In his essay for the Criterion DVD of *Night and the City*, Paul Arthur writes, "Working in and around London's Soho district, rather than the familiar

haunts of New York or Los Angeles, Dassin and company did not have to subtly evoke lingering effects of wartime bombing; they are clearly inscribed in blasted, nightmarish landscapes recruited for the film's climactic scene." The voice-over narration and the shots of London along the Thames which open *Night and the City* establish the film's setting. The first shot of a bridge dissolves into a shot of the Parliament buildings and Big Ben, and then, as the narrator says "the city is London," dissolves into the neon lights of Piccadilly Circus, which includes a double-decker bus.⁴⁵ On London as a setting, Raymond Durgnat argues that the film "is a *ne plus ultra* of noir visual style, every frame a painting, every character a deep-sea monster, gritty or flabby, like noir Fellini. Its London makes Chandler's LA look like Surbiton" (142). Andrew Spicer, in *Typical Men*, connects Fabian's identity and the London setting: "For all [his] sexual charm, his immense, neurotic energy and knowledge of the city's hidden recesses, he gets hopelessly out of his depth. In the memorable closing scenes he pounds along claustrophobic alleyways, or across the bombed rubble around St. Paul's, trying to elude the thugs of the gangster Kristo whom he has crossed. The back-lighting and wide angle photography make the buildings loom over him, reflecting his own delirium and broken dreams" (128).

Like Harry Lime, Harry Fabian operates best in the liminal space of the rubble. After the opening narration, we cut to a long shot of the lone Fabian running through a wide-open space. Fabian's constant running is a motif throughout the film, as he avoids

⁴⁵ In an interview included on the Criterion DVD of *Night and the City*, Jules Dassin recalls being criticized for creating a London for *Night and the City* that did not exist, for fabricating the locations in order to portray a seedier and more American-looking underbelly of British society. Dassin flatly denies the charge: "I invented nothing. It was all there." Dassin credits Percy Hoskins of Scotland Yard for introducing him to the various clubs, streets, and alleyways used in the film. Hoskins showed Dassin a side of London that reflected the increasing influence and presence of American popular culture. The neon signs of Piccadilly and the American Club where Fabian picks up tourists all suggest this encroachment of America and American culture.

being caught. In the wide spaces of Trafalgar Square, St Paul's Cathedral, Hammersmith Bridge, or Piccadilly Circus, Fabian is exposed. In the alleyways and in the ruins of bombed-out buildings, he can survive. In the next shot, a bombed-out area, Fabian moves almost effortlessly through the rubble and destruction, escaping his pursuers and finding safety at Mary's flat.

Harry feels most comfortable in areas that are not identifiably London, like the Great Wheel and sewers in *The Third Man*. In the nondescript alleyway by Phil Nosseross's The Silver Fox Club, for example, he is all smiles and handshakes. In the American Club, where he cons tourists, Fabian is a smooth talker. In the bombed-out section of the city, Harry, in one of his few acts of strength, kills one Kristo's men. However, Fabian finds himself weakened when he meets Phil in Trafalgar Square.

Dassin's sets this scene in Trafalgar Square, which, as it was built to commemorate a British naval victory during the Napoleonic wars, is symbolic Britain's might and one of the city's most recognizable locations. There the British Phil asserts his dominance over American Harry. As Harry begs Phil to reconsider, the large black lion statues of Nelson's Column suggest British power and stoicism in contrast to Fabian's agitation and helplessness: "Why are you backing out now? Everything's in the palm of my hand."

Dassin uses other important London locations to suggest that the city itself is against Fabian: Piccadilly Circus, the River Thames, and the Hammersmith Bridge. In the famous Piccadilly Circus, a camera mounted in a car follows one of Kristo's men around the Circus as he spreads the word that Fabian is a wanted man. Dassin uses the circular Piccadilly to suggest a literal roundup – as if the whole of London were conspiring against Fabian. At the ending the River Thames and the Hammersmith Bridge develop this tension

between representative London landmarks and the American interloper as Harry runs into the deadly hands of the Strangler. Standing on the Hammersmith Bridge, Kristo watches his wrestler choke the life out of Fabian and dispose of his body in the River Thames. While one could argue that this final victory of the city over Fabian suggests a restoration of sorts, the disruption has already occurred and could happen again. The death of Fabian does not restore any of the relationships that have been disrupted and does not prevent another American from further disrupting Britain's social stability. If anything, Fabian's disruption creates the space for someone else to come along and force their way into the system. The rubble, after all, remains.

The ending of the both films ties together anxiety about change, new architecture, disruptive, childish outsiders, and the stability of London's identity. The bombed-out areas that are exploited by amoral outsiders like Harry Lime and Harry Fabian survive them. Lime's and Fabian's breach of the social structure will be visible long after their respective defeats, just as the evidence of the bombing is borne out in new buildings. Any attempt to rebuild and repair the damage of the bombings would necessarily alter the look, and therefore the identity, of the city because *new* buildings would be needed to replace the old ones. As change is looked upon in these films as frightening and disruptive, so, too, is change in the appearance of the city.

These two films which illustrate some of the characteristics of British film noir, have their origins in literature. *The Third Man* was scripted and then novelized by Graham Greene, and *Night and the City* was (very) loosely adapted from Gerald Kersh's 1938 novel. Both films employ Americans as the main characters to emphasize the growing British feeling of displacement, but also to project British feelings of disconnectedness onto

characters who are already outside that social structure. Greene is arguably the key British author in terms of film noir adaptations: “Greene’s widespread reputation as a ‘filmic’ writer depends on his intelligent and slick use of melodrama, and on the vividness of his visual detail” (Durnat *Mirror* 169).

Elizabeth Bowen’s *The Demon Lover and Other Stories* could have provided the foundation for a more authentically British film noir, one that exploited the growing sense of isolation and disconnectedness among the British in the later war years. Written between the spring of 1941 and the fall of 1944, these stories, usually considered to be gothic, deal with the emotional and psychological stress of the war, just as the hard boiled detective novels had done in post WWI America. Bowen’s stories deal with the amnesia inherent in film noir, the forgetting of self and place. They describe British characters lost in environments that should be familiar. Despite having this rich source of material on which to draw, British filmmakers found their style of noir in societal anxieties about the “American Occupation” and growing concerns about American cultural influence. Americans gave the British public a new reason to be anxious and allowed filmmakers Reed and Dassin, to transpose feelings of disconnect, which Bowen ascribes to British characters, onto American protagonists.

The literary foundations of film noir have been well explored in the critical literature. The classic period of American film noir relied heavily on the “hard-boiled” novels and stories of writers such as James M. Cain, Cornell Woolrich, Dashiell Hammett, and Raymond Chandler. Spicer states, “Hard boiled fiction formed the central and

‘immediate’ influence on film noir’s subject matter and characterizations” (*Film Noir* 5).⁴⁶

The tough detectives in the novels of Hammett and Chandler are, according to Dennis Porter, a reaction to the more refined English detectives of Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers (qtd. in Spicer 6). These American writers transplanted their detectives to the streets of American cities. Emphasizing the importance of the literary basis of film noir, Frank Krutnik notes that nearly 20% of American film noirs made between 1941 and 1948 were adaptations of novels or short stories (33-34): “Numerous film noirs imitated or reworked hard-boiled sources and many hard boiled writers, including Raymond Chandler who wrote an original screenplay for *The Blue Dahlia* (1946) and co-adapted Cain’s *Double Indemnity*, were hired by Hollywood studios during this period” (Spicer 5).

At their collective heart, Bowen’s short stories are not concerned with the war itself: “These are all wartime, none of them war, stories. There are no accounts of war action even as I knew it – for instance, air raids. Only one character – in ‘Mysterious Kôr’ – is a soldier; and he only appears as a homeless wanderer round a city” (132). Bowen’s focus is on the impact the war had on the people of Britain, the feeling of disconnection that accompanied the war. Bowen concentrates her narratives on the change in the way the British thought about themselves, as she claims in “Preface to *The Demon Lover*”:

It seems to me that during the war the overcharged subconsciousness of everybody overflowed and merged. It is because the general subconsciousness saturates these stories that they have an authority nothing to do with me. ... The circumstances under which ordinary British people lived were preposterous – so preposterous that,

⁴⁶ This is not meant to lessen the significance of other commonly identified influences on the development of film noir – Weimar cinema, French cinema of the 1930s, and American crime dramas. My intention is only to stress the relationship between literature and film noir.

in a dull way, they simplified themselves. ... And self-expression in small ways stopped – the small ways had been so very small that we had not realized how much they amounted to. Planning fun, going places, and buying things, dressing yourself up and so on. All that stopped. You used to know what you were like from the things you liked and chose. (132, 133)

Bowen acknowledges both a general community connectedness (through what she calls the “overcharged subconsciousness”) and personal disconnectedness present in the wartime population, which speaks to the notion of a lost personal identity. While shared experiences and feelings created a sense of unity, the sacrificing of personal preferences and desires suggests an erosion of the individual identity.

In “‘A More Sinister Troth:’ Elizabeth Bowen’s ‘The Demon Lover’ as Allegory,” Robert Calder examines this idea of disconnectedness in Bowen’s most anthologized story (91). In the story, Mrs. Kathleen Drover visits her shut-up London home (Drover and family have temporarily relocated to the country). She discovers an unstamped letter addressed to her at the house. She dismisses the idea that the part-time caretaker has left the note out for her, “The caretaker (if he *were* back) did not know she was due in London today” (81). The letter, marked with that day’s date and signed K., appears to be from Mrs. Drover’s long-missing and presumed dead fiancé. It refers to their “anniversary and the day we said” and a meeting “at the hour arranged” (82), which greatly disturbs Mrs. Drover. Since K.’s disappearance in the last war, Mrs. Drover has married and had a family. She decides to flee. She exits the house and heads to a taxi rank where only one taxi waits, “[appearing] already to be alertly waiting for her” (87). Once she is inside the taxi, the clock strikes seven and car takes off, turning before Mrs. Drover can give directions. The

story ends with Mrs. Drover screaming and beating on the glass as the “taxi, accelerating without mercy, [makes] off with her into the hinterland of the deserted streets” (87).

Before rejecting rational interpretations and suggesting that “The Demon Lover” is best understood as “a wartime ‘document,’ a ‘diary’ entry of a woman’s response to yet another war” (93), Robert Calder begins by establishing the variety of critical responses to what appears to be a ghost story. Because Bowen is not explicit in her use of the supernatural, Douglas A. Hughes and Daniel V. Fraustino have challenged the idea that this is a ghost story.⁴⁷ Hughes, Fraustino, and Calder have all drawn attention to Bowen’s title, an allusion to an English ballad “about an absent lover, an intervening marriage, and a desertion from that marriage upon the lover’s return” (92). Heather Bryant Jordan writes, “Such stories as ‘The Demon Lover’ force the reader to question the distinctions between reality and fantasy” (132). Whether one interprets Mrs. Drover as a mentally disturbed character who hallucinates or as the victim of revenge, Bowen’s story reveals a larger uncertainty and the disruption of the safety of stable relationships (particularly Drover’s marriage) and understanding. The boundaries blur between what is understandable and what is incomprehensible, creating a mood of dislocation.

Bowen describes Kathleen Drover’s life after her fiancé went missing as “a complete dislocation from everything” (84). This dislocation is “relieved” in her courtship with William Drover: “She married him, and the two settled down in this quiet arboreal part of Kensington: in this house the years piled up, her children were born and they all live till they were driven out by the bombs of the next war” (84). As the bombs threaten their

⁴⁷ Hughes focusses on the disturbed mental state of Mrs. Drover, arguing that Bowen’s story “is a masterful dramatization of acute psychological delusion, of the culmination of paranoia in a time of war” (qtd. in Calder 91). Fraustino, while challenging some of Hughes’s claims, posits that “The Demon Lover” is a realistic murder story.

lives and cause the Drovers to leave their home, the apparent reappearance of K. threatens the life Kathleen Drover has created in her role as wife and mother. The security of the life she has known is ultimately undermined by the mysterious letter. Bowen refuses to clarify the details of the narrative – Who sent the letter? Who drives the taxi? – leaving the reader with a sense of ambiguity and senselessness. Bowen employs this kind of senselessness in other stories, notably “The Cheery Soul.” The unnamed narrator, invited to spend Christmas with a family, arrives to find only a resentful aunt, who has no idea where the rest of the family are and “speaks in innuendoes” (Lassner 68), and a note, “I AM NOT HERE. To this was added, in brackets: ‘Look in the fish kettle’” (57). The house is hardly decorated – “Only a row of discreet greeting-cards (few with pictures) along the top of a bureau betrayed the presence of Christmas. There was no holly, and no pieces of string” (52). Lassner argues that Bowen uses the holiday season to create an even greater sense of disconnectedness. At Christmas “the dislocations of war intensifies [sic] a need for human connectedness, a sense of belonging” (67).

“The Cheery Soul” breaks down the expected relationship between two familiar features in British fiction: the host and weekend guest⁴⁸ and the detective and the mystery. Bowen uses the motif of the guest to disturb and upset what should be an obvious relationship – the responsibilities and obligations between the host and the guest. If one is invited to spend the weekend, there are certain expectations about her hosts. The most remedial of these expectations, of course, is that the host is present. The narrator cannot understand why his hosts are not at home and is left, along with the reader, confused and uncertain: “The Rangerton-Karneys’ absence from their own house was becoming,

⁴⁸ This is especially frequent in novels that have upper-class characters and feature British estate homes, such as the novels of Evelyn Waugh and P.G. Wodehouse.

virtually, ostentatious” (53). Bowen also calls into question the relationship of detective and mystery when her narrator assumes the role of detective in order to figure out what is going on. When the narrator discovers another note: “Mr. & the 2 Misses Rangerton-Kareny can boil their heads. This holds 3” (57), he becomes a detective and tries to solve the mystery of the note. Though the narrator attempts to investigate, there is no clear sense of what the mystery is. Lassner argues that the story reveals “the discordance between language and meaning” (68). Mysteries cannot be solved if the clues defy sense. As with “The Demon Lover,” no explanation is offered and no real sense is made of the events. Bowen uses this feeling of uncertainty masterfully in her stories, whether uncertainty of events, motives or details of the plot. The uncertainty and ambiguity in *The Demon Lover* stories could have lent to the development of British film noir.

I have previously outlined the importance of the city in film noir and shown how Carol Reed and Jules Dassin use the rubble of the city to create a sense of disunity and space for criminals to operate. Bowen’s use of the residential areas of London intensifies this idea of disunity and unfamiliarity. Bowen frequently sets her stories in abandoned, deserted, and bombed-out neighbourhoods of London. Even the safety and comfort of home have been disrupted by the war. “The Demon Lover” and “The Cheery Soul” are set in houses. Mrs. Drover, for example, goes to her shut-up house specifically to check the condition of her home: “There were some cracks in the structure left by the last bombing on which she was anxious to keep an eye” (81). The Rangerton-Kareny home is rendered disturbing and disconcerting by the condition in which the narrator finds the house. The opening paragraph of “In the Square” emphasizes the bleakness, neglect, abandonment, and isolation that accompanied the evacuation:

At about nine o'clock on this hot bright July evening the square looked mysterious: it was completely empty, and a whitish reflection, ghost of the glare of midday, came from the pale-coloured facades on its four sides and seemed to brim it up to the top. The grass was parched in the middle; its shaved surface was paid for by people who had gone. ... Elsewhere, the painted front doors under the balconies and at the tops of steps not whitened for some time stood out in the deadness of colour with light off it. Most of the glassless windows were shuttered or boarded up, but some framed hollow inside dark. (7)

Bowen uses the language of lifelessness and death to describe these homes: the empty square, the dead grass, the neglected steps, and the deadened colour. The final sentence suggests that the houses' non-shuttered windows are almost skull-like. Houses and homes in these stories are not places of warmth, comfort and safety, but rather places of confusion, uncertainty, and mystery. Rather than simply portraying bombed-out buildings, many of Bowen's stories defamiliarize homes and houses. Houses are boarded up or divided or shared with strangers. By defamiliarizing residential dwellings in this way, Bowen's characters find themselves in classic noir situations, situations that defy logic and sense. Mysteries are not explained, plots are not resolved, and narratives end without a sense of resolution. Bowen's use of London space, particularly the abandoned residential areas of the city, could have created an important layer to the sense of dislocation found in British film noir. Bowen's use of British characters could have allowed film noir to deal more directly with the British fears and concerns without displacing or subverting them. Since film noir relies on such uncertainty, Bowen's stories of life in wartime Britain could have provided a solid foundation for further developments of a unique British film noir.

In thinking about British film noir, it is important to consider how the style of film noir is used to comment on the circumstances of contemporary post-war Britain. Rather than simply copying the plots and characters of American film noir, British film noir revisions American film noir to dramatize British anxieties and fears, like Britain's loss of prominence, the fear of increased American presence in world politics, and questions about social stability. British film noir does not have the volume of American film noir, but it is interesting to examine its development and speculate on how it could have continued to develop. By remembering that American film noir developed from American literature, I suggest that the wartime short stories of Elizabeth Bowen show that these themes of alienation, senselessness, and dislocation had already materialized in literature. Rather than adapting the stories of Elizabeth Bowen – who could have been, I think it is not an overstatement, as influential a figure in British noir as James M. Cain or Raymond Chandler – these films present galvanizing Americans who risk, fail, and destabilize society. This displacement allows Britain access to film noir. In the films, the weight of moral degradation falls to Americans. They destabilize our understanding of traditional moral investments and display the excess and anarchy of film noir. In addition to portraying British fears about position, dislocation, and social instability, *The Third Man* and *Night and the City* use the important film noir setting of the city to further foreground these questions. Through the use of the bombed-out buildings, the ancient city of London, with its iconic structures and architecture, becomes unfamiliar and creates space for the American protagonists to disrupt and disturb the stability of British society.

Chapter Four:
Adapting Dickens:
Orphans, Parents,
and Post-war Britain

*But you may dismiss me from your mind and conscience.
But Estella is a different case, and if you can ever undo
any scrap of what you've done amiss, in keeping part of
her right nature away from her, it will be better to do
that than to bemoan the past through a hundred years.*

~ Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations*

*Probably very little that was new in psychological theory
came out of the evacuation experience, but there is little
doubt that because of it things became known to very large
numbers of people who would otherwise have remained ignorant.*

~ D.W. Winnicott

In his 1944 essay “Dickens, Griffith and Film Today,” Russian filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein declares the Dickensian novel to be especially cinematic because of “Dickens’s creation of an extraordinary plasticity. The observation in the novels is extraordinary – as is their optical quality. The characters of Dickens are rounded with means as plastic and slightly exaggerated as are the screen heroes of today” (303). Early cinema produced many Dickens adaptations, 71 films, both short and feature length released between 1896 and 1946. Most of these films originated from the major English-speaking film-producing countries, Britain and the United States.⁴⁹ In his chapter “Dickens – our contemporary,”

⁴⁹ Russia produced *Sverchok na pechi* (1915), based on the holiday story “The Cricket on the Hearth.” *Oliver Twist* was adapted in Hungary, as *Twist Olivér* (1919), and in Germany, as *Die Geheimnisse von London - Die Tragödie eines Kindes* (1920). Germany also adapted *Little Dorrit* (*Klein Dorrtje*) in 1917.

Jeffrey Richards explains Dickens's relevance to 20th-century audiences: "Dickens's mastery of melodrama and comedy, his gallery of unforgettable characters, his broad canvas, his social conscience and his sentimentality made a wide appeal to a wide audience, not just in his books but in adaptations of them first for the stage and later for the screen ... Dickens's universality became clear as the cinema took him up and each generation reinvented him to make him 'our contemporary'" (*Film and British National Identity* 328, 331).

Between 1946 and 1951, there was a renewed interest in Dickens in British cinema, which Jeffrey Richards calls "the period of Gothic Dickens" (340). However, James Chapman states in "God Bless Us Everyone: Movie Adaptations of *A Christmas Carol*," "The post-war years had witnessed a renewed interest in Dickensian adaptations in British cinema, but they were very different from their pre-war forebears, being more lavishly mounted, visually exciting and darker in tone" (20). Four notable Dickensian adaptations were produced by three separate studios: Cineguild produced both David Lean's *Great Expectations* (1946) and *Oliver Twist* (1948); Ealing Studios produced Alberto Cavalcanti's *Nicholas Nickleby* (1947); and George Minter Productions produced Brian Desmond Hurst's *Scrooge* (1951). These four films, along with George Cukor's *David Copperfield* (1935), are considered to be the most artistically successful adaptations of Dickens's work ever filmed. The four British films share certain visual connections that create the impression of cohesion across the films. All four use black and white cinematography, relying on contrasting light and shadows as a means of creating mood, which Richards and Chapman suggest is the influence of "film noir with its chiaroscuro lighting and expressionist shadows" (Chapman 21). Several actors appear in two or more of

the four films.⁵⁰ Although the two adaptations by David Lean are often examined together, Jeffrey Richards connects the four films briefly within the larger framework of Dickens adaptations. However, no one has examined the shared themes or visual style among this group of films. In *Narrative Film*, David A. Cook places these films within the “traditional staple of British cinema – literary adaptations” (567). But is there something more that connects these four Dickens adaptations? What aspects of Dickens’s narratives did the filmmakers think would appeal to British post-war audiences?

Richards addresses the societal concerns of individual films in his examination of the larger framework of Dickensian adaptations, suggesting, for example, that the economic concerns of Hurst’s *Scrooge* speak to new economic realities of post-war Britain, such as rationing, while previous British adaptations of the novella were more likely to address concerns of empire.⁵¹ Like Richards, I think there is an important connection between these films and the immediate post-war period in which they were made. Richards looks at various contemporary social issues that are unique to each film, arguing that these films “construct an image of the Victorian era as something dark, fearful, oppressive and about to be eliminated by the Labour Party’s welfare system” (341). I shall examine one common thematic concern that both ties these four films both together and to the period

⁵⁰ Most notably Alec Guinness, Ivor Barnard and Francis L. Sullivan (*Great Expectations* and *Oliver Twist*); Bernard Miles (*Great Expectations* and *Nicholas Nickleby*); Kathleen Harrison (*Oliver Twist* and *Scrooge*); Roddy Hughes (*Nicholas Nickleby* and *Scrooge*); Peter Bull (*Oliver Twist* and *Scrooge*) and Hattie Jacques (*Nicholas Nickleby*, *Oliver Twist*, and *Scrooge*).

⁵¹ Richards notes that the British *Scrooge* (1935) “stresses the essential social cohesion of the nation, intercutting between the Lord Mayor’s Christmas banquet and the beggars in the street feeding on scraps scavenged from the kitchens. But all join in singing ‘God Save the Queen’ ” (336-37).

when they were made: the welfare of children. All four films reflect post-war Britain's concern about neglected children.

Throughout World War II, 827,000 British children were evacuated from major urban centres to rural areas in order to escape the German bombings. As social researcher Richard Titmus observed, "Not until over three years had passed was it possible to say that the enemy had killed more soldiers than women and children" (qtd. in Calder 226). Apart from the immediate dangers from the German bombing campaign, Calder identifies other "sinister statistics" that reveal a disturbing level of child endangerment that was the result of "the nervous and physical strain on the adult population":

More infants than usual were suffocated in their cots, or choked on their food; more fatal accidents befell children in their homes; though there were fewer cars on the road, those that remained killed more children than in peacetime; more children drowned, notably in emergency water tanks. (226)

Some people considered the moving of children from heavily populated urban areas to less populated rural areas to be a benefit. As Calder notes, "evacuation, it was often argued at the time, was basically good education, even if it led to bad formal schooling" (49). In a BBC radio address on the topic of homecoming, D.W. Winnicott comments on "some curious people – optimists, I suppose – who heralded evacuation as something that would bring new life to the poor children of the cities. They could not see evacuation as a great tragedy, so they looked at it as one of the hidden blessings of the war" (50). Despite such claims that evacuation would be beneficial for some children, many British psychologists and psychiatrists, most notably Winnicott himself, concluded that even the necessary removal of children, especially young children, from the care of their parents

could have serious repercussions on the development of those children. Consequently, he believed, a large percentage of evacuated children had trouble remembering their real parents and their pre-war lives in the city once they returned home. In “Home Again,” a 1945 broadcast talk to parents, Winnicott refers to a nine-year-old boy who “has spent a great deal of his young life away from his London home. When he heard about the return of the evacuees because of the end of the war, he started thinking things out, getting used to the idea and making plans. Suddenly he announced, ‘When I am home in London I shall get up early every morning and milk the cows’” (40).

The British worried about how children who had been evacuated would develop into adulthood and whether parents and the social system could raise these children. The Dickens novels provide fruitful source material for stories about neglected children and cruel or ineffectual parental figures.⁵² In British society, these concerns are addressed most clearly in the groundbreaking psychoanalytic work of D.W. Winnicott, as well as that of the Sub-Committee of the Women’s Group on Public Welfare’s 1946-47 “Study on the Neglected Child,” which came out of the government-sponsored Curtis Report. All four Dickens films concern children who are abandoned, orphaned and/or neglected by parents and parental figures. There is also a sustained scrutiny of unfit parental figures: either “weak” parental figures, who, however kind and loving, are ultimately unable to adequately care for, or protect, their children, or “negligent” parental figures, who are ruthless, abusive, and cruel.⁵³ In choosing to adapt these particular Dickensian narratives, the

⁵² I have opted for the term “parental figures” as it more accurately represents the characters we encounter. Not all are literal parents, but rather surrogate or substitute parents: uncles, sisters, grandparents, teachers, workhouse administration.

⁵³ The Sub-Committee of the Women’s Group on Public Welfare defines “cruelty” as “deliberate physical ill-treatment. Neglect has been interpreted widely as failure to make

filmmakers foreground concern for children and reflect the growing distrust and distance between adults and youth.

In his preface to the Women's Group on Public Welfare's 1946-7 study, *The Neglected Child and His Family*, J.B. Priestley calls the issue of child neglect "appallingly complicated" (ix). Indeed, many of the post-war concerns about the welfare and well-being of children are rooted in the war and the complicated issue of wartime evacuations of urban centres. In 1944-45, the National Society dealt with 107,312 children for the Protection of Cruelty to Children (*Neglected Child* 13). The study asserts that the war was

responsible for an increase in child-neglect, though it appears rather to have aggravated causes which already existed than to have provided new ones. The blitz made bad houses hopeless, and women who may have kept dust and dirt within bounds before the war gave up the struggle when walls cracked and the peculiar smell of fallen rubble invaded every room. Repairs which might have been done were indefinitely postponed. Shelter life and loss of sleep were enough to daunt the most valiant housewife... Bombing, too, interfered with school attendance, and the regular pattern of life which school imposes. Shift work and long working hours broke up the family. (69)

The evacuation, while not considered a cause of parental neglect or cruelty, was viewed as detrimental to children's development:

Some people felt that children back from the country tended at first to wander or be unmanageable, and difficulties arose because they had become strangers to their parents. Several disturbing cases have received publicity where the child in a

adequate provision for the physical, emotional, and intellectual needs of a child" (*Neglected Child* 16).

family, on return from evacuation, with higher standards and better manners than were current in her own home surroundings, has been singled out by the mother for cruel treatment, which may mirror the latter's feelings of resentment and inferiority.

(69)

Winnicott addresses the anxiety felt by parents of evacuated children because these parents, like their children, are limited in their ability to "keep alive the idea of someone he [sic] loves without contact with that person ... They soon [begin] to feel the doubts about their children, to have feelings that they were in danger, or that they were ill or sad or even being ill-treated, quite apart from any justification for thinking these things" (45).

Winnicott ties these unjustified, but powerful, emotions to the city mother's latent feelings of worthlessness, suggesting that mothers who relinquish their children, even in the midst of an immediate danger, do so with a sense of their own inability to care for them:

The city mother is asked, advised, and indeed pressed to give up her children. Often she feels bullied into compliance, not being able to see that the harshness of the demand comes from the reality of the danger of bombs. A mother can be surprisingly sensitive to criticism; so powerful is the latent sense of guilt about the possession of children (or of anything so valuable for that matter) that the idea of evacuation first tends to make a mother unsure of herself and willing to do whatever she is told regardless of her own feelings. One can almost hear her saying, "Yes, of course take them away, I was never really worthy of them: air raids are not the only danger, it is my own self that fails to provide them with the home they ought to have." It will be understood that she does not consciously feel all this, she only feels confused or stunned.

(Winnicott 32)

One Mass Observation account records one mother's feeling of uncertainty about her decision to keep one of her children at home, believing that no one would be able to see to the child's special diet as well as she could. While the mother admits that keeping the child at home will allow her to prepare the child's specialized diet, she also recognizes that in keeping the child, she is potentially placing her in danger, which reveals a more overt sense of unworthiness. The mother acknowledges, according to Winnicott, that she can only protect the child *to a degree*, but feels that no one else can protect the child any better. She sets the child, and the child's needs, in a place of utmost importance – no one can give the child the quality of care the child deserves, not any the mother.

Connected to this parental anxiety about worth was the guilt about the freedom that life without children afforded: "The effect of the war most frequently commented on by witnesses was the 'good time' mother, who went out with soldiers and frequented public houses and dance halls at night, leaving the children alone for hours. This occurred in all classes of the community, and there was noticeably an increase in irresponsibility of the better-class mother" (*Neglected Child* 69-70).

In the years following the war, there was a sharp rise in reported incidents of child neglect and cruelty (*Neglect Child* 70), suggesting that during the years that these Dickens adaptations were being made, the British public was, more than ever, aware of child neglect:

Of the 37,474 cases dealt with in eleven months (1946-47) by the N.S.P.C.C., nearly two thirds (23,430) were classified as suffering from neglect, 3,241 from ill-treatment and assault, and the remainder were listed under 'exposure, begging, corruption of morals, abandonment and other wrongs.'

(Neglected Child 17)

The report also refers to the many rumoured and, in their opinion, unsubstantiated, incidents being reported by the British media, such as reports of parents not wanting their children back after the evacuation ended. In this environment of anxiety about absence and abandonment, the British government produced the Curtis Report, which “served to focus public attention on the question of the child deprived of ordinary home life, whose family life for one reason or another has been broken, or whose home is considered by the Court to be so inadequate or so harmful that in the child’s own interest he must be removed from it” (*Neglected Child* 13).

In the chapter “Reconstituting the Family” in *British Cinema of the Fifties*, Christine Geraghty argues that post-war British cinema shows a notable concern with the condition of children: “Children are everywhere in post-war British cinema. They play on the bomb sites and the empty streets; they get lost, make unsuitable friends, go to school and are attended to in hospitals and children’s homes” (133). Geraghty’s study is (mostly) limited to films of the 1950s. However, even in the first few years after the war, a number of films examine the place of children. Films as diverse as Charles Crichton’s *Hue and Cry* (1947) and Carol Reed’s *The Fallen Idol* (1948) suggest a growing division between children and adults in post-war society that speaks to the increased distrust children had for their parents who had sent them away. Having been sent away, children had a very different experience of the war. In *The Fallen Idol*, which I have suggested earlier as an example of British film noir, Phillipe reveals Baines’s affair with Julie to Mrs. Baines quite innocently, having failed to understand of the nature of the illicit relationship. Despite the mutual affection between Phillipe and Baines, they are divided by both age and experience.

This divide between the child and the adult world is dramatized when Phillipe finds Baines and Julie in a small café in the middle of an emotional conversation. Phillipe's presence necessitates that the adults code their conversation about their impending separation. The boy, oblivious to what Baines and Julie are really talking about, sits between them, occasionally interrupting to ask for something to eat. Phillipe is, therefore, not only distanced from Baines and Julie by not understanding their conversation, but he is also distanced from the audience, who understands the weight of the lovers' conversation. The audience recognizes the affair and Phillipe's inability to correctly interpret what he sees. Later, after Mrs. Baines' death, Phillipe again misunderstands the adult situation he finds himself in, which nearly results in Baines's being charged with his wife's murder.

In Charles Crichton's *Hue and Cry*, the first of the famous Ealing comedies, a group of children and teenagers uncover a criminal plot that uses a popular comic strip to pass information about robberies between members of a crime syndicate. The distance between children and adults is depicted by the adults' skepticism. Those few adults not involved in any criminal activity either do not believe the young people's story or are too frightened to act. Without the help of adults, the children must act on their own. At the end of the film there is no indication that the divide between the adults and the children has been or can be mended. Children have a separate, marginal culture. The final scene suggests a more overtly antagonistic relationship, as thousands of children from all over London descend upon the adult criminals.

As the British welfare state became increasingly aware of the needs of children, the issue of how best to raise children became "a subject of much study, to which sociologists, psychologists and educationalists all contributed" (139). As Geraghty acknowledges British

cinema's tendency to deal with social issues "indirectly," she confines her examination of children in post-war cinema to films with contemporary settings: a Gainsborough melodrama *They Were Sisters* (1945) and the domestic comedies of Sidney and Muriel Box. I see the Dickensian adaptations as being equally concerned with society's anxieties about what to do with, and how to raise, post-war children.

Great Expectations

David Lean had much to prove with *Great Expectations*, his first film without long-time collaborator, Noel Coward. Lean had directed all the films he made with Coward, and had, along with Ronald Neame, adapted Coward's theatrical source material to film, but the name people recognized was Noel Coward's. In *The Cinema of David Lean*, Gerald Pratley explains that more than just personal reputation was at stake, suggesting, rather poetically, that Lean carried the reputation of the British film industry: "Critics asked whether or not British film-makers, bereft of the impetus of war, could go on making films to excite the admiration of the world and place truth before simple fiction" (62). Pratley argues that in striking out on his own, Lean deliberately abandoned the post-war concerns of Britain: "there had been enough drabness, tragedy and heartache during the war years. Here was a form of intelligent escapism rooted in British character, tradition and literary achievement" (67). However, when examined in light of the attention post-war British society gave to questions of child-rearing and the overall condition of children, *Great Expectations* becomes very much a product of the time in which it was made, and its concerns prove to be the concerns of post-war Britain.

Great Expectations was well received by both critics and audiences, and marks a significant transition in David Lean's development as a filmmaker. In America, *New York*

Times critic Bosley Crowther declared the film to be, “screen storytelling at its best.” In England, Leslie C. Staples “pronounced the new film ‘a worthy transcription of a great book’ ” while praising the “stellar cast of British actors, lauding in particular Alec Guinness, reprising his 1940 stage role of Herbert Pocket” (qtd. in Allingham). As one reviewer, in what has become a much-repeated summation of the film, claimed, “What Olivier did for Shakespeare on the screen, Lean has done for Dickens” (qtd. in Pratley 63).

Lean begins *Great Expectations* by emphasizing Pip’s loneliness and status as orphan, stressing the child’s lack of familial connections and presenting a series of inadequate parent-substitutes. In a particularly literary introduction, the adult Pip (John Mills) narrates directly from the opening of Dickens’s novel: “My father’s family name being Pirrip, and my Christian name Philip, my infant tongue could make of both names nothing longer or more explicit than Pip. So, I called myself Pip, and came to be called Pip.” As Pip abandons both his father’s surname and his own given name, he challenges the expected relation between child and parent. Parents name their children, both through the given name, which is chosen, and the surname, which is traditionally not chosen. The surname identifies the bearer with a particular family. Pip’s lack of a proper surname and invented given name coheres with forced solitude.

To demonstrate this loneliness visually after Mills’s introductory narration: a fierce wind blows pages of the book and the image dissolves into a long shot of the desolate marshes in a scene that Michael A. Anderegg calls “both more and less rich than the [original] Dickens passage” (41). In the distance Pip (Anthony Wager) runs along the path by himself. The camera keeps Pip too far away and too hidden by shadows to be clearly visible in the centre of the frame. In this flat, lifeless environment, only Pip shows any sign

of life. The only comparable objects are the two ominous gibbets, symbolic of death: “the first, in the distance, seems to impend doom (which for Pip is the imminent manifestation of Magwitch); the second, intruding in the right foreground of the frame, is more obviously a man-made object which graphically ruptures the natural pattern” (Silver and Ursini 55). The shadowy, inhospitable environment suggests Pip’s endangerment and isolation. When Pip arrives at the churchyard to visit his parents’ grave, these flat, lifeless marshes give way to the claustrophobic churchyard, with broken fences, leafless branches, knotted trees and stones overgrown with vines. Pip walks to the tombstone and replaces a large weed with his a small bouquet of flowers. The wind picks up, frightening the young boy. His attention is drawn to his surroundings. There is no one there, but it is as though the environment comes to life, an interesting contrast with the previous scene in which nothing appeared to be alive. Pip turns to look at the trees, their branches swaying in the wind. Alone and frightened, Pip appears small and helpless. When he turns and runs into the arms of the convict, Magwitch, whose menacing figure further dwarfs him. Though Pip does not realize it at this point, this encounter will result in Magwitch’s attempt to act as father-figure to Pip. Pip’s kindness, however coerced, moves Magwitch to set Pip up as a gentleman.

Pip’s loneliness and abandonment are compounded by Magwitch’s threats of violence. It is noteworthy how much the film’s opening associates Pip with violence – first, Magwitch’s horrific and colourful story about his companion, and, second, Pip’s sister’s physical assault. The dark, ominous tombstone stands in for Pip’s parents. His parents are both present and absent in this scene. They reside in the churchyard, but are unable to comfort Pip or protect him from the inhospitable environment or the menacing

convict who threatens to slice Pip's throat and to have his "heart and liver out." The mention of Joe is fitting as it both anticipates his introduction in the next scene and suggests a connection to Magwitch. Both assumed parental roles in Pip's life, although neither character can adequately fulfill that role, because both men are represented as childlike and must themselves be "parented" by Pip.

Pip's identification of the tombstone as "being" his parents, as opposed to simply representing the place of their burial recalls William Wordsworth's "We Are Seven," in the child's perspective on death. In "We Are Seven" the adult speaker and a "little Cottage girl" debate the number of children in the girl's family because two of the children "in the church-yard lie / [b]eneath the church-yard tree" (31-32). While the adult insists that "[i]f two are in the church-yard / [t]hen ye are only five" (35-36), the girl is resolute in her belief that there are seven children. The child's innocent understanding of the world accepts the absent Jane and John as present because when she visits their graves she believes herself to be in their physical presence, despite their inability to participate in her activities. Unlike the "adult" rationalism of Wordsworth's speaker, Magwitch not only takes Pip's explanation of his mother at face value, in asking if Pip's father is "alongside her," but aligns himself with the child's understanding of death.

Joe Gargery's appearance and mannerisms also suggest both his inability to protect Pip and his own childlike qualities. After returning from the churchyard and the frightening encounter with the convict, Pip is met with the promise of violence and then an actual beating at the hands of his sister. Joe acts as a confidante, warning Pip of Mrs. Joe's search. Like the absent/present parents, Joe is helpless to prevent the assault and protect Pip. He can only tell Pip to hide behind the door and get the towel between him and the switch.

Lean shows Mrs. Joe beating Pip only for a few moments before panning to Joe, who winces with each blow. When Mrs. Joe finishes punishing Pip, she pushes the boy across the room to Joe's side and demands, "Get to the table! Both of you!" She punctuates her command by cracking Tickler, the switch she uses to punish Pip, against the table. Her order, directed equally at Pip and Joe, further emphasizes Joe's childishness – Mrs. Joe treats Joe as another child who must be told what to do and when to do it. Lean stresses the family dynamic through the framing of these shots: Mrs. Joe, the parent, "rampaging" on one side of the frame; Joe and Pip, the children, relatively still on the other side.

Magwitch and Joe blur the line between parent and child. Both characters have some claim to be a parental figure for Pip, but both are shown to be weak parental figures who later require Pip to look after them. Joe, when he arrives in London for a visit with Pip, appears out of place and "grotesque" in his new suit. The scene, which Silver and Ursini cite as an example of how pointedly Lean uses the comedy of Dickens's novel, "concludes with [Joe's] hat floating in Pip and Herbert's teapot, occasion[ing] some serious introspection by Pip" (60). There is something childlike in Joe's discomfort with his own appearance, as if he has been made to look "grown up," as a child dressed in formal clothes parodies adults. His manners and speech are also forced and uncomfortable. Pip, looking quite grown up and comfortable in his dressing gown, assumes the role of parent to Joe's child. When Joe "acts up," or, rather, fails to conduct himself as an adult, Pip attempts to discipline him. When the hat lands in the teapot, Joe tries to retrieve it, but Pip snatches it from him and gives him a scolding, disapproving look.

Despite Abel Magwitch's claims to be Pip's "second father" when he finally reveals himself to be Pip's benefactor, Magwitch has little actual claim to the title "parent." His

first name is itself a misnomer – he hardly proves to be “able” throughout the narrative of the film, despite achieving great success as a sheep farmer in New South Wales. His fortune allows Pip to move to London as a gentleman with many opportunities. Magwitch is both aware and proud of his part in making Pip a gentleman. Anderegg notes, “the odd delight he takes in having made Pip a gentleman is movingly palpable” (43). The easy access to Magwitch’s money and the lack of parental guidance succeed only in making Pip a snob. Anderegg points out that in Lean’s adaptation, Pip’s snobbery is directly linked to Magwitch’s “ready money” (45). Though Magwitch placed Pip under the legal guardianship of his lawyer, Jaggers, Pip is left to his own devices in London. Jaggers’s primary responsibility is the money and, as he tells Pip, he is well paid for his duties. He does not regard teaching or disciplining Pip to be part of those duties. In fact, he absolves himself from any part in Pip’s errors: “You’ll go wrong, of course, but that’s no fault of mine.” Risking imprisonment if he is found, Magwitch expects to have been warmly received by Pip, after making himself known, though clearly Pip wants even less to do with Magwitch than he did years earlier in the churchyard. Magwitch’s absentee parenting has made his own “second son” ashamed and afraid of him.

While nothing about his London upbringing prepares Pip for helping and caring for someone like Magwitch, Pip re-adopts the values of compassion and interest in others’ well-being that he learned from Joe. In this, Pip occupies a role between that of parent and child, as seen previously through his self naming. Magwitch’s return to London to claim the title of father to Pip results in his becoming the figurative child-adult to Pip’s adult-child. By returning to England, Magwitch places himself in danger of imprisonment. Though he went many years without parental care and discipline, Pip grows up into a

mature and responsible adult who selflessly cares for other people. In order to save Magwitch, who gave him so much, from imprisonment, Pip devises the plan to get Magwitch out of London and is willing to go to New South Wales. When that plan fails and Magwitch becomes ill, Pip continues to care for him, despite losing any hope of inheriting his money. In becoming a parent to Magwitch and recognizing responsibility, Pip manages to grow up himself.

The need to “grow up,” to accept responsibility, addresses the reality of the evacuated children’s situation. Being removed from parental authority and placed in the care of strangers forced many children to look after themselves. Authorities had intended to provide evacuated children with stable environments, but as Calder writes, so many children arrived at train stations to be transported that “they were marched into whatever trains happened to be waiting until these were filled, in many cases with little or no attempt to control their destinations” (37). In this chaos many children were forced “to grow up” and look after themselves, assuming the adult responsibilities of the parent because no one else could.

Oliver Twist

In Lean’s adaptation of Dickens’s second novel, *Oliver Twist*, the concerns of children and the inability of adults sufficiently to care for children are more obviously foregrounded than in the other post-war Dickensian adaptations. Lean “imagined *Great Expectations* as a fairy tale, just not quite true, and *Oliver Twist* as a grimly realistic study of what poverty was like at that time” (qtd. in Pratley 76). Unlike Pip in *Great Expectations*, Oliver does not grow into adulthood through the course of the narrative. He

remains a child throughout the narrative and finds himself under the influence of a number of unsuitable parental figures during his adventures.

Anderegg summarizes the plot of Lean's film: "Oliver escapes from one false family in another false family, briefly finds refuge with a "true" family, falls once again into the hands of the false family, and, finally, having in a sense helped to kill the false family, is reunited with his true family" (49). Anderegg anticipates my own argument by describing the communities in which Oliver finds himself as "families." However, in reducing the plot to the movement between false and true families, Anderegg fails to account for the circumstances of Oliver's "fall" back into the hands of the "false family" of pickpockets, or the role of other characters in "killing" that family, which Anderegg, no doubt, means figuratively, but which includes the brutal literal death of Nancy. As post-war Britain struggled with reconstituting families that had been broken up because of the war (either because of the evacuations or service) and finding a place for children, Dickens's *Oliver Twist* provides many opportunities to screen indirectly these societal anxieties about children and parenting, from the relatively safe distance of Victorian England. Because Oliver is such a passive character in his own story, being acted upon rather than acting, Lean's film is better read through an examination of these families and the specific parental figures connected to Oliver: Oliver's unnamed mother, Bumble and Fagin, and Mr. Brownlow. And although Oliver comes to reside with his true family, in the character of Mr. Brownlow, Lean includes enough questions about Brownlow's suitability as a parental figure to complicate the apparent happy ending of the film.

Lean opens the film with the circumstances of Oliver's birth and establishes both a weak parental figure and negligent parental figures: Oliver's mother and the workers at the

St. Michael's and All Angel's Parish Workhouse. In a scene that recalls Pip's journey to the churchyard, Oliver's mother, pregnant and ready to give birth, wanders along a desolate roadway, another solitary figure in an inhospitable landscape. Anderegg claims this "opening sequence graphically establishes the predominant style and mood of David Lean's *Oliver Twist*: a gothic atmosphere, evocative more of the Brontë sisters than of Dickens, and a situation that is the stuff of melodrama" (46). This landscape is made all the more sinister first by the storm clouds and then by the storm. Weakened from her condition and her journey, she spots the Parish Workhouse in the distance, an ominous building in rain and dark shadows. She almost collapses at the front gate. Lean further emphasizes her weakness by the lack of dialogue. She cannot even ask the attendant for help for herself. Once inside, she gives birth to the child who will later be named Oliver by Mr. Bumble, the Workhouse Beadle (Francis L. Sullivan), but she is too weak to care for him or even to name him.

As with Pip, Oliver's naming challenges conventions of naming children and reinforces his role as orphan. As his mother died before she could give the child either a Christian name or a family name, both "Oliver" and "Twist" were chosen by the parish beadle, Mr. Bumble. Bumble tells Mrs Corney that he invented the name: "I name all our foundlings in alphabetical order. The last was an S. Swabble I named him. This was a T. Twist I named him." Unlike Pip's name, which is a modification of his given name and surname, Twist's random surname hides his true parentage and the familial connections to Mr. Brownlow that would save him from the various hardships he must endure.

Oliver's mother is never named in the film. As he does not know her, we do not know her, either. The Workhouse Doctor who delivered Oliver reduces her story to exclude

any significance: “The old story. No wedding ring, I see.” Despite the very unusual necklace that Oliver’s mother wears, and which catches Mrs. Thingummy’s notice, the story of Oliver’s mother, as well as any significance that story might have, is undermined by the doctor’s pronouncement.

Mrs. Thingummy’s theft of Oliver’s mother’s necklace, the child’s only connection to his family, characterizes the hypocritical nature of staff at the Parish Workhouse, for all their proclamations that “God is Good,” “God is Just,” “God is Life,” and “God is Love.” s Mrs. Thingummy takes the crying infant down into the basement of the Workhouse, a title crystallizes this hypocrisy and names Oliver’s negligent Workhouse parents, who will continue to try to hold influence on his life, Bumble and Mrs. Corney: “Oliver Twist cried lustily. If he had known that he was going to grow up under the tender mercies of the Beadle and the Matron, he would have cried even louder.”

Mr. Bumble the Beadle and Mrs. Corney mask their true motives and characters with an artificial formality and politeness. Bumble and Mrs. Corney flirt innocently and display almost extravagant manners in their addresses to each other. Some examples of their genteel concern for each other are Mrs. Corney’s way of taking Bumble’s official stick and hat, their excessive use of the other’s name when speaking, and Mrs. Corney’s lengthy invitation to a drink (“Now, you mustn’t be faint at what I’m going to say. You’ve had a long walk, or I wouldn’t mention it. Will you take a little drop of something, Mr. Bumble?”) Though the title card suggests that these two are unfit to raise children, we first see evidence of their viciousness, particularly Mrs. Corney’s viciousness, when Bumble mentions Oliver’s name. At that instant all manners are forgotten. Mrs. Corney’s face turns stern: “He’s the worst disposed boy I ever did see.” The full significance of the duplicity

of their manners becomes apparent only after they are married and have little need for niceties and “appearances.” Mrs. Corney’s praises of Bumble turn to insults and abuse. Any sign of affection or care is merely an act. She reveals herself to be shrewd, cunning, and manipulative when hearing Mrs. Thingummy’s confession and during her interactions with Monks. Likewise, any power and authority Bumble displays in this scene give way to cowering and, as his name suggests, bumbling. Later, evidence of his bullying is seen when, thinking no one is looking, Bumble strikes one of the children in his care as he leaves the Workhouse.

This introduction to Bumble and Mrs. Corney and the scene that follows it juxtaposes the discrepancies between the way of life of the workers of the Workhouse and of the children of the workhouse. Though it could hardly be called opulent, Mrs Corney’s sitting house is quite comfortable and homey, with chairs and table for entertaining, and pictures (including a portrait of her late husband) adorning the walls. The cut to the Workhouse introduces both nine-year-old Oliver (John Howard Davies) and the poor conditions in which the Workhouse children are forced to live. There is a power dichotomy at work here: the privileged, the haves – the workhouse officials, represented by Bumble and Mrs. Corney; and the underprivileged, the have-nots – the orphans. The camera pans along a line of barefoot boys, on their knees scrubbing the floor. Their tattered clothes and dirty feet afford a striking contrast to the ornamental attire of Bumble, who takes Oliver to “be presented to the Board,” and to the ruffled finery of the Board members in the following scene. Lean shoots Oliver framed between the dark, opposing figures of Bumble and Mrs. Corney, who stand in the extreme foreground with their backs to the camera. This angle and positioning emphasize Oliver’s fragility and helplessness. Even as he walks

towards the camera – his open shirt revealing his pale, thin torso – Oliver is dwarfed by the two towering adults, as if he is only given as much of the frame as is absolutely necessary.

While Jeffrey Richards argues, quite rightly, that these post-war adaptations challenged idealistic representation of Victorian England and “restored the darkness to the Dickensian vision” (341), the state of these Workhouse children is also reminiscent of reports on poor evacuee children. The evacuation of British children from major urban centres to smaller rural areas not only exposed these children to a side of England they had not experienced, it also revealed to the adults who billeted these children the extent of poverty and deprivation in which many children lived, not always the result of the war. The evacuations served as a sort of wake-up call, exposing the poverty that existed in Britain. As D.W. Winnicott told the Medical Section of the British Psychological Society, “Probably very little that was new in psychological theory came out of the evacuation experience, but there is little doubt that because of it things became known to very large numbers of people who would otherwise have remained ignorant” (73).

Angus Calder records the shock that a leading member of Churchill’s government, Oliver Lyttelton, received at the conduct of the ten evacuee children who stayed at his country house: “I had little dreamt that English children could be so completely ignorant of the simplest rules of hygiene, and that they would regard the floors and carpets as suitable places upon which to relieve themselves” (41).⁵⁴ Calder also recounts the incidents of head lice, skin disease, and bedwetting reported by the Women’s Institutes. Some of the

⁵⁴ Calder refers to a study which “suggested that about five to ten percent of the evacuees may have lacked proper toilet training.” And because the evacuations took place during the school holiday, children did not have a routine medical inspection before they were moved. “Reports of school medical inspections before the war had suggested that about one child in six in London and one in five in Liverpool was lousy, though it was later suggested, with different statistical backing, that this was a very great underestimate” (43).

children's clothing "was in a deplorable condition, some of the children being sewn into their ragged little garments ... Condition of their boots and shoes – there was hardly a child with a whole pair and most of the children were walking on the ground – no soles, and just uppers hanging together" (42).

Lean contrasts the circumstances of the orphans and the adult workers throughout Oliver's time at the Workhouse. The Board, which is responsible for overseeing the development of orphaned children, is sadly out of touch with the realities of their workhouse, believing it "has become a place of entertainment for the poorer classes." Lean, of course, makes clear that such a notion is deeply ironic. The orphans' "abounding provision" is a single bowl of broth served from a single pot and a small crust of bread. They eat on bare wooden tables then watch enviously as the workers dine on roast beef, Yorkshire pudding and potatoes. These scenes and the ones that immediately follow play without dialogue. The orphans watch the workers eat, draw straws to determine who will ask for more food, and sit through their own meal without speaking. The next bit of dialogue is Oliver's timid request: "Please, sir, I want some more." The silence singles Oliver out and places all the audience's attention, and, later, all the workers' attention, on him. However, it also creates a sense of community, community through repression, between Oliver and the other orphans. Unable to speak and plan and organize, the orphans are forced to communicate with each other with glances and gestures. The natural sounds of childhood (laughter, shouting, even crying) are absent from the Workhouse. However unwillingly he plays his role as the boy who requests more food, Oliver represents all the orphans of the Workhouse. Lean visualizes this idea of community and individualism when Oliver draws the short straw. The frame is filled with boys anxiously watching each other

select a straw. When Oliver reveals his choice, the boys gasp audibly and run away. This foreshadows the way Oliver will be singled out for punishment and effectively sold off for £5 to any tradesman, though he acts for all the orphans. The community of orphans disintegrates swiftly when Oliver is punished.

Because the Workhouse parental figures do not enact any sort of Christian compassion and are unwilling to care sufficiently for the needs of these children, the orphans must try to look after themselves and look out for one another. They are not, however, successful, although their example anticipates the next group of children Oliver encounters. When Oliver heads to London, he falls in with another community of children, led by Fagin (Alec Guinness). Despite their more overtly criminal tendencies, this second community initially seems more stable and supportive, though, but soon reveals, like the dichotomy of privilege of the workhouse, another power relation between adults and children.

Calder points to a “sharp increase in convictions for juvenile delinquency” in the period of evacuation (225). With schooling erratic, children found themselves without supervision, and “[t]he number of young people under seventeen found guilty of breaking the law in England and Wales [rose] by over one-third between 1939 and 1941” (Calder 225). Winnicott speaks of “a great hole”(46), not only between parent and child, but between evacuated children and their new communities: “Children from bombed areas did not just go about looking exactly like the local children, and joining them in playing; they tended to keep apart” (Winnicott 41). In place of establishing a connection or relationship to surrogate parental figures or friends or their new communities, many evacuated children

remained cut off from their billets, living on letters and packages from home. Winnicott identifies this isolation as one of the causes of delinquency.

Lean echoes Oliver's Workhouse experience in his experience with Fagin's community. When the Artful Dodger asks if Oliver is hungry, it recalls Oliver's unsuccessful attempt to get more food at the Workhouse. As Oliver first begins to follow the Artful Dodger, Lean evokes the stairs at the Workhouse. In the Workhouse, characters seem to be continually descending staircases, as if the Workhouse itself goes deeper and deeper into the ground as the rooms get darker. In the Workhouse, Oliver also always seems to be going down sets of stairs, as if the hellish location is indicative of the staff's inhuman treatment of Oliver and the other children. When the Dodger and Oliver descend the first staircase, Lean creates a similar feeling of dread, which he quickly contrasts when the Dodger takes Oliver by the hand and leads him up a set of stairs. Lean emphasizes the importance of this directional shift by including a close-up tracking shot of the stairs themselves, along with close-ups of Oliver's confused face. At the top of the first staircase lies a man passed out, whom the Dodger and Oliver step over on their way up the next staircase. The music swells as the Dodger leads Oliver across the bridge that connects two buildings. Beneath the towering dome of St Paul's, Oliver tentatively follows into the rooms where he is introduced to Fagin.

Oliver's introduction into the "family" of pickpockets recalls Oliver's earlier interview with the Workhouse Board, to suggest why Oliver believes his situation improved. The interview with the Board, with its formality and judicial overtones, is here replaced with informality and inclusion. Oliver is not made to stand, as prisoner in the dock, apart from Fagin or the other boys while he is questioned. Fagin leads Oliver to the

table for a meal, where everyone sits together. When Oliver does not know what a “beak” is, Fagin explains the expression to him without insult or reproach, unlike the workhouse Board, which labels Oliver a fool when he does not know what an orphan is or his own birthday. At the heart of these two scenes is the issue of Oliver’s education, or, as the Chair of the Board states, teaching the boy “a useful trade.” Under the authority of Bumble and the Board, Oliver is first taught to pick oakum – a job characterized by monotony – then, after being sold to Sowerberry, he learns undertaking – a job wholly associated with death. Under Fagin, Oliver learns to pick gentlemen’s pockets.

Lean also contrasts two the authority figures: Bumble and Fagin. At first, Lean’s vision of Fagin strikes a stark contrast to Bumble. As the Dodger leads Oliver into the rooms where the “family” of pickpockets lives, Fagin is positioned in the shadows, behind the table of boys surveying Oliver. He has his back to us, and, until the Dodger approaches him for his assessment of the new boy, is hardly visible. Lean’s revelation of Fagin is striking. He cuts to a medium close-up as Fagin turns. His appearance – long hair and beard, sharp features, a slight curl of smile – is at once sinister and comical. In comparison to the Workhouse, Oliver appears to be in a more stable, less menacing environment. Fagin does not have Bumble’s physically imposing figure. Stoop-shouldered, almost frail, Fagin stands at almost the same height as the children. He does not dominate the frame as Bumble does. He is often situated with the other children, as opposed to against them.⁵⁵ His interactions with the boys are not stiff or formal as the Beadle’s were and his boys are not frightened into silence. They laugh and joke with each other and with Fagin. In

⁵⁵ Lean regularly depicts Bumble accompanying and displaying Oliver, as if the child were an object. He takes Oliver to stand before the Board and later to be inspected by the Sowerberrys.

demonstrating the art of pickpocketing to Oliver, Fagin turns crime into a pantomime, making himself appear foolish and outwitted, and amuses young Twist.

In his ability to be funny and serious, Fagin shows a remarkable adaptability as a parental figure. He slips effortlessly into various parental guises as the mood or situation requires: strong disciplinarian, easygoing father. Fagin's humour makes him a more sympathetic figure than the humourless Bumble. Humour is almost always restorative, and, by making his audience (both the boys and the film's audience) laugh, he is a slightly more promising parental figure than the rigid Bumble. Despite a selfishness that results in his eventual downfall, Fagin shows, through his ability to adapt his parenting style, that he *could* effectively parent the boys in his care or, at the very least, not alienate the boys.

As Bumble and Mrs. Corney quickly reveal their true characters, Fagin, by degrees, reveals his brutal, menacing side: first, in taking money to let Monks spy on the sleeping Oliver, then when he reacts ferociously to the discovery that Oliver is awake and has seen the box of jewellery he has hidden away from the other boys. Fagin stands from the table where he has been examining his hidden jewellery and asks, "Why are you awake?" Before Oliver can answer, Fagin rushes over to where Oliver sits on the floor. "Speak up, boy, quick!" The old thief stands over the wide-eyed boy in a visual display of power reminiscent of Bumble's towering frame. Once he is satisfied that Oliver has not seen Monks, Fagin resumes his more jovial demeanour. He smiles and says, "Tsk, tsch, my dear," as he lowers himself down to Oliver's position on the floor. "I only tried to frighten you." He explains that the "pretty things" Oliver saw are all he has "to live on in his old age." Fagin continues to assert his kindly, jovial identity by resuming the game of pickpocketing and telling Oliver what a great man he will grow up to be. However, when Fagin feels

threatened of being “blowed upon,” the almost comical mannerisms that amused and attracted Oliver are as unreliable as the formal manners of Bumble and Mrs. Croney.

The presence of Sikes, an associate and former pickpocket of Fagin’s, further reveals Fagin’s manipulative side as well as demonstrating the consequences of a lost childhood. Bill Sikes is often cited as the cruellest character in the film,⁵⁶ a figure without remorse or sympathy. Sikes is also a product of Fagin’s parenting, a former child pickpocket under Fagin’s care. This connection is quite noteworthy, given the film’s preoccupation with questions of child rearing. Sikes is the adult whom the neglected pickpockets will grow into – brutal, violent and murderous. Lean shows hints of Sikes’s demeanour in the Artful Dodger when Fagin turns fierce after Oliver’s arrest, suggesting the type of adult the Dodger will become. Before the Dodger can even answer questions about Oliver’s whereabouts, Fagin threatens violence, first brandishing his knife, then grabbing the Dodger by the collar and shaking him: “Speak or I’ll throttle you.” When the Dodger slips out of his coat, he and Fagin continue their fight. The Dodger’s admission that Oliver was arrested only fuels Fagin’s rage. The Dodger’s face contorts in anger. He attempts to hold Fagin off, first with a toasting fork, then, when Fagin disarms him and moves towards the club, the Dodger grabs the club and heads for the door. Fagin hurls a pot at the Artful Dodger’s head. A few moments later, we see this same look of rage on Sikes’s face when Fagin explains how Oliver’s arrest could affect him. At first Sikes is dismissive about the boy’s arrest - “Well, what of it?” Fagin explains, “I’m afraid, you see, if the

⁵⁶ While Lean softens some of Fagin’s sinister nature and Bumble’s violence, Michael A. Anderegga states that for the role of Sikes, Robert Newton “lets out all the stops... squinting one eye and shaking with anger in his best melodramatic manner. And the effect, somehow, is just right: Bill Sikes is both malevolent and comic (but not funny – one does not laugh at Sikes), a frightening, eccentric figure” (58).

game was up with us, it'll be up for a good many more. It would come out rather worse for you than it would for me."

Critical opinions of Mr. Brownlow, Oliver's grandfather and final parental figure, tend to suggest an uncomplicated reading of the character. Hardly a figure to stand out alongside such figures as Bumble, Sikes, and Fagin, Mr. Brownlow is often taken at face value, the kindly old man who is reunited with his lost grandson. Silver and Ursini suggest that "Lean combines all the 'do-gooders' into one, the person of Mr. Brownlow," a character that Dickens created

to exonerate much of Victorian England very neatly in the person of Mr. Brownlow, Oliver's grandfather. He is the principal agent of destruction for the Fagin-Sikes-Monks ring. In bringing the insidious Monks to justice and in demoting the workhouse tyrant, Mr. Bumble, the members of Victorian society could identify with this avenging angel and, thereby, relieve whatever guilt that may have had.

(82, 80)

Anderegg suggests that bright light assumes symbolic force in *Oliver Twist*, remarking on Lean's use of light to suggest cheerfulness when Oliver first wakes up at Mr. Brownlow's house to contrast the dark world of Fagin and his accomplices. However, Anderegg does not mention that when we first see Oliver at Mr. Brownlow's house it is night time: the curtains are drawn, and Mrs. Bedwin knits by the low burning fire as Brownlow and Dr Grimwig enter the room to inspect the sleeping child. The implication seems clear: even "true" families are not completely immune to the darkness of the "false."

Though Brownlow cares for Oliver and wishes to protect him from harm, idealizing Brownlow undermines the complexity of his character and the weight of Lean's ending. In

our introduction to Brownlow, Lean clearly shows him to be well meaning but ineffectual. Both at the scene of Oliver's arrest and in the police court, Brownlow tries to get the charges dropped. His concern for the boy's well-being is mocked and ridiculed. Despite Brownlow's protests, Oliver is charged and taken into custody. In the court, Brownlow's appeals to have the case dropped, his request for mercy and his observations about Oliver's condition are ignored by the judge. Later, when Oliver asks Mr. Brownlow if he is going to be sent away, Brownlow tells him, "No, my dear, I'm not going to send you away *unless you give me cause*" (emphasis mine). The full weight of this sentence is alluded to when, almost immediately after Brownlow speaks, Oliver's attention turns to the portrait of his own mother hanging on the wall. This is a clear reminder to us that there are still unanswered questions both about her story and about Brownlow's parenting abilities. Was she turned out of her home by Mr. Brownlow? Was he responsible for her ill-fated trek to the Workhouse in the storm?

Finally, Lean implicates Brownlow as being primarily responsible for Oliver's recapture by Fagin and associates, and partially responsible for the death of Nancy. It is Brownlow, after being goaded by his friend Dr. Grimwig, who sends Oliver to return the books which results in his being taken. In an attempt to prove that Oliver is trustworthy, Brownlow sends him on an errand that endangers his life. When Nancy arranges the meeting with Brownlow, she takes great care to avoid being followed, although Brownlow waits in the open, holding a large, conspicuous umbrella. Nancy not only recognizes the dangerous situation she has placed herself in, she explains this situation to Brownlow, who responds to her fears of being murdered not with promises of protection or assurances of safety, but with talk of Oliver – "Young woman, if you have any intelligence about this

poor boy put me in possession of it” – as if the seriousness of her situation is lost on him. Just as he was unable to protect Oliver from Fagin, naively sending him out into the streets, Brownlow is powerless to protect Nancy. This is not to suggest that Oliver should not wish to be reunited with Mr. Brownlow at the end of the film. In terms of suitable parental figures, Mr. Brownlow is clearly the best candidate to raise Oliver. However, in light of post-war realities, this film questions the abilities of all parents and the idea that children can ever really be kept safe from the evils in the world.

Nicholas Nickleby

Cavalcanti's *Nicholas Nickleby* has suffered from comparison to the other post-war adaptations, particularly Lean's *Great Expectations*, made a year earlier. Bosley Crowther's 1947 review of the film compares Cavalcanti's film directly to *Great Expectations*: "Perhaps the major misfortune of *Nicholas Nickleby* ... is that it follows so closely, while memories are still green, upon the heels of the splendid screen version of *Great Expectations*, which we saw earlier this year" (Crowther). David Parker suggests, "looking again at Cavalcanti's film some of the contemporary responses seem harsh. There are suggestions of a neo-realist approach to the direction that gives some scenes, especially those at Dotheboys Hall, a ferocity unmatched by other Dickens's adaptations of that era." And Jeffrey Richards argues, "[*Nicholas Nickleby*] is a creditable production which also seeks to restore the darkness of the Dickensian vision, with the horrors of Dotheboys Hall and Ralph Nickleby's suicide graphically depicted" (342). Cavalcanti, who worked in documentaries alongside John Grierson, is more interested in representing the brutalities of Dickens's story without Lean's artistic distancing. When Squeers hits a child, Cavalcanti does not show the emotional effect of the assault on another character's face, as in Lean's

medium close-up on Joe's reaction to Pip's beating in *Great Expectations*. He shows the violence of the act.

Cavalcanti scales down Dickens's complicated and episodic narrative⁵⁷, and compares three parental figures for Smike (Aubrey Smith): Ralph Nickleby (Cedric Hardwicke), Smike's biological father who has never acknowledged paternity and who gave the child up in order to secure his late wife's inheritance; Mr. Squeers (Alfred Drayton), who runs the school where Smike has been living; and Nicholas (Derek Bond), who discovers Smike at Squeers's school and, without knowing his relation to the boy, takes care of him.

The film begins by establishing Ralph as a negligent parental figure even before the revelation of Smike's paternity is made. With the announcement of his brother's death, Ralph, a miser along the lines of Ebenezer Scrooge, claims to be unable to support his newly widowed sister-in-law and her two children as he is expected to do. Ralph's general character is first revealed through his insensitive and unfamiliar manner when he calls on his relatives, foreshadowing these same attitudes towards his own son, Smike. While Nicholas addresses him as "Uncle Ralph" and extends his hand, Ralph, rather than shaking his nephew's hand, hands Nicholas his top hat and remarks, "You must be Nicholas." He tells his sister-in-law to refrain from giving in to emotions because "Husbands die every day. Wives also."

⁵⁷ The anonymous review in the March 1947 issue of *Monthly Film Bulletin* refers to the difficulty of condensing a novel with such a "wealth of incident and characters" ("The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby" 35).

As Ralph often tells Newman Noggs, his offer of help to the Nicklebys comes only from a sense of duty and expectation. Despite being wealthy, he explains that he is unable to look after his brother's family. He finds Nicholas a position at Squeers's school and Kate a position at a dressmaker's, only to maintain appearances: it is expected of him as the late Mr. Nickleby's brother to look after his family. By finding Nicholas and Kate positions, he relieves himself of financial responsibility, as he does not have to keep them himself.

Worse, Ralph attempts to use Kate for his own profit. Ralph tries to arrange meetings between innocent Kate and his affluent clients, like Sir Mulberry Hawks. The sexual threat lies in the secrecy and Hawks' predatory mannerisms. Cavalcanti further establishes Kate's helplessness by showing her mother's inability to protect her. While her uncle uses her as a pawn for his own financial gain, Kate's mother, Mrs. Nickleby, is shown to be completely oblivious to her daughter's situation. She eagerly accepts Sir Mulberry's invitation for her and Kate to accompany him to the theatre, wholeheartedly trusting Ralph's intention. She is unable to recognize the sort of man Sir Mulberry is or the look of dread on her daughter's face.

Cavalcanti contrasts Ralph's lack of regard for his own family to both Squeers's treatment of his own family and Nicholas's genuine compassion for Smike. The introduction of the school's founder, Wackford Squeers, has an almost melodramatic tone: he wears a patch over one eye and is negotiating with Mr. Snawley to take Snawley's undesired stepchildren. Squeers is discernibly wicked, another in a long line of cruel and hypocritical Dickensian authority figures. Squeers tells both Snawley and later Nicholas that he acts as a father to the boys in his school. However, there is a marked difference in the way Squeers treats his own children and the way he treats the students at his school. He

pretends to comfort a crying child as Ralph and Nicholas are departing his company, but viciously beats him after they leave. As the carriage is about to leave, Squeers tells Nicholas to sit up top as he's "afraid of one them boys falling off. And that's twenty pounds gone." This equation of children with commodities informs his treatment of his students and his approach to education. His "lessons" are presented as a twisted sort of self-education, undermining any need for a knowledgeable authority figure. When Squeers asks a boy to spell a word like "Botany," Squeers misspells the word on the blackboard ('Bottinney'), then sends the child to shovel the snow off the garden path as a means of "doing it."

The choice to adapt *Nicholas Nickleby*, with its cruel schoolmaster and condemnation of Squeers's brutal style of education, addresses contemporary post-war concerns about the quality of education children received during the period of bombing and evacuation. Schools were commonly commandeered for official war purposes. Calder records that "[a]bout one in five of the nation's schools were damaged by bombing. Others became rest centres. Pupils either did without teaching or packed into larger classes elsewhere" (225). As a result of this, the quality of education available to evacuated children varied considerably. Calder cites the experiences of East End schools evacuated to Oxford to illustrate this variety:

One school kept together much as before (with double shifts for a while); another, housed in inadequate premises, almost collapsed. A third flourished magnificently in a country mansion and a fourth did well in a holiday camp, while others more or less merged into village schools. Even those schools which struggled most successfully to preserve their identities were faced with the problems added by the

drift back to the cities. A selective 'secondary' school, depending on specialist teachers, would face a dilemma when most of its pupils had returned; if teachers went back to look after them, this might deprive those who remained of their chance to learn, say, Latin or biology. (48-49)

While children of the upper class could afford to make up for such gaps in their education, middle-class and lower-class children simply could not: "The post-war intake of National Servicemen contained a dismaying proportion of illiterate or educationally retarded youths" (225). And though educational reform in the early 20th-century had created more opportunities for these children to move on to one of the nation's universities, even Oxbridge, the inadequate education many students received during the war made such a move impossible. This lack of education, coupled with the rise in delinquency, created a deep national concern for the future of Britain. Even parents whose children received adequate formal education must have been anxious for the general future of children in post-war society. If children represent a nation's future, the future of Britain was in serious question.

While Squeers treats the boys in his care with violence and abuse, he treats his own family with warmth and affection, doting on them. This places him in sharp contrast with Ralph, who hid his own son away in order to receive his late wife's fortune. As cruel as Wacksford Squeers is to his students, he is at least kind to his own wife and children. He affectionately kisses his wife when he and Nicholas return to the school; Wacksford Jr is hardly seen without candy or some other treat in his hand; and Fanny Squeers has complete run of both the school and Smike, whom she orders around as freely as her parents do. Despite Squeers's affection for his family, the film strongly implicates Mrs. Squeers and

the children in Squeers's cruelty. And though the entire Squeers family are made accomplices in his violence through their inclusion in the fight between Nicholas and their father, Squeers loves and cares for his family, and his family alone. Squeers's shortcoming as a parental figure is not that he does not care for his own flesh and blood. His shortcoming, and the shortcoming of his family, is not caring for and protecting other people's children.

Although Nicholas is not as memorable a character as Squeers or Ralph, he has the best understanding of post-war parenting. Nicholas's humanity and compassion for the students (particularly the lowly Smike) at Squeers's school should be seen as an example. Read with an understanding of the contemporary conditions of children, Cavalcanti's film suggests that it is not enough for adults to be concerned with the well-being of their own children. Ralph Nickleby's selfishness is monstrous, but so is the limited affection of Squeers. Even the villainous Squeers, for all his violence and cruelty, devotes himself to his own family. Nicholas's concern with Smike precedes the knowledge that Smike is related to him. Nicholas cares for the boy, not to maintain the appearance of duty and not because the boy is a member of his family. He cares for Smike simply because Smike needs to be looked after. Nicholas, in all his ordinariness, models Dickens's secular humanism with its concept of ethics and justice for post-war Britain. It is not enough for a person to care for just herself or her family. If society is going to improve the condition of children, to educate them and to raise them, then the condition of children must be everyone's concern.

Scrooge

In a review of Brian Desmond Hurst's *Scrooge* (released in the United States as *A Christmas Carol*), senior *New York Times* critic Bosley Crowther suggested a connection between the film and the "continuing austerity and food rationing in Britain. ... The usual conceptions of Christmas in terms of puddings and flowing bowls are not visualized to any conspicuous degree ... Even the gay board of the Cratchits is kept on a modest scale, and cheerfulness rather than foodstuffs is apparent in the home of nephew Fred" (qtd. in Chapman 24). Perhaps this (perceived) sensitivity to an overtly British situation can help account for the film's success in Britain and the cool critical response from American reviewers.⁵⁸ *A Christmas Carol* had been adapted for film many times before, including two versions in the 1930s, but Hurst's adaptation has an unusual darkness, in terms of both mood and lighting: "Hurst's direction makes the city a grim and inhospitable environment, with the wind howling down the streets and pavements empty save for the occasional beggar" (Chapman 21), as if the city itself possesses the same coldness and inhumanity as Scrooge.

Chapman draws a comparison between Hurst's film and Charles Barr's reading of the Ealing comedies as "complex allegories of the social and political changes taking place in Britain in the late 1940s and early 1950s" (22). Chapman ties *Scrooge* into Britain's changing political landscape, suggesting that Scrooge himself can be interpreted as Winston Churchill's newly elected Conservative Party, which had been uninterested in

⁵⁸ James Chapman writes: "[*Scrooge*] was well received by the British trade press, with *The Cinema* remarking that '[o]nce more the old tale comes to us as stimulating and salutary' and praising the 'strength and versatility' of Sim's performance ... But the Hollywood trade bible *Variety* considered that the film ... 'hasn't enough entertainment merit to rate it anything but slim chances ... There's certainly no Yuletide cheer to be found in this latest adaptation of Charles Dickens' Christmas classic'" (24).

social reform during the war years and returned to power in 1951 “on a pledge to maintain the welfare state and to bring an end to austerity and rationing” (Chapman 23).

Scrooge is not as obviously concerned with the depiction of orphaned or neglected children as the previous post-war Dickens adaptations. While Tiny Tim plays an important role in *Scrooge*, famously observing “God bless us, everyone,” the film, like Dickens’s novella, concentrates Ebenezer Scrooge. Hurst uses Dickens’s holiday ghost story of “reclamation” to suggest that Scrooge is himself a negligent parent, a father-figure who has ignored his duties to care for his “children:” his nephew, his employees and their families, and the poor. Hurst emphasizes this theme with the inclusion of a scene that had not been featured in the previous adaptations of *A Christmas Carol* in the 1930s: the Ghost of Christmas Present’s revelation of the two starving orphans beneath his robes (Chapman 23). Hurst contrasts Scrooge’s neglectfulness with weak parental figures, like Bob Cratchit and Fan, to show the importance of Scrooge’s transformation. If Scrooge – and the audience – does not come to understand his unfulfilled role as caregiver, then the goodness and innocence of Tiny Tim are lost.

Hurst begins his film, following Dickens’s novella, by establishing Scrooge’s misanthropy. He scoffs at the suggestion that he will keep Christmas; he refuses to extend a customer’s loan, which will result in the man’s imprisonment; and he refuses to donate money to “buy the poor some meat and drink,” claiming that such charity is not his “business.” Hurst plays Scrooge as a negligent parent throughout his next encounter with his nephew, Fred. Scrooge and Fred have been estranged since Fred’s marriage to a woman of whom his uncle disapproves, “a girl as penniless as [him]self.” Even Uncle Ralph in *Nicholas Nickleby* understood the importance of *appearing* to assist family. For Scrooge,

Fred, the customer who is unable to repay his loan, and the starving poor are all equally unworthy of his assistance.

Scrooge learned how to be a negligent father-figure from his own father. When he and the Ghost of Christmas Past visit Scrooge's old schoolhouse, they find a young Scrooge who has been left alone for the holidays. Fan, Scrooge's sister, comes to bring Scrooge home: "Father's so much kinder than he used to be that home's like heaven." The skeptical Scrooge replies, "Maybe for you, perhaps. But not for me. He doesn't know me or even what I look like." The Ghost of Christmas Past shows that Scrooge's estrangement from his family mirrors his estrangement from his nephew by drawing a connection between the absent Mrs. Scrooge and Fan herself: "Your nephew. [Fan] died giving him life, just as your mother died giving you life, something your father never forgave you for, as if it had been your fault." Like his father who never forgave him for his mother's death, Scrooge's resentment for his nephew stems from Fan's death. As his father sent Scrooge off to boarding school, Scrooge has allowed his disapproval of Fred's wife to remove Fred from his life.

Fan, like her mother, is a physically weak parent. Her death recalls the death of Oliver Twist's mother and Pip's mother. However much she may love and care for her son, she is too fragile to protect him. She is even too weak to ask for her brother's assistance in looking after the child. She starts to ask her brother for his promise but passes out before she can finish. While visiting the scene of Fan's death with the Ghost of Christmas Past, Scrooge first hears the words Fan uttered after his younger self, distraught and angry, had exited the room. "Ebenezer, promise me you'll take care of my boy." The words strike the older Scrooge speechless. The Ghost of Christmas Past soberly asks, "You heard her?"

revealing that the sole reason for this painful visit is for Scrooge to hear finally this deathbed request and to recognize his failure as a parental figure. Confronted with the implications of his dying sister's request, Scrooge can only nod before saying, "Forgive me, Fan. Forgive me." He repeats his apology, getting louder until finally he is reduced to tears by the knowledge that he has failed his dear sister by failing to "take care" of Fred.

Like Fan, Bob Cratchit is a weak parental figure. Though Cratchit does not die, he cannot adequately care for Tiny Tim. He dotes on the child, often carrying him long distances on his shoulder. However, his weakness as a parent figure is suggested both in his overly optimistic assessment of Tim's situation and in his inability to pay for medical treatments. Cratchit tells Fred that the family is in "high hopes" about Tim's prospects, then hopefully assures his eldest daughter, "He's getting stronger, Martha my love, isn't he?" His wife's defeated expression and hesitant nod reveal his wishful thinking. Nor can their abundant love meet Tim's medical needs on his fifteen shillings a week salary.

In the film's epilogue, when we are told of Scrooge's transformation and that he became like a "second father" to Tiny Tim, Tim shouts, "Uncle Scrooge" and runs toward the former miser. Without the aid of his crutch, Tim jumps into Scrooge's arms for an affectionate embrace. Scrooge, discernibly interested in the boy's well-being, watches as Tim demonstrates a couple of bends to show how well his leg works. Scrooge's transformation is characterized by his parental care of Tiny Tim. Scrooge is now a good man because he is a good "father" to those who are weak. Tim not only survives because of Scrooge's intervention, but he grows stronger, losing his characteristic limp and crutch.

In his assessment of Lean's *Oliver Twist*, Gerald Pratley observes: "There was considerable disappointment on the part of many of his admirers that at a time when Italian

neo-realist directors were shooting significant films about post-war problems, Lean should choose to remain in the past and make a second Dickens film” (77). *Oliver Twist* and these other Dickens adaptations share the concerns of the Italian neo-realist films, like De Sica’s *The Bicycle Thief* and *Shoeshine* and Visconti’s *The Earth Will Tremble*, which deal with the condition of children and families after the war. The neo-realists set their films in contemporary times and address relevant concerns about the future of Italian children. Lean, Cavalcanti, and Hurst use popular narratives of Dickens with their safe, historical distance to address indirectly similar concerns about the children in a post-war Britain.

Before Pip leaves Miss Havisham for the final time, he rebukes her for the way she has brought Estella up, but tells her not to worry about him:

But you may dismiss me from your mind and conscience. But Estella is a different case, and if you can ever undo any scrap of what you’ve done amiss, in keeping part of her right nature away from her, it will be better to do that than to bemoan the past through a hundred years. This scene has been much examined in the critical literature because Lean uses it to set up the death of Miss Havishman. Silver and Ursini note that Lean “explicitly suggests that Havisham’s death is ironically and inadvertently caused by Pip (slamming the door behind him, he dislodges a piece of firewood which ignites her dress)” (57). Barecca draws a connection between the importance of fire in the fireplace (an unusual sight at Satis House) and Miss Havisham:

Only in the scene where Miss Havisham confronts and seems to repent her evil, with her hand over her heart asking Pip “What have I done?”, is she pictured beside a roaring, smoking fire. But the effect here is really hellish; the piece of coal dislodged when Pip slams the door shut on her seems to roll as if animated by its

own rage to set her dress on fire. Dickens uses the word “consumed” several times to describe Miss Havisham’s obsession; her ultimate consumption by fire seems to indicate an outward movement of the anger and rage she has internalized for so long; it is as if, confronting her own power she is consumed by it.

(40)

Although the novel’s corresponding scene continues for several pages, Lean ends the scene with Pip’s final words to Miss Havisham, in a house that recalls the structural damage by German bombings. His speech attacks her poor parenting abilities with a hesitant hope of improvement.

These Dickens films suggest this hesitant hope for the post-war situation by suggesting that in order to move forward, both adults and children must attempt to understand each other and relate to each other. Scrooge’s transformation is complete, when, like Pip in *Great Expectations*, he accepts his identity as both parent and child. As Pip becomes Magwitch’s parental figure by remembering and re-enacting his selfless actions as a child, Scrooge’s redemption is characterized by a burst of childishness. Sims’s performance is truly remarkable in its ability to enact convincingly this childishness. He sings and dances around his sitting room: “I don’t know anything, I never did know anything.” He stands on his head. He makes faces at his housekeeper. The ghostly visitations free Scrooge to childlike glee, giggling and laughing at the joy he gets from looking after all people. As children must have a more adult understanding of their world, then adults must be more childlike.

The first of these post-war adaptations was one of Dickens’s more mature works. *Great Expectations* represents something of culmination of earlier works, like *David*

Copperfield and *Oliver Twist*. Its idea that children can ultimately overcome hardships and adversities on their own and independent of a parental figure no doubt seemed an attractive argument in the immediate aftermath of the evacuations. As the decade went on, however, and the impact of the evacuation became more apparent, the post-war adaptations return to Dickens's earlier works, like *Oliver Twist* and *Nicholas Nickleby*, for their more community-minded approach to children. These later films and earlier narratives argue that the responsibility of caring for, and raising, the children of Britain falls not to the children themselves, but to everyone. *Nicholas Nickleby* asserts his worth by caring for the neglected Smike; Scrooge's redemption comes through his reunion with his nephew, Fred, and his "parenting" of Tiny Tim.

After the various plot points of *Oliver Twist* have all been resolved, after the villains have been punished, and after Oliver is safe with his identity firmly established, Lean closes on Mr. Brownlow's house in the distance. After all that has happened, the characters can return to the comfort and safety of this home. Lean holds this shot for an exceptionally long time, as Oliver, Mr. Brownlow and Mrs. Bedwin head there. Oliver walks with the two adults, then runs ahead of them. He smiles, laughs and encourages them to catch up to him. The credits roll as the three continue their walk to the house, which represents the family that Oliver has been seeking. Oliver has found his "true" family and will live in this picturesque house. Yet Oliver cannot be unaffected by the events of his recent past. He has experienced Mr. Brownlow's inability to protect him from the outside world. Oliver has seen the worst of humanity and has known other children who have no such home. By Lean's camera positioning and framing, as the three approach the house and its safety and familial security, its interior remains unavailable to us. It is as undefined as the family's

future. While we watch Oliver, Brownlow and Mrs. Bedwin enter the house, we cannot come any closer. However, Lean suggests that the house and, more importantly, the promise of the house are not too far away.

Conclusion

Throughout my thesis, I explored how anxieties that came out of World War II are manifest in post-war British film, paying particular attention to films that disguise the war's impact. In Chapter One, I re-evaluated the screen personae of Celia Johnson and Deborah Kerr using Dyer, Naremore, and Affron's "star acting" method of analysis. I traced the evolution of their solid, dependable middle-class housewife personae and showed how these identities are challenged and complicated in their post-war films. Although current criticism argues that Johnson and Kerr conspire to return women to their pre-war roles of wives and mothers, such interpretations reduce the complexities and nuances of these films and these performances. Because the filmgoing public understood "Johnson" and "Kerr" as the embodiment of middle-class domesticity, these actors challenge the ideals of domesticity in *Brief Encounter*, *Perfect Strangers*, and *Black Narcissus* by struggling with the possibility of abandoning their confining roles. If Celia Johnson can contemplate leaving her husband, then any British housewife could. When Johnson and Kerr choose to return to the home, it is not simply to resume their former positions. They have been changed as a result of their experience and these changes suggest an alternation in their domestic roles. In addition, it is never clear if their choice to return is the right one, reflecting the uncertainty expressed by many women who returned to the home after World War II. The attractiveness of the alternative remains a viable option and the return home only presents the *hope* of a more fulfilling life.

In Chapter Two, I examined the representations of middle-class masculine virtues, such as duty, determination, and obligation, in the screen personae of Michael Redgrave and Alec Guinness. In *The Lady Vanishes*, Michael Redgrave demonstrates the elasticity of

the pre-war middle-class masculine identity. He can be anything that either Iris or the narrative need: musician, detective, husband. However, in the oppressive post-war conditions, the British masculine identity required continued sacrifice, altruism, and determination. In the post-war POW film *The Captive Heart*, Redgrave shows the need for a less elastic, more rigid middle-class masculine identity to overcome the hardships of post-war life, such as rationing, rebuilding the infrastructural damage to London and other cities, and economic uncertainty. Redgrave's performances in *Dead of Night* and *The Browning Version* illustrate the importance of an external release from this confining stoicism, and demonstrate the dangers perpetually rigid identity.

Despite his popularity with post-war audiences, Guinness's work is rarely examined in terms of post-war realities. With his chameleon-like versatility, Alec Guinness can be anyone he chooses, and his performances in *Kind Hearts and Coronets*, *The Lavender Hill Mob*, and *The Ladykillers* emphasize the performative nature of middle-class masculinity. Guinness's portrayal of eight members of the d'Ascoyne family in *Kind Hearts and Coronets* suggests that Guinness is always performing roles, always acting, unlike other stars, who project a recognizable identity. His role as young Henry, the most obviously middle-class of the d'Ascoynes, foregrounds this performative aspect. Henry pretends to be a dutiful, teetotaling husband in his wife's presence, but hides alcohol in his developing shed and frequents the local inn. In *The Lavender Hill Mob* and *The Ladykillers*, Guinness's performing the role of middle-class masculinity is more obviously highlighted, where other characters mistake Guinness's *appearance* of respectability for *actual* respectability. By highlighting the performative nature of Guinness's characters and

Guinness's ability to transform, these roles undermine the rigid masculine ideal upheld in *The Captive Heart*, suggesting that such maleness may be merely a deception.

Chapter Three proposed the existence of a uniquely British style of film noir through an analysis of Carol Reed's *The Third Man* (1949) and Jules Dassin's *Night and the City* (1951). Although the wartime stories of Elizabeth Bowen suggest that a literary source material for a more British-focussed type of film noir existed, these films choose instead to recast the individual disconnectedness and alienation of American film noir into a cultural alienation. Maladjusted, childlike American protagonists run around ancient cities, disrupting and destabilizing the social structures they find and cannot understand. British film noir moves the setting of film noir from the modern American city to London or a London substitute. The wartime damage to these old European cities, with identities established long ago, is suggested to create liminal space that permits these outsiders exploit these cities. British film noir reveals British vulnerability and anxieties about their own displacement by America after World War II and can be seen as a working through of Britain's new, unheralded role in world politics.

I contextualized the popular post-war Dickens adaptations within the larger framework of Britain's concern about children in Chapter Four. While *Great Expectations*, *Nicholas Nickleby*, *Oliver Twist*, and *Scrooge* are artistically successful adaptations of Dickens's novels, they reflect, with their focus on orphaned heroes and negligent parental figures, ideas expressed in D.W. Winnicott's theories of child development and delinquency and anxieties that came out in response to Winnicott's theories. The evacuation of children during the London Blitz resulted in many children being uprooted from their families and relocated to the homes of strangers. The evacuation increased

awareness about the extreme poverty many children lived in before the war, and the long-term effects of parental separation on child development. Winnicott's theories connected delinquency, separation, and abandonment, arguing that even the necessary separation of mother and child could result in maladjusted children. These films, which have more in common with the concerns of Italian neo-realism than most people believe, consider the problem of neglected children in post-war Britain and suggest the possibility of healing either through the efforts of the individual child, as in *Great Expectations*, or a more communal parenting, as in *Scrooge*. Despite their Victorian settings, these films reveal a deep concern with the issues of contemporary post-war Britain and demonstrate the extent of the war's impact on films in the decade after World War II.

The long-reaching impact of the war has not been adequately considered in analyses of post-war British film. While various studies have focussed on the more overtly realist films, few consider how deeply the war affected British film. The anxieties and uncertainties about what life was going to be like, what roles men and women would play, and how children would grow up can be seen in a wide selection of films, such as *The Browning Version*, *Black Narcissus*, *Brief Encounter*, and *Scrooge*. Regardless of genre, director, or studio, British films of the immediate post-war period show the overwhelming impact of World War II. While the war's presence is often muted in these films, the war and the conditions of post-war society are at the heart of understanding them.

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