

**Post-war trauma and doubling
in 1940-50s British cinema**

**A Thesis Submitted for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores doubling motifs in British films in the 1940s/1950s, focusing on case studies that conform to realist traditions. British realist films are often analysed on a purely literal level whereas this study is aimed at exploring ways to re-examine these texts using different approaches. The study covers example films from 1943-1955 and situates the examples in various historical contexts to examine wider themes such as class, gender, propaganda and tensions in Europe. The thesis makes a connection between the manifestation of a subtle doubling motif in British films and links to real-world societal events in post-war Britain.

INTRODUCTION

The overall objective of this study is to explore British cinema in the 1940s-1950s and the prominence of a doubling motif in the filmic output in this era. This will be achieved by using a cross-disciplinary approach incorporating a textual analysis, accompanied by a broader contextual study of the historical landscape in which the films were produced. The main themes covered throughout the thesis are the effects of post-war trauma, propaganda, class and gender. These topics are analysed using example films that conform to British realist traditions with the intention of proving that there are hidden depths to these case studies and that they relate specifically to prominent socio-cultural concerns of the era. Another key aim within the study is to prove the existence of a doubling motif within these realist films and to analyse how this contributes to a greater understanding of the fractured nature of British society in this era. This study will also provide a more unique approach to studying British realist films. Ultimately, the core argument of this thesis is that a doubling motif is present in British realist films, and this relates to specifically to the fractured nature of British society in the aftermath of WWII.

The rationale for this study stems from the importance and magnitude of societal changes in 1940s and 1950s Britain, especially in the post-war period. These changes arguably shaped society in the 1960s and beyond, so it is often cited as a particularly important transitional period in British society. However, barring a few exceptions, British film in this period was relatively stilted and relied heavily on realism as a guiding principle. In an academic sense, the concept of British realist traditions was often discussed as a major defining feature of the films in this period. Due to this, discussions regarding this era often focus heavily on very literal interpretations which give little room for more conceptual debates. Although this practice has changed in recent years, there is scope for a major revaluation of many of these British realist films. This will be explored in more detail in the literature review.

Throughout the study the appearance of the doubling motif is directly linked to the lasting impact of societal changes in the aftermath of WWII and how communities in the post-war era became more fractured. Periods of uncertainty and societal flux, such as post WWII and post 9/11, are key to the concepts of doubling, duality and splits

within film analysis; with texts often linking specific filmic trends to real life events. This is a particularly rich field of study in psychoanalytical film, where academics often use the analysis of horror and fantasy films to explore the way they use the filmic space to create metaphors that comment on present day society. However, my study differs in that it actively avoids analysing films that fit into these genres and instead identifies various examples of the doubling motif in more diverse corners of British cinema, specifically in films that lean towards social realism and melodrama, as opposed to fantasy. The aim of the study is to highlight the prominence of this doubling motif in a wide variety of British films, but also to explore the importance of this motif's origins and how it manifests itself in relation to historical events and social change in Britain during this time period.

The thesis consists of six chapters, each of which uses an individual film as its case study. The films are presented in chronological order to allow elements of the historical context to build up and flow from chapter to chapter, and to show the development of certain motifs alongside the development of British cinema. This structure was chosen to capitalise on the historical context in each period of time, using the chronological structure to slowly build upon historical changes and events in one chapter which would in turn impact on the next chapter. This would create a stronger link between the chapters, but also create a more holistic marrying of the textual analysis and historical approach. A purely thematic approach to the chapters was considered in the research stage, which used a collection of films in each chapter, rather than just one per chapter, and this mass of films would have spanned the entirety of the 1943-55 time period. This was replaced due to the complexity of shifting around in history, while also attempting to fold in specific socio-cultural concerns. Instead, the films were carefully selected to not only explore the specific historical period they were made in but also be an illustration of a key theme. The opportunity to dedicate a full chapter to each film, felt like an opportunity to examine these films in more depth rather than dilute the analysis.

The specific films were selected due to their diverse themes and genres to prove that these motifs defy simple classification and are present in a wide collection of films during this period. Chapter one covers *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (Michael Powell, 1943) and explores concepts around British identity, tradition, gender and

military colonialism. Due to its flashback structure, moving through 1902-1943, the film acts as a great starting point for the thesis as it looks back at the recent history leading up to the end of WWII. Chapter two analyses *Kind Hearts and Coronets* (Robert Hamer, 1949) and focuses on class and identity, specifically in this case to the main protagonist's mixed heritage. Tradition is again present in the discussion, but this time linked to class structures, 'old money' and the perceived permanence of these traditional values and social hierarchies. Chapter three uses *Pool of London* (Basil Deardon, 1951) as its case study and is particularly focused on race and emerging diasporas. The changing face of post-war Britain is also a factor in the chapter, both in its populace and landscape, given the film heavily features bombed-out areas of London as well as starting to open up debates regarding immigration and race relations. Chapter four's case study is *Secret People* (Thorold Dickinson, 1952) which takes place in the 1930s and is an example of a film that explores the past to discuss the present day. The chapter includes espionage, political uncertainty in Europe and also furthers the debate on diasporas via the lead protagonist's refugee status. Chapter five uses *The Sleeping Tiger* (Joseph Losey, 1954) to discuss the emergence of youth crime, the delinquent film cycle and how this links to the widening of the generation gap in this era. The final chapter covers *The Ladykillers* (Alexander Mackendrick, 1955) and looks at the text's metaphysical vision of British society, including its use of stereotypes and genre conventions to comment on the post-war societal flux. The concept of doubling and duality within the films is presented in different ways across these chapters, including more literal examples of doppelgangers in Chapters one and two, highlighting contrasting issues in society in Chapter three, to swapping/switching personas in Chapters four and five, to the more opaque example of Chapter six where the film appears to be a darker mirror image of London.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this literature review I will be covering academic work specifically related to post-war trauma, doubling and British cinema in the 1940s/50s. The main focus of this will be to fully explore the impact of post-war trauma and the accompanying doubling motif within the films of this period. I will be directly linking the cinematic motif of the double, or split personality, to the historical post-war trauma within British society. I will be breaking down this literature review into 6 key fields with the intention of building up a solid foundation for my main thesis. The 6 sub-headings will be: Post-war trauma; Propaganda & Post-war consensus; British realist tradition; Class; Gender; and Doubling/Split personalities. They are specifically presented in this order to firstly outline the post-war impact on British society, then give an outline of British filmic traditions in the 1940/50s, before honing down into very specific thematic elements.

The appearance of a double within film is often associated with a the fracturing of a character's ego (Ruddell, 2013: 56), thus a projection of an alter-ego takes physical form. In this sense, the double is created to reveal elements of a protagonist's ego which would otherwise be buried deep underneath the surface. The double in literature and film can take many different forms, not necessarily just a straightforward doppelganger of a character. The painting in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is referenced by Otto Rank in his work *The Double* (1925) as a more abstruse example of this creation of a double, in this case an object, within a narrative. Split personalities are often closely linked due to this theme, as it is another example of a fracture/split within an individual, but rather than being a separate physical manifestation, it remains within a single character (Ruddell, 2013: 6-7). Given the instability of Britain during WWII and the preceding post-war fallout, it would appear that many facets of British life suffered a crisis in this period. I will argue that this coincides with the emergence of the doubling motif within British cinema. The fracturing of a personality, a community, or a Nation's values may be a rationale for the appearance of these doubles or alter-egos.

I will not be covering literature relating to doubling in other art forms, such as works in literature and art history. There is an extensive body of work that covers doubles in literature (Markley, 2001; Vardoulakis, 2010; Maleska, 2015), however there are also a large amount of texts that discuss this within literary film adaptations and original

film output. Due to this, I feel it is more beneficial to focus on the latter two fields as they will take into account the specificity of the cinematic qualities, rather than simply the narrative traits of the story. I will not be covering psychoanalytical studies (Zizek, 1991; Rose, 2005) within this thesis unless they relate specifically to issues around National Cinema or a specific British auteur. This is partially to avoid too many mixed methods which will complicate an already large field of study. This will allow me to focus the study on a more neglected field: how this motif relates to national cinema and how analysing the historical context surrounding the film texts feeds into a deeper understanding of British cinema in this era.

Doubling / Split personalities

The appearance of these doubles and splits raises questions about why this motif is so prevalent in this period of British cinema. Many of the examples in my chapters relate to protagonists who are in flux and out of place in their surroundings. The precarious and changing nature of masculinity in this period can be seen as a catalyst, but doubling and split personalities has been analysed throughout film and literature since the early 1900s and gender is not always at the forefront of the debate. Otto Rank's "Double" links the appearance of a double in literature as a spectre that uncovers the truth, revealing the character's ego, as in Dostoyevsky's *The Double* (Rank, 1925). Alternatively, this can be seen as a shield or defensive mechanism against the truth as in Oscar Wilde's *A Picture of Dorian Gray* (Wilde, 1992). The Dostoyevsky example is a clear doppelgänger created by the protagonist's mental breakdown, however the Wilde example, of an object or item as a double, opens up the debate into other interpretations of the double. Although Rank mainly discusses literary work where the doubling is literal in context, as opposed to being implied, he admits that this doubling represents "the interesting and meaningful problems of man's relation to himself – and the fateful disturbance of this relation..." (Rank and Tucker, 1971: 7). The theme of mirroring and reflections (i.e. the same, but different, or opposing) is constantly referred to in Rank's examples in literary sources.

The analytical roots of doubling and split personalities within the field of psychoanalysis is clearly an influence on several filmmakers. The term psychoanalysis and 'Freudian thought' was all developed at the end of the 19th century. Freud's book *The Interpretation of Dreams* (Freud, 1997) was first published in 1900 and several of

his major theories were developed in this era. He laid out the idea of split personalities within a single human (i.e. the ego, super-ego and id) and the Freudian slip. The British Psychoanalytical Society was also formed in 1919 and Joan Riviere, a founding member, had begun translating Freud's works in 1921. Many of the Berlin School of Psychoanalysts also emigrated to Britain in the 1930s, beginning around 1933, and became part of British society, practicing within various different fields (Robinson, 2015). Given the cultural significance of some of these texts and societies, it is fair to assume a certain level of knowledge of this field was present in British society by the 1940s, especially in the more educated middle-classes. By the 1940s these psychoanalytical themes had started to permeate into mainstream cinema. In particular the success of films which explored mental health or split-personalities and featured a psychoanalyst as a major protagonist, such as *The Seventh Veil* (Compton Bennett, 1945), a British production, and *Spellbound* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1945), a Hollywood production. Given this movement within film culture, it would be naïve to think that many of the more subtle references to psychoanalytical theories in this era would be merely coincidental. This gives me an opportunity to argue the case for a less literal analysis of some of the films in the 1940s and 1950s, as there may have been an influence from the psychoanalytical community. While this is not a major concern within my study, it would be remiss not to acknowledge the cultural significance of Psychoanalysis within this period, especially if the further research suggests that this motif stems from key auteurs in the production of these films.

Doubling is a theme that is discussed in several works which analyse films, but many of these are not necessarily relevant to this period of cinema or the analysis is not centred around doubling/splits as a guiding principle or motif (Pirie, 2008; Durnat, 2011; Moor, 2012b; Meehan, 2017). Tony Williams' book *Structures of Desire* (2000) uses much more psychoanalytical approaches to analyse British films in this era. Due to this focus, he explores ideas of mirror images and doubling in *Dead of Night*. He frames the film's themes as "the repressed returns with a vengeance." and focuses on the haunted mirror's split exposing "male impotence and insecurity" (Williams, 2000: 91-93). Williams' analysis often uses various methods to explore British film produced in WWII and the post-war era, tackling a subject from an unexpected perspective, which I believe can be beneficial in developing some alternative approaches to analysing film in this era.

Caroline Ruddell's book *The Besieged Ego* (2013) uses the defining principles of Otto Rank, Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan, among others, to analyse the use of doubling and doppelgangers in film. 'The Jekyll and Hyde' template, i.e. the good and bad half of the same character, is put forward as a major thematic trait throughout Film and TV. One chapter exclusively deals with this phenomenon (Ruddell, 2013: 55-78) and focuses heavily on horror and gothic traditions. The examples of these transformations are from both film and TV are varied: from *Angel Heart* (Alan Parker, 1987), *Black Swan* (Darren Aronofsky, 2010) and the TV Series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. The analysis focuses on more literal examples of the doppelganger or split personality, i.e. physically becoming a monster, but also occasionally focuses on more oblique examples. *Memento* (Christopher Nolan, 2000), in which the character struggles with his short-term memory, is used as an interesting example of how the lack of memory distorts the character's perception of oneself. This is tackled from a psychoanalytical approach by linking memory to one's own idea of themselves and Freud's concept of the id/ego/superego (Ruddell, 2013: 49). The discussions around visual metaphors on film are particularly usual in the textual analysis of several of the films in this thesis, most notably *The Sleeping Tiger* in chapter five which links the prominence of mirrors as a cinematic visual device to "...denote fragmentary identity. The use of a mirror reflection emphasises the fact that a character's identity is being split into two..." (2013: 13). This film also features several visual metaphors that frame the two lead protagonists in opposition to each other, something more common in genre films and links back to "...horror, fantasy and/or Gothic genre conventions.", due to the more literal nature of the good/evil Manichaeian divide that appears in these genres (2013: 55).

Although the aim of Ruddell's book is different, there is scope for me to build on some of her analysis and tackle the topic using a more contextual approach. The fact that the vampire metaphor is discussed at length here is useful, as this is a common reference point in relation to duality in many texts. The parasitical nature of the vampire, feeding on other people, is similarly interesting in relation to gothic subtexts regarding the true meaning of the monster in some of these films. *The Ladykillers* is of particular interest here, as the hero/villain paradigm is equally skewed, if in fact it exists at all, between Alec Guinness and the old woman. There are also the allusions

of the gothic which appear regularly throughout the film, particularly with Alec Guinness's entrance being announced via a looming shadow. This can also be seen in his mannerisms that mimic Max Schreck's Count Orlok in *Nosferatu* (F.W.Murnau, 1922). These may be a simple reference to the Gothic tradition in English literature, but this does appear to have been a fairly frequent influence throughout film history and still continues to be a touchstone in many genres (Pirie, 2008: 17). Instances of Freudian allegories are often found in these Hammer films (Pirie, 2008: 108) and the doubling motif can be identified in several different guises. Dracula is often positioned as the exotic 'other' in relation to Johnathan Harker, however Dracula can also be seen as a figure who becomes a monster. The schizophrenic nature of a person being turned into a vampire, which literally changes their personality and appearance, is fairly obvious. David Pirie (2008) eludes to several instances where Hammer horror uses the monster as a way of disrupting the family ideal. For example, the use of Dracula as a force whose outside influence tears apart the stable relationship of Johnathan and Mina; or when family members are influenced to betray their family members. The relation between Van Helsing and Dracula is also a major doubling motif within the Dracula cycle, used as a balancing measure between the opposing forces. Ironically, the villain is the debonair charming character pitted against Van Helsing's rather roguish manic outsider persona, which slightly skews the hero/villain paradigm.

Pirie does not use the Dracula canon as a way to look at society, but there are several other instances where he highlights these issues. The haunted mirror section of *Dead of Night* (Cavalcanti, Deardon, Hamer & Crichton, 1945) is discussed regarding the conventions of the ghost story sub-genre, specifically the importance of the use of the middle-class couple and the mirror's depiction of a higher class which is just out of reach (Pirie, 2008: 17-18). The doubling here relates to social climbing and discontent, which ultimately ends in murder. He also briefly discusses the ventriloquist's dummy section of the film, but does not expand on the doubling theme which is present in both of these sections. There is potential to build on this type of analysis, as the doubling within the mirror and the split personality of the dummy can be further examined as constructs brought on by post-war issues. Specifically, the fear of the stagnating middle classes in the recession and the fracturing of a personality via post-war trauma.

Charles Barr's BFI Film Classics *Vertigo* (Barr, 2012) makes several references to the doubling technique used within the film. Obviously, the literal doubling of Kim Novak's character, and her deception, forms a large part of the narrative so it would be an obvious area to investigate. Outside of the confines of the film space, doubling is not really linked to a broader discussion regarding the alternative meaning of this motif. Although Hitchcock is British, the majority of his films from 1940, with the exception of *Frenzy* (1972), are Hollywood productions. Michael Walker's *Hitchcock's Motifs* concentrates on a variety of motifs in Hitchcock's work and has a particular focus on his use of the "alter-ego double" (Walker, 2005: 148) which is subtly used in various different guises. Most prominently the examination of *Strangers on a Train* (Hitchcock, 1951) gives us one of the most literal incarnations of this device. He argues that the darker elements of the lead protagonist are projected onto the alter-ego, giving a morally complex film a more clear cut sense of clarity by separating the good and evil (Walker, 2005: 149). While Walker's book is a very astute textual analysis of Hitchcock's themes, it does not question the cultural relevance of any of these, in fact it collates examples of the motifs from several different eras into a single analysis. However, linking these films to historical facts is not the aim of Walker's book. These are both interesting examples, mainly from a methodological standpoint, but also support the notion that there is a lack of emphasis on National Cinema in this field.

Although doubling is mentioned in several of the above texts, it is never analysed as a guiding motif in British cinema during this era. Although it is often referred to in relation to specific auteurs, most notably Hitchcock and Powell, this motif is not linked explicitly to national cinema although, on occasion, the impact of the post-war environment is briefly brought to the forefront. I intend to build on these works by introducing a more rigorous historical context to inform the textual analysis. *The Besieged Ego* uses psychoanalysis as its anchor point, which allows the book to pull from Hollywood sources and Japanese film within the same example. This creates a much more rich and varied analysis of certain thematic traits, and how these can be married up with psychoanalytic theory. However, my methodology differs as it concentrates on the specific historical context, the production history, and an acknowledgment of key individual auteurs to create a much more narrow and focused study.

Doubling within my thesis is not specifically limited to the literal double, or doppelganger, I also use the notion of mirroring and duality as a basis for discussions around the nature of British society within this era. This takes many different forms throughout the thesis. In the early chapters doubling is represented by characters played by the same actor, their appearance links to memory, a sense of permanence and of the present-day mirroring the past. In later chapters, the doubling motif becomes more complex, and less literal, linking to dualities and fractures in society. The doubling in these instances relate more to split personalities, multiple characters mirroring each other, or the creation of entirely separate personas. The final chapter also includes discussions around post-modernism and how empirical knowledge of film forms is used to mirror and warp previous British filmic traditions to comment on society.

Post-war Trauma and Consensus

Direct links between art and the trauma of WWI and WWII are often implied, but not expressly discussed, in film studies literature. For example, Robert Murphy's section in *Ealing Revisited* makes reference to "...traumatic memories of war combined with a traditional British fondness for dark and bloody melodrama to seep into the cinema of the period..." (2012: 86), however it is stated as a fact rather than a point for further investigation. Charles Barr's *Ealing Studios* (1998) similarly implies on several occasions a link to the trauma of the nation in the post-war films. In his section on T.E.B Clarke (Barr, 1998: 80-107) he makes constant reference to films being a response to "post-war feeling", as if the comedy films were an antidote to a post-war depression. However, this is not the focus of his book, so it often teases the idea without fully developing an argument: this is especially so in the case of the cynical tone of *Kind Hearts and Coronets* (Robert Hamer, 1949) which can be argued as a venting of a country's post-war frustrations. Adam Plummer's *The British Trauma Film: Psychoanalysis and Popular British Cinema in the Immediate Aftermath of the Second World War* (2023) uses psychoanalysis as its guiding principle, and focuses on the films a small selection of films from 1945-48. The film selections are specifically aimed at darker themes and genres, horror films and psychological thrillers such as *Dead of Night* and *The Seventh Veil* (Compton Bennet, 1945) are covered. While there are some thematic overlaps with my thesis, the focus is purposefully narrow on the immediate post-war years and on films that lean towards psychoanalytic studies.

Paul Fussell's books regarding post-war trauma are of particular interest as they position themselves as primarily a historical/cultural account on the wars, using memoirs and historical documents, but also use literature and poetry as a supporting counterpoint. *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Fussell, 1975) is focused on WWI, but does use literary examples from further afield as a way of showing the accuracy, or distortion, that the prism of memory can cast on a historical period. Fussell lays out several cultural tropes that were developed during WWI and the post-war aftermath. The most interesting of these is his assertion that the war had a polarising effect that became embedded in British culture (Fussell, 1975). Divisions between the horrors faced by the returning troops and the experiences of civilians who stayed at home is highlighted by Fussell as another major polarising factor. The wartime experiences of the troops were unimaginable, "its conditions were too novel, its industrialised ghastliness too unprecedented." (Fussell, 1975: 87) that a divide was created when these two demographics came back together. This is also discussed in relation to literature traditions of good/evil and how the use of broad binaries is often used as a simple narrative device. He argues "The drama of the binary here resides not in the actual event but in the post-war tendency of imagination that has imposed a dramatic binary action upon it." (Fussell, 1975: 80). In essence, Fussell's argument here relates to the concept that these binaries were created to justify the actions of the war, then became commonplace and were then used in subsequent retellings of the events. His use of the word "imagination" can also link to a further debate regarding cinematic output in post-war periods and how these binaries were forced into the fabric of these films.

Fussell's later book *Wartime* (1989) focuses on WWII and similarly looks at the innocence of the nation running up to the start of the war, particularly the naïve view of the wartime experience both at home and on the battlefield. The split between the mood of the civilians and troops at the end of WWI was clearly not fully explored at the time, leaving the scar of the many traumas on individuals and smaller communities, but stoically buried by the nation through a sense of community spirit and the 'People's war' idealism. Instead, there was a slight return to the patriotism and positivity of the British nation. Despite the immediacy of the horrific memories from WWI, it appears the same upbeat, and potentially naïve, spirit was held by the troops at the start of the

war, with a hope that the conflict would be “fast-moving...and perhaps even rather easy” (Fussell, 1989: 3) . This emotional repetition of naivety entering the war followed by intense trauma post-war is clearly present in WWII as well. Once again creating the polarisation of the nation on a very personal level, former troops and civilians living side-by-side, but carrying vastly different experiences. The idea of binaries and of a split nation after the end of WWI in 1918 is an interesting concept that can be carried over into the post-war period of 1945. However, Fussell is much more direct in his *Wartime* book focusing on the simple fact that “almost everyone had had a relative killed or wounded or knew someone who had” (Fussell, 1989: 143), which concentrates on the direct impact of the war as opposed to more complex theories such as the binary oppositions in society.

This sense of a polarised community is also outlined by Paul Addison (2010), specifically in relation to the myriad of changes that happen in the short period around 1945. The end of the war in 1945, the return of the troops to their families, the culture clash that resulted from these two communities coming back together, the Labour government coming back to power and the introduction of the welfare state in 1945 which attempted to support many of the working-class communities in the aftermath of the war. The reintroduction of rationing in 1946, which then continued in some form until the early 1950s may have had a profound effect on the bond between communities within this short period, as rationing created a forced sense of equality. However, when moving from the ‘age of austerity’ into the ‘age of affluence’ around 1954, a date that coincides with the end of rationing (Addison, 2010: 51), the gulf between the classes reappeared once again creating a divide which had not been present for around a decade. While these events cannot be described specifically as trauma, the sudden changes to everyday activities can be seen as creating a landscape that led to more divided communities. This polarising effect which Fussell describes in relation to various facets of British life, both personal and artistic, is clearly a major factor in the post-war condition of the British people. Given the other historical events that took place in the mid-1940s, it points to a very specific turning point in British history which clearly highlighted the opposing ideals in society. This is a very interesting sociological phenomenon that could have had a major influence on the appearance of the doubling motif in British cinema in this post-war period.

A common symptom in the aftermath of trauma is a sense of “disempowerment and disconnection” (Herman, 2015: 133). To begin the healing process, these connections must be made again. Judith Herman (2015: 70-71) further discusses the need for individuals to engage with communities to overcome these issues, citing the Vietnam War memorial as an example of a beacon of shared post-war grief. The community acknowledges the trauma and “celebrates the heroism” which supports the healing process of the individuals and the wider communities. This idea of a monument as a way to heal could easily be linked to the filmic tradition of the national war hero. The film itself becomes the monument which supports and reaffirms patriotic ideals of heroism. On the surface, the monument/film presents these heroic ideals, but could also be hiding the metaphysical sociological scars of the nation’s trauma. Judith Herman also outlines the stages of recovery after trauma, the second stage of this being “remembrance and mourning” (2015: 175). This stage includes the survivor retelling the story of their trauma, as a form of “reconstruction” (2015: 175). The temporal distance from the traumatic event effects the subject’s true recollection, but the process is aimed at transforming the trauma into a story which the subject owns. In theory, this storytelling becomes a way of empowering the subject and controlling the trauma. There are two elements of this which are of particular interest: firstly the idea of storytelling or filmmaking being a way of reconciling traumatic events; the second being the temporal space between the event and a time when a subject can fully comprehend and subsequently tackle the trauma in a coherent, or rational, manner. The first supports a theory of trauma being worked through via creative endeavours, such as filmmaking. The second point relates to the healing process taking time, before being revisited, which could pose questions about how these traumas were dealt with in British film over a longer time period, not just the short period after WWII, which opens up the option of looking at post-war films over a longer time period. The latter point is something that is explored in Chapter 1, as *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (Michael Powell, 1943) looks back at both the Boer War and WWI, and Chapter 4 as *Secret People* (Thorold Dickinson, 1952) takes place in the 1930s, specifically looking at issues leading up to the start of WWII.

Fussell’s concept of the binary oppositions leads on to an interesting debate regarding the concept of storytelling and how these oppositions could have been subtly introduced into a film’s narrative via the doubling motif. I had originally highlighted

1943-1955 as my time period given the, based on the prominence of the double motif in *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* in the final years of WWII in 1943, and the then the major tonal shift in British cinema 1957 with the emergence of the British New Wave films and Hammer horror. Herman's concept of people 'working through' trauma over a longer period of time appears to support my choice of a longer time period, as the selected films tackling not only contemporary issues, but also commenting on the failings of the recent past.

Propaganda and consensus are important within this study because they relate specifically to the concept that the majority of British films in this post-war era were uniquely created with the intention to reinforce a, possibly false, sense of community. Financing and producing films which have a set world view, it could be argued, stifled creativity and expression in this era, but also potentially forced many of the darker and more controversial elements into the subtext of the films in this era. Given this assertion, an outline of both propaganda in this era and the concept of consensus gives an important foundation to the British film industry prior to and during my selected period.

Propaganda is covered extensively by James Chapman's book *The British at War* (1998). It is particularly important for my study to understand the forced ideologies that were built up via propaganda film. This book contains invaluable information on the Ministry of Information (MOI) and their strategies throughout the war which also helped to shape many of the film cycles of the time. This is heavily based on production and historical information. The second half of the book breaks down specific themes of the films that were funded. Although there is no in-depth analysis of the film texts, there is a categorisation exercise outlining key themes which are present in many films of this era. This book only covers 1939-45, however these themes do continue into the post-war era and many films actively move away from these established themes, especially in later war films, which can be an area that can be built upon. Some of the issues here are covered in other literature, notably in *The Finest Years* (Drazin, 2007), *Britain Can Take It* (Aldgate and Richards, 1986) and *Rethinking British Cinema* (Richards, 2013). However, as Chapman's book is entirely focused on this subject matter, it appears that this is the definitive text in this field.

Both Charles Drazin (Drazin, 2007) and Robert Murphy (Murphy, 1992) extensively cover the MOI films and cover the idea that these films did form a subtle style of British propaganda. Also this did form the basis of many funding decisions in fiction films, specifically *49th Parallel* (Michael Powell, 1941) which was seen as a film that would gain sympathy from the USA for the British cause in WWII (Murphy, 1992: 13-15). GPO films are covered in more depth by Drazin, especially in relation to Alberto Cavalcanti taking over at the GPO and his views on lack of division between documentary and fiction (Drazin, 2007: 120). This approach then bleeds into his later film *Went the Day Well?* (Cavalcanti, 1942) which has a particularly focused theme of rural communities bonding together, for the greater good, to fight the enemy. In this case it is specifically a Nazi invasion which was still a real possible threat in 1942. Cavalcanti would become a key factor in many of the darker Ealing Studios films that blended fact and fiction in the 1940s (Murphy, 2012: 82-83).

British film was used as more subtle political propaganda device, and therefore there are elements of government support and restriction within this period that helped form British film as a whole and these constraints must be taken into account when discussing this era (Richards, 2013). These in turn had an impact on British society as a whole, given that even the mild propaganda in the 1940s has the overall aim of unconsciously biasing a demographic. The propaganda within the Ealing films is a fairly good basis to work from due to Michael Balcon, the head of the studio during this period, and his openness about his use of such methods (Drazin, 2007: 105). Ealing's war films, and arguably a lot of their output, were always tinged with an overriding propaganda-based community spirit message, which was a thematic trait throughout. This usually includes a plucky group of underdogs forming a community group for the greater good to overcome the enemy. While this is not necessarily an originally concept, it is the parochial nature of the Ealing films that make them more relatable to everyday communities, such as the bond between the working-class and lower-middle-class community in *Passport to Pimlico* (Henry Conelius, 1949). This point is picked up by several academics in this field and originally by Charles Barr in *Ealing Studios* (1998) and later in *Ealing Revisited* (Duguid *et al.*, 2012). Lee Freeman's chapter covering the political revolutions in Ealing films makes specific reference to the impact the Studio had on society:

Ealing has tended to be associated with the wartime transformation of British society that contributed to the Labour Party's historic electoral victory in 1945, where shared experience of war helped to shape a new social and political consensus, increasingly democratic and egalitarian in nature. (Freeman, 2012: 71)

Tony Williams (1991) also sees the utopian nature of the Pimlico community echoing real issues in post-war Britain, specifically the way the community attempt to keep out the black-market spivs, an issue the government wanted to clamp down on given certain rationing was still in place. However, the mere nature of the black market being present, suggests an underbelly of society which rarely surfaces in the films of this era. *They Made me a Fugitive* (Alberto Cavalcanti, 1947) is one of very few films to depict this subject in a more serious manner, as opposed to the usual “serio-comic” spiv style character which was popular in this period (Spicer, 2003: 127). Ealing Studios tackled the war and post-war both from this Homefront perspective, as in *Passport to Pimlico* and *They made me a Fugitive*, but also produced several ‘monument’ war films celebrating the heroic act of war like *The Cruel Sea* (Michael Frend, 1953). However, even *The Cruel Sea* focuses heavily on the impact on the crew when the return from their duties and are haunted by the decisions they made at war, celebrating both the victory and the ongoing trauma.

Andrew Higson’s *The Concept of National Cinema* (1989) argues heavily that there are historical academic issues regarding the attempt to form a very specific and stable version of the British public to support the analysis of British film. This approach, he argues, ignores the fluidity of national trends over time and, more importantly, it often disregards class, race and gender (Higson, 1989: 39). This is mainly aimed at other academic works which have attempted to define British film in oversimplified reductive terms. Higson’s other works analyse the creation of communities on screen, which in themselves create a false vision of the reality of the nation. His analysis of Ealing’s communities is a good example:

It is striking that, in constructing a vision of a potentially consensual community, several Ealing films explore a liminal space on the margins of

the nation in order to be able to grasp its apparent centre. (Higson, 2000: 45)

The idea of a “consensus” being sort after, within a film space, is interesting and one that is also shared by Charles Barr in his discussions regarding representation (1998). This debate furthers the opinion that these filmic spaces and communities are created, not as a facsimile of reality, but as an acceptable version of ‘reality’ that carries the essence of the British national identity within its depiction. Although class is discussed in a later section, it is worth mentioning that this “consensus” also frames Britain as particularly middle-class and middle-brow, rather than representing society in a more rounded fashion.

An overarching theme in many texts relates to the camaraderie of the British people during the wartime years and the following post-war years. The phrases “People’s War” or “People’s War Mentality” are often used as a framework to discuss the bonding of communities to tackle these wider issues caused by the war. This mentality can be seen as a major backbone of many of the Ealing films in this period (Freeman, 2012). There are many discussions regarding this as a manipulative construct which furthers a specific ideological outlook, creating once again the ideal of community spirit for the audience (Williams, 2000). Andrew Spicer also makes several references to the People’s War construct, specifically in relation to Michael Balcon’s use of this motif to create a safe ethical framework (2003: 28). The “people’s war” concept is discussed in depth (Chapman, 1998; Spicer, 2003; Duguid *et al.*, 2012), however I believe this can be used as a counterpoint in relation to several films which veer away from this ideal and have been little discussed in the existing literature. These films display the fragility and weakness of individuals, rather than the image of a stable nation and communities within it. This fragility is a major element of *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (Michael Powell, 1943) which will be used as the opening chapter to introduce some of these themes which contradict the idea of stability and camaraderie. The discussion of *The Ladykillers* (Alexander Mackendrick, 1955) in a later chapter will question the concept of the, seemingly, cosy nature of some of the Ealing films and also the idea of the “consensus” being merely a façade which hides more complex themes.

As is referenced on numerous occasions, the Post-War community spirit formed closer links between the classes (Richards, 1997: 128). The camaraderie borne from the war continued into post-war Britain. This ideology is evident in many of the war movies from this period, but is particularly noticeable in the Ealing films. This is also referenced as a major strength of Ealing Post-War, but then equally the act of "...repeat[ing] the old truisms about class, gender and generational difference..." was also seen as one of the factors of their downfall (Harper and Porter, 2007: 58). Given I will be concentrating on several Ealing films and War films, the changing ideology of the nation, from consensus in the 40s and early 50s to dissent in the late 50s, is clearly an area which is of major importance. Tony Williams (2000) makes specific reference to Ealing's *Dead of Night* (Cavalcanti, Deardon, Hamer & Crichton, 1945) in relation to the post-war repressive ideologies. The argument that this film embodies "chaotic feelings of instability" (2000: 154) points towards the film being a mirror of the fears of the British nation. Although unorthodox in comparison to other theorists in the field, Williams' slight movements towards a psychoanalytical approach do point out truisms about several of these post-war films. While *Dead of Night* is primarily a horror movie, elements of it do still conform to the cosy and comfortable British consensus, especially the dialogue sequences. The use of mild propaganda and the concept of a shared consensus of Britain clearly has a major role in the shaping of British film in this period. The need for a reconnection with more traditional values, via hero-led narratives, or a more colloquial cinema via Ealing studios all led to a reaffirmation of British ideals. This helped form the British National identity in post-war Britain, not just within the film spaces, but within wider communities.

Class and British Realism

The previous section outlined the concept of consensus within the style and tone several films within this era. Another example of consensus in this era of British cinema was the widespread adoption of the realist tradition, in which British films adopted a style that favoured realistic depictions on screen and eschewed more expressionistic visual and narrative elements. The realist tradition is a key factor in any discussion regarding British cinema in this era and impacts on several different areas of study. British cinema is often analysed using realism as a starting point (Hill, 1986), arguably this is something that was still the case for several decades after the period I am focusing on and potentially up to the modern day. Taking into account directors like Mike Leigh

and Ken Loach through to Andrea Arnold and Lynne Ramsay, but there have also always been the exceptions like Michael Powell and Christopher Nolan. The realist tradition stems from the focus on documentaries in the 1930s. Many of which were also linked to government information films and propaganda, including the Ministry of Information films and GPO films. These films did use a form of docu-drama, or “Story-Documentary” (Drazin, 2007: 162), as an approach which often fictionalised real-life events. John Grierson’s reign at the GPO, prior to him leaving in 1937, produced some of the most notable of these examples, such as *Coal Face* (Alberto Cavalcanti, 1935), about a Yorkshire mining community, and *Nightmail* (Harry Watt & Basil Wright, 1936), following the staff on an all-night cross-country train. Both films focus heavily on the lives of working people and carry a message of community spirit. As these films were supported by the government, they were perceived as having a mark of quality. As their aim was educational, while entertainment was just a means of delivery, there was also an element of this output that was deemed to be for the betterment of the British people.

There was also an expectation that fiction films veered away from fantasy elements and kept grounded in reality, as a way of keeping the public similarly grounded. As such a tradition was cemented that ‘reality’ equalled quality and escapism was frowned upon (Murphy, 1992). Michael Balcon’s influence in the 1930s and 1940s also furthered this tradition, due to his uncommon view that British films should have “social relevance” and reflect “British values” (Drazin, 2007: 102). *Realism and Tinsel* (Murphy, 1992) discusses this tradition in relation to the earlier Ealing Studios films particularly the war films. The subject matter itself implied that the films would be forced into a realist mode, as opposed to a fantastical one, but this was a specific goal of Michael Balcon to uphold the documentary tradition of the 1930s and not stray too far away from realism. These films also acted as a part of the propaganda movement of the war effort, so realism was important in relaying this message, as fantasy could be seen to undermine the cause by veering into escapism. Balcon actively supported the war effort, but also ideologically wanted to still make good films (Chapman, 1998: 80). The book does outline an interesting case in relation to *A Matter of Life and Death* (Powell & Pressburger, 1946), an Archers/Rank production, in which critical response was very negative due to the film’s “technical trickery” (Murphy, 1992: 96). The press did not like films that betrayed the tradition, especially a war film, regardless of the

film's success and overall quality, it was the idea that the film was moving away from reality and into fantasy that they found deceptive. Similarly, Gainsborough were also deemed to betray the tradition of realism (Murphy, 1992: 42) with their post-war costume melodramas which were most definitely created as simply entertainment. There is also an argument here that the "stiff-upper-lip" actions within a film were often mistaken for "realism" (Murphy, 1992: 71).

These elements are important due to the idea that some British films within this era fall in-between the 2 conflicting modes of "realism" and "fantasy", instead depicting a kind of "magical realism". This is set out early on by Andrew Moor (2012b) in relation to Powell and Pressburger, as their films contain many fantasy elements while still appearing grounded in reality. He discusses that one perspective of British national cinema is that it can be seen as "understated, unsensationalised, 'true', anti-fantastic, restrained, un-Hollywood: a set of qualities which echo ideas about national character" (Moor, 2012b: 5), which while being a sweeping statement that ignores many experimental British auteurs, is partially true of mainstream British cinema in many eras. However, Moor's idea of an overtly fantasy film still holding on to reality is never switched around: a film seemingly based in reality which contains subtle elements of fantasy which could almost go unnoticed. Given the backlash to overtly fantastical films, this approach would seem like an obvious one for a production team trying to explore different cinematic techniques. I feel this is a possible opportunity that can be explored in my work. While I am not suggesting that there is a separate sub-genre of "Magical realism", as I believe that would be a pointless exercise in this case, what I am suggesting is that British films of this era were more cautious with their use of overtly fantastical themes and imagery. Even a film such as *Dead of Night* (Cavalcanti, Deardon, Hamer & Crichton, 1945) which is, in reductive terms, a horror anthology but has very little fantastical imagery, other than a few scenes. The horror themes run throughout the film, but it is ostensibly set in a world of based on reality.

The restrictions and restraint within many of these film examples forms a key factor in my argument. The study argues that many of these films have themes embedded within them which are, in part, created by the socio-economic conditions of the era. If these themes were on the surface, especially more critical or satirical content, they would have struggled to be made in this era. Unlike after 1957 when these themes

bubbled to the surface. Although not mutually exclusive, there is also a question of whether these elements were unconsciously embedded into these films or hidden by the creative forces behind the production. The British realist tradition, and the academic focus on facets related to this tradition, has arguably created a very narrow field of analysis of films made in the 1940-50s which ignores some of the wider socio-political factors outlined above. A revaluation of films in this era using other methods, such as the idea of doubling, would open up new debates regarding alternative readings of these films. *The Sleeping Tiger* (Joseph Losey, 1954) and *The Ladykillers* (Alexander MacKendrick, 1955) will be used as the main focus of two of my later chapters and I believe they have traditionally suffered from a relatively narrow analysis which assumes a realist approach or focuses on wider production factors.

Class is a key factor in British cinema in the latter periods of the 1950s and the films of this period becoming increasingly politicised. John Hill's *Sex, Class and Realism* (1986) covers the period of 1956-1963, but importantly outlines many of the contributing factors in the proceeding 2 decades leading up to his chosen era. This lead up to the British New Wave era of cinema is a major justification for choosing 1955 as a bookend to my thesis. The British New Wave can be defined by a shift towards a "commitment to addressing contemporary social realities and...a political serious representation of working-class experiences" (Hill, 1986: 1). This was also accompanied by a visual shift that moved away from formal expressionism and instead used a pared back visual approach closer to documentary. The change in style, which focused on working class protagonists and grittier narratives, is widely recognised as a turning point in the nation's cinema. The focus on "critiques of the British middle-classes" and "more explicit celebrations of working-class energy" (Harper and Porter, 2007: 267) are key traits which were not present in the post-war period, at least not in an overtly literal sense. Class is also relied on heavily by Durnat, specifically in discussions regarding working-class audiences and their enjoyment of specific depictions in films, allowing them to "daydream upwards" (Durnat, 2011: 53). He also debates certain films in relation to post-war wish fulfilment and the wider allegorical use of politics and class in British film (Durnat, 2011: 22-27). *The Decline of Deference* (Harper and Porter, 2003) defines the breakdown of class boundaries in post-war Britain as a major factor, as suddenly the working classes could attain, through social mobility, a more middle class lifestyle. However, although this may have

been the case in wider society, it is questionable whether British cinema truly embraced the working classes in this period.

Linking back to the national identity section, the idea of a filmic “consensus” mentioned by both Freeman (2012) and Higson (2000), in their cases specifically in relation to Ealing, was also instrumental in depicting an acceptable version of the class system on screen. Even Ealing’s more political films like *Passport to Pimlico* (Henry Conelius, 1949) do not delve into post-war poverty. David Pirie’s makes specific reference to the couple in the ‘Haunted Mirror’ section of *Dead of Night*, as an example of a “typically trite English couple” (Pirie, 2008: 17), an archetype that appeared regularly in the Ealing cycle. Outside of Ealing, productions by the Archers and Gainsborough can also be seen to lean towards middle-class archetypes, rather than grittier subject matters. After the 1957 tipping point, Michael Powell did move into more working-class territory with *Peeping Tom* (Michael Powell, 1960). Within the war films of the 1940s there was a tendency to use a middle-class or upper-middle-class officer as the hero figure, something Spicer defines as the “Debonair Gentleman” (2003: 8-12). David Niven’s role in *A Matter of Life and Death* (Michael Powell, 1946) is referenced as a prime example of a character moulded into a version of the “male ideal of the British ruling class...romantic, ethical and practical” (Spicer, 2003: 8). In essence, the Blimp character is a version of ideal, but one that has been broken and twisted into a bitter husk of the once heroic figure. Spicer (2003) discusses at length the use of the “everyman” character in the 1940-50s, in the form of such actors as John Mills and then later by Jack Warner. This role embodied an acceptable version a working-class family man, relatable to a wide audience due to their clean hard-working honest persona. He makes specific reference to George Dixon, the lead protagonist in *The Blue Lamp* (Basil Deardon, 1950), as an excellent example of the righteous idyllic level-headed man of the people, working hard to support the community. The fifties also continued the trend of the middle-class lead in comedies, epitomised by Dirk Bogarde in *Doctor in the House* (Ralph Thomas, 1954), which can be seen as “the middle-class boy-next-door” (Spicer, 2003: 88). This is similar to many of Ealing’s protagonists in 1940-50s, relatable, charming but clearly well-educated character, a role also taken up by Alec Guinness on several occasions. As already discussed, this then moves further towards a focus on working-class culture from around 1957. Although there are exceptions to break the rules, Spicer’s main thread leads us from

the depiction of more upper-class characters in the early 1940s through to the depiction of many more working-class people towards the end of the 1950s. There is a clear shift in within this period, which appears to point towards by chosen time period of 1943-1955 as being a key time period, especially given the appearance of the flawed hero persona in *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* in 1943.

The task of pigeonholing films or fictional characters into class boundaries, and the subsequent analysis of this after doing so, gives way to debates about the class divide in British cinema. The split in the country which has seeped into certain films is often pointed out, but not specifically explored as a close textual analysis of intended meaning. Overtly politicised films are often analysed by foregrounding class, such as Durnat's (2011: 88) analysis of *I'm All Right Jack* (John Boulting, 1959) and tackled from a very literal, and political, perspective. My chosen films already align themselves to some excellent research on the depiction of class in 1940-50s British film, so there will be an opportunity to explore some of these issues further within my thesis. This can be seen in chapter 2 which tackles *Kind Hearts and Coronets* which relies heavily on class structures, social capital and social mobility, however class and social hierarchies are also present in several other chapters, specifically when discussing *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp*, *Pool of London*, *The Sleeping Tiger* and *The Ladykillers*.

Gender

While the 'realist tradition' can often be confused as a purely aesthetic concern, the form is often used to enhance the real-world concerns, specifically in the British New Wave films in the late 1950s. These films are typified by the sense of a flawed masculinity and use this form to enhance these "ideological effects" (Hill, 1986: 65). However, this is also a factor in *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* in 1943 where the sense of 'realism', both visually and narratively, is used to explore gender, specifically masculinity in this example. In this era, the topic of gender relates to hierarchal standing, power struggles and roles within society. The appearance of flawed masculinity, or the broken hero, is of particular importance within this period which also coincides with the emergence of stronger female characters. This possibly stems from the real-life roles women had taken on during the war, as the men had

been enlisted, which shifted the power balance considerably. Hence, to some extent, gender politics starting to shift and impact the male dominated social strata.

Andrew Spicer's *Typical Men* (2003) covers a wide range of stock British characters throughout cinema history. Several chapters are of particular interest as they outline the trend of the stoic English gentleman character and points out the occasions where this character fails to live up to expectation. Both *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* and *Bridge on the River Kwai* (David Lean, 1957) feature in this section, mainly as brief examples, however a link between Candy and Col. Nicholson is made related to their downfall. He makes the link between these two characters as they have a similar narrative arc, given that they both start as pompous, irrational stoics "whose values have become antiquated" (Spicer, 2003: 44), but they are partially redeemed in their final acts. There is specific attention taken to Ealing's role in the construction of the post-war English gentleman:

...Michael Balcon tried to reconstruct the figure as a meritocratic professional that could absorb the gritty stoicism of the People's War but within the ethical framework of middle-class endeavour. (Spicer, 2003: 28)

The fact that Balcon, among others, attempted to reconfigure the Gentleman character from a "debonair" figure in an "ordinary hero" is outlined here and links to many other references to Balcon's use of his studio's films to deliver semi-politicalised message to his audiences. In the case of *The Man in the White Suit* (Alexander Mackendrick, 1951): the common man's actions can make a difference to society. However, the hero characters are still framed within the "middle class anarchic" (Durnat, 2011: 42) framework of Ealing's work. A full shift towards the working-class male character did not really come into effect until the late 1950s British New Wave cycle. This does highlight the post-war period as a particularly important era in the depiction of the British male, as the archetypes begin to develop frailties and flaws. Col. Candy is an early example of the flawed hero, which becomes common place in the post-war era, so the book does point towards *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (Michael Powell, 1943) as being a logical starting point with this thesis. On a broader level Andrew Spicer's book is particularly interested in breaking down stock characters into trends. For example, "The debonair gentleman", "The Action hero", "The progressive

Common Man”, etc. (Spicer, 2003) This is traced in a chronological fashion, so it clearly develops each role’s development into the new era, adapting to suit a new audience.

Andrew Moor pays a lot of attention to masculinities in crisis (2012b) throughout his writings on Powell & Pressburger. Given their work through the 1940s and the large amount of films featuring the war, Moor’s insights work as a good template for other ideas. The masculine ideal of the war hero is equally upheld and undermined in their work, a theme of patriotism and rebellion fighting against each other. This contradiction can be seen throughout this era. Moor (2012b) gives particular attention to the change in tone in the post-war era and specifically to the changing role of masculinity. War films would usually be based around strong male characters and camaraderie, whereas Powell and Pressburger moved their War stories into broader territories by incorporating love stories and strong female characters. Moor analyses this through the eyes of the masses: the ‘people’s war’ and the welfare state being a driving force in softening the audience into being more accepting of different types of narratives (Moor, 2012b: 125-134). The idea of community spirit is constantly referenced in Moor’s work and it works as a backbone to many of Powell and Pressburger’s films, often groups of misfits from different classes and backgrounds coming together to support each other. This shift in ideology as a nation, and clearly as an audience, is encapsulated by Powell and Pressburger’s films from *The Life and Death of Col. Blimp* (1943) onwards into the immediate post-war era. Robert Murphy discusses several of the Powell and Pressburger women, praising their depictions for going against the grain of many films of the era. Sheila Sim’s character, Alison, in *A Canterbury Tale* (Michael Powell, 1944) is a notable example as she is a “fiercely independent” (Murphy, 1992) presence throughout the film and never falls into the traditional female love interest stereotype. Many of the Powell and Pressburger female characters fall into this non-traditional category, some in a very overtly feminist way like in *I Know Where I’m Going* (Michael Powell, 1945) and some in a more complex fashion like the nuns in *Black Narcissus* (Michael Powell, 1947). This may be an area that can be built upon, given Deborah Kerr’s triple role in *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp*, as a potential debate regarding non-traditional female characters in this period.

Sue Harper's *Women in British Cinema* (2000) is partially concerned with the depiction of women in British cinema, but also the pre-production methods that led up to the films being made. Particularly interesting from the perspective of how women were moulded on screen, which factors into all of my examples. Ealing is covered in-depth, but interestingly mainly for their lack of female characters, as opposed to the ones they put on screen. The doubling effect of the Deborah Kerr's multiple roles in *Blimp* has been described as different manifestations of an ideal woman (Christie, 1994b) through the gaze of the protagonist Clive Candy. Sue Harper reads the use of Kerr in multiple roles as the "evocation of the Eternal-Feminine" (2000: 41), which again implies her image is being projected and viewed via the male gaze, despite the strong willed, and independent, nature of all of her multiple characters' actions within the film.

My opening chapter will be focused on *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp*, which features the complex focal point of Deborah Kerr playing several different roles. My final chapter will focus on *The Ladykillers*, which features only a single female character and avoids the stock character of the 'love interest'. Due to this gender anomaly in my bookending chapters, I feel a focus on these gender issues would raise some interesting debates. Is this a male or female phenomenon? Is the weighting of male creatives in this period a factor in the inception of the doubling motif?

Research Questions

By combining a detailed textual analysis of the doubling motif in key British films from this period, with the historical context of the era, I aim to address the following research questions:

How was the doubling motif depicted in post-war British cinema and what does this reveal about post-war trauma in Britain?

How did British filmmakers address this trauma within the constraints of the realist aesthetic?

How does the doubling motif manifest itself in relation to class issues in this era of British cinema?

How was gender used by these filmmakers to interrogate these themes, and what does this reveal about the depiction of trauma and the doubling motif?

The above questions will allow me to analyse this period from several different perspectives. Firstly, the broader historical and societal nature and its impact on British film, while also examining the nature of the filmmaking aesthetic and narrative traditions which form the basis of debates around this British national cinema.

METHODOLOGY

This study will focus not just on the film texts themselves, but the historical events which surrounded their period of production. My primary research will consist of a textual analysis of the individual films chosen for each chapter, which is not restricted to a specific field of film analysis, instead it will analyse several different facets of the film including mise-en-scene, cinematography, narrative themes, characters, etc. However, research regarding historical events which influenced these productions will also be discussed. Linking real life historical events into a discussion regarding a fictional film is complex, as a film is rarely treated as a historical document without some level of scrutiny. However, the collection of articles 'The New Film History: Sources, methods and approaches' embraces this approach:

“...film history is also different in so far as the main primary sources, the films themselves, are unique: the film historian requires skills of formal and visual analysis that are specific to the discipline. The aim of *The New Film History* is to demonstrate, through case studies, how the principles of historical investigation can be applied in practice in order to illuminate the structures and processes that determine the nature of the medium of film and its social institutions ” (Chapman, Glancy and Harper, 2007: 1-2)

My method relies on the fact that British film has been influenced by the historical context surrounding its time of production. In turn the film artefact then influences society and future filmmakers. James Chapman (2013) discusses these approaches in some depth, making reference to Richards and Durnat as adopters of the notion that film was a “reflection of society” and that several historians had started using “...the idea that film, especially popular film, provided insights into the values of the societies in which it was produced and consumed” (2013: 91). The symbiotic nature of film and society is touched upon by Jeffrey Richards (1997: 89) as he outlines the importance of British films’ influence on audiences in the war and post-war years, in the sense that it influenced and solidified a sense of national identity across Britain. Jeffrey Richards has already used a similar methodology, specifically his analysis of John Mills’ “everyman” character (1997: 131) who echoes the nation’s sense of classlessness in the post-war era, while simultaneously supporting the continuation of

this myth well into the 1950s. Propaganda is key in several chapters and the theoretical basis of this is vast, and has been discussed in depth in relation to the war and interwar years, due to the fact that film was "...adopted by the state as an instrument of political indoctrination" (Chapman, 1998:1). This relates specifically to the back-and-forth nature of film imitating society and in some instances conversely being used to influence societal trends. This trend of low level propaganda is built upon in several chapters as a continuing trend that remained after WW2.

This sense of art imitating life, and vice-versa, is key a principle when tackling this subject – in essence film-as-mirror-of-society. However, within the context of this study, there are going to be limitations to how much I can claim to have represented the entirety of the national identity of Britain within this period. Broader sociological theories such as those developed by Michael Billing (1995) and Benedict Anderson (2016) develop discussions regarding how identity and communities can be seen as larger entities within society, which is a similar approach that is utilised in several sections of my thesis.

My criteria for selecting my case studies were based on several factors. Firstly, I wanted the films to be representative of key societal shifts or issues across the 1940s and 1950s. For example, *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* examines the last few years of WWII, but also marks the end of British colonialism. *Pool of London* marks the beginning of multicultural shifts across Britain the early 1950s. Secondly, I wanted to use films that had either been largely ignored, or that had been often analysed in a very different manner. *Pool of London*, *Secret People* and *The Sleeping Tiger* were selected as they were relatively unsuccessful films and therefore have had very little academic attention since their release. *Kind Hearts and Coronets* and *The Ladykillers* are popular films, but don't get analysed using a combination of both historical and conceptual approaches. Thirdly, given the nature of trying to combine historical context and the concept of doubling, I wanted to avoid films that used overtly fantastical elements. These types of film are often used to discuss doubling and psychoanalytic concepts, due to the metaphorical links that can be attached to fantasy, so I felt my study would be more unique if it utilised examples that moved away from this and instead highlighted the subtext of post-war trauma hidden underneath more realist films. The choice of Powell and Pressburger's *Blimp* instead of *A Matter of Life*

and Death (Michael Powell, 1946), both of which could serve as an interesting case study to discuss the end of WWII, related to the former's lack of fantasy sequences and its grounding in reality.

Theoretical discussions regarding realism are complex and there is "...probably no critical term with a more unruly and confusing lineage than that of realism" (Hill, 1986: 57). In terms of this study, there are several overlapping concepts, such as classic realism, British realist traditions and social realism that was particularly prominent in the British New Wave. In essence, all of these they are striving for a sense reality over artificiality whether this be in visuals, dialogue or narrative themes. John Hill (1986: 58) points out the main issue with looking at versions of reality on screen and specifically how definitions of reality are constantly in flux due to changing expectations and traditions, therefore "Films which were accepted as 'realistic' by one generation often appear 'false or 'dated' to the next." James Chapman (2013: 39-40) broadly summarises theories regarding the difference between formative and realist approaches by focusing on elements that are eschewed in the realist movements of the 1940-50s. Specifically these relate to formalist approaches that attempt to stylise film such as *Mise-en-scene* that does not conform to "photographic veracity" in the lighting and sets in German expressionism, and also include the quick montage editing techniques used convey alternative meanings in Soviet montage movements. This is specifically counterpointed with the Italian Neo-realist approach of stripping back all of these stylised visual tricks in order to present a less expressionistic image on screen.

John Hill similarly complicates some of elements that would broadly define realism on film, especially in social realist forms, and argues that some of the factors are completely invisible within the film text (Hill, 1986: 60). For example, knowledge of social and political structures are often too complex to discuss within a two-hour film, so therefore the sense of reality actually comes from the individual audience member rather than entirely within the film. This is key to several chapters within this study, as links to historical contexts are implicit and explicit within many of my chosen case studies, but both do rely on empirical knowledge of the viewer. As this study is specifically looking at the period of time that links British realist traditions and the social realism of the British new wave, elements of both of these eras overlap in my case

studies, especially in the final two chapters on *The Sleeping Tiger* and *The Ladykillers* as the overlap, or clash, between these two forms becomes more apparent.

Given the links between doubling and psychoanalysis, it would seem natural to discuss these films using a purely psychoanalytical approach. However, as Ruddell (2013: 28) argues “psychoanalysis is best put to use when combined with other methodologies” and also further points out that an engagement in these deeper psychoanalytical debates is not necessary to utilise it as a broad framework for the analysis of film, especially when linked to “industry and socio-cultural contexts”. Psychoanalytical approaches in film have been criticised for being “both restrictive and ahistorical” (Richards, 2013: 22) and having “a disdain for empirical methods” (Prince, 1996: 72). This is true of some of Slavoj Žižek’s work, specifically his work in *Looking Awry* (1991) which references a vast amount of popular cinema without taking into account their place in broader socio-cultural contexts or their modes of production, however it needs to be acknowledged that his scope is to discuss psychoanalytical theories using popular culture. While I will not be entirely avoiding psychoanalytical terminology, as I believe this approach does have merit, the scope of my study is almost the opposite of Žižek’s as there is a strong focus on contextualising my chosen case studies within British history and culture.

Given that the thesis includes discussions regarding trauma and post-war psyche, which are explored to enable me to better identify and analyse specific subtextual elements within my case studies, there are several instances which would naturally benefit from a more psychoanalytical approach. However, these are not explored so as to avoid splitting the focus of the study between too many conflicting methodologies. For example, in Chapter 5 which focuses on *The Sleeping Tiger*, the film could easily be analysed using a more Freudian or Lacanian method linking to desire. There are several elements that align with this type of methodology, specifically the love triangle, oedipal allusions and a strong emphasis on pleasure seeking which could lead to a discussion regarding ego, superego and id (Freud, 1997). However, marrying this with the contextual elements of this study proved to overcomplicate an already dense topic and therefore a deeper psychoanalytical approach is not explored in any of the chapters. Given the above example, I will be following the approach of discussing any psychoanalytical elements within an historical context as this will

balance many of the criticisms of psychoanalytic film studies and keep the study grounded in British socio-cultural concerns.

I intend to follow a 3-step approach:

1. Outline the historical context of the film. This will focus on the film's production history, Britain's cultural landscape and socio-political factors.
2. A textual analysis of the film linking these historical factors to several aspects of the film's characters, narrative and mise-en-scene.
3. Finally, I will be addressing the emergence of the doubling/splits motif within the individual film and how its emergence can in turn be linked back to the historical context of Post-War Britain.

Step 1 is intended to build a solid foundation of the context of the film text. This will focus on many of the historical factors that were impacting the film's production using British Film History as a guiding principle. Given the diversity of the films and topics, this historical context will not follow set formula, but is intended to be catered to each film's content and themes. However, they will fall into three key areas: Production History, British cultural landscape and socio-political factors. For example, Chapter one focuses on *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* which was released in 1943, therefore the film study is historically situated in the context of the final years of WWII and also links back to earlier wars featured within the film. Whereas chapter five focuses on *The Sleeping Tiger* and is situated within the mid-1950s and highlights the widening cultural generation gap and the rise of youth culture.

Step 2 and 3 form the analysis section of the process and naturally follow on from each other. Step 2 relates specifically to a textual analysis which will focus on the key themes of the given film. These vary across each film and include Gender, Class and Propaganda, as well as more film specific issues such as the 'British Realist Tradition'. Specific case studies are designed to align themselves with certain topics, for example *Kind Heart and Coronets*'s plot relates to class and social climbing, whereas *Secret*

People links to gender, propaganda and wider issues around political tensions in Europe.

The 'Realist Tradition' is an important issue as the study will focus on film texts that are all set in a fairly straightforward version of 'reality', in the sense they would fall into the category of being historically accurate to their setting. Specifically, they can be described as non-fantastical in nature. As they would fall into the 'Realist Tradition', the more surreal and sub-textual elements of these film texts have often been overlooked. My methodological approach is intended to allow me to analyse these films, whilst taking into account the constraints of the realist aesthetic, and how filmmakers created a subtle subtext that depicted post-war fears within the fabric of their films.

Step 3 is intended to focus on the doubling motif. Marrying up the general thematic qualities discussed in the textual analysis and the historical context but using these in a slightly more conceptual sense. This will give me a broad overview of different instances of this motif, specifically looking into how this motif is depicted visually, how it is incorporated into the narrative and how it links to post-war issues in Britain.

Step 3 naturally links back to Step 1 grounding the more conceptual elements of the doubling motif back to the historical context. This will be used to reveal the meaning behind the instance of the motif by linking this to both specific historical events and broader social-political factors impacting British culture within the era. Ultimately, the combination of these two elements will help define a more specific typology of different instances of this motif.

Chapter 1 - The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp

This first chapter will focus on the film *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (Powell, 1943) which was released towards the end of the first world war. The film itself is set in 1942, but also tracks back through the previous 40 years and uses the British military activity as a backdrop, or sub-plot, in many of the dramatic scenes in the film. In this sense, I feel it is a good starting point as the film outlines many of the British military conquests and is critical of the continuation of this British colonial attitude. Arguably, the release of the film in 1943 also coincides with the decline of Britain's imperialistic rule. The mix of satire and real-world events also moves towards a more post-modern and critical approach to the war movie.

I will put aside the complexities of the narrative of *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* in favour of a brief summary to begin this chapter. The film's running time is 163 minutes, takes place over 4 decades and includes several sub-plots, so an in-depth plot breakdown is too cumbersome at this point. The film begins with the retirement-age Major-General Clive Wynne-Candy in 1943 being humiliated by younger soldiers while taking part in a home-guard training exercise. He is 'ambushed' in the Turkish baths, while under the impression that the exercise, or 'the war', begins at midnight. We flashback to 1902 wherein we meet the young Lieutenant Clive Candy on 'home leave', fresh from the Boer War. In reaction to German propaganda blaming the British army of killing young children in South Africa, he defies his superiors and travels to Germany to meet Edith Hunter. Candy insults the German army in an altercation during a visit to a café, which spurs the necessity for a fencing duel between himself and a member of the German corps, Theo Kretschmar-Schuldorff. Both men are injured and hospitalised but become close friends and vie for the attention of Edith Hunter. Clive Candy graciously steps aside and supports the relationship between Theo and Edith. The film flashes forward to 1918 where Clive Candy is serving in WWI and meets Nurse Barbara Wynne, whom he later tracks down in England and marries. When the war finishes, he visits Theo in a POW camp and is snubbed, but they later resume their friendship in London in the intervening years leading up to 1938. Both their wives die and they form a close friendship. Clive Candy is, due to his advancing years, forced to work for the Home Guard which leads up to the start of the flashback in 1943 where Candy is supported by a young female soldier, Angela "Johnny"

Cannon, who works as his assistant and driver. We then replay the ambush scene and the humiliation of Clive Candy while running the war scenario training exercise.

Doubling and duality are key to the film's depiction of Britain as a nation on the cusp change and therefore the motif manifests itself in several different ways. The flashback structure presents us with different versions of Clive Candy across history as he acts as literal manifestations of the changing tide of the British male in the early 20th century. With each shift in time, we see a different version of the same man, as if split into convenient segments. The British/German binary opposition is explored through the friendship of Clive and Theo with the backdrop of both WWI and WWII turning them into natural enemies, but instead there is an interesting use of counterpointing and duality to explore a more humanist view of the two nations. Finally, there is a literal visual doppelganger with the appearance of Edith/Barbara/"Johnny" throughout the film, as they are all played by the same actress. This deliberant resemblance is barely mentioned in the film, but it heavily implies a deeper meaning to the depiction of these three women across the 40-year timespan of the film.

Blimp was the fifth collaboration between British director Michael Powell and the Hungarian émigré screenwriter Emeric Pressburger. The film is notable due to the controversy it caused in the run up to its release in the Summer of 1943 where it was targeted by the British government due to its depiction of the military. Certain scenes within the film do "epitomize everything that was wrong with British militarism" (Murphy, 1992: 62) which was seen as a major threat to wartime morale by the MOI. Although fictional, the film does use several real-world events as backdrops, and the character Clive Candy is often cited as being a criticism of Winston Churchill (Christie, 1994: 43). The actor Roger Livesey is aged using make-up in sections of the film, and while he more closely resembles the cartoon of Blimp, it could also be argued that there is a passing resemblance to Churchill (Fig. 1).



Figure 1: Clive Candy (Roger Livesey) as Col. Blimp (Left) and Winston Churchill (Right)

The Winston Churchill subject is covered in numerous texts such as Ian Christie's *Arrows of Desire* (1994) and in his introduction to the published production documents to the film (Christie, 1994b: 3-54). The MOI's official report cites the "authors attack the British outlook on life... [and] exaggerates the fair play idea to the point of ridicule" (Christie, 1994b: 33) and it was later reported that Winston Churchill responded to the film with "diehard hostility" (Christie, 1994b: xvi). The 'open secret', as Christie describes it (1994: 43), of Churchill's attempts to ban the film often take precedence in many debates regarding the film, which is hardly surprising given the salacious, headline grabbing nature of the incident. James Chapman (1995: 19) makes reference to the apocryphal nature of some of the stories around the Churchill situation, the fact that there is no clear consensus on the actual events and how this often "overshadowed other important considerations" when analysing the film. This narrow focus was, in many respects, why I was drawn to researching the film from both the historical perspective and attempting to broaden the focus using slightly more conceptual approaches, specifically in relation to key over-looked areas: Masculinity; the three female protagonists; Candy's complex relationship with Theo; and the overarching colonialist rhetoric.

The title itself is taken from David Low's popular political cartoon which first featured in the in the Evening Standard on 21st April 1934, becoming a hugely popular character, mainly in the 1930s and 1940s, but he did continue to appear in various different incarnations over the following 50 years (Bryant, 1991). The pompous Col. Blimp character was used as shorthand by Emeric Pressburger for an outdated military

figure, as his version is drawn in a much more sympathetic light. Despite this, there is a political agenda at play within the movie:

Emeric wrote Blimp's biography with a clear propaganda aim in mind. He was concerned that certain elements in the British establishment – the Blimps – were fighting the war in the same gentlemanly, sporting way they had fought wars in the past. These people either had to be got rid of or made to realize that this was not just another imperialist tussle... (Macdonald, 1994: 207)

This statement quite clearly points to Pressburger's intention for the film to have an impact on the present-day situation during WWII. In fact, Low and Pressburger's separate treatments had a long-lasting effect on culture, if not contemporary events. The basic premise of this Blimp-style character is a recurring archetype in British culture, featuring in various different forms across film and TV, most notably in the form of Colonel Nicholson in *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (David Lean, 1957) and in Captain Mainwaring in the TV show *Dad's Army* (BBC, 1968-1977). It has imposed itself as an unflattering illustration of an oafish commanding officer. This Churchill / Blimp incident and Pressburger's political intentions are a major factor in the selection of this film example. The close links to historical events do imply that there are other elements within this film which can be analysed further in relation to socio-political and socio-cultural factors.

Flawed Masculinity

Candy is the main focus of the full narrative, so it seems appropriate to start by focusing on his journey throughout the film. He is depicted as, ironically, a deeply flawed character whilst simultaneously embarking on an almost perfect illustrious career. While he does suffer a slightly ignominious ending, on first viewing he holds a certain level of respect and dignity throughout, so it seems strange that this character would be at the centre of such controversy. The fears surrounding the portrayal of the lead protagonist in *Blimp* are partially warranted, especially if the character is supposed to fill the role of the hero of the story. Stubbornness and arrogance are common traits in the military cinematic hero in the 1940s, but this can be easily interpreted as more of a sign of determination rather than hubris. Andrew Spicer

relates this typical military male character to “the persistence of the gentlemanly ideal” within British cinema, a character that could “absorb the gritty stoicism of the People’s War” (2003: 28). In effect this is what Clive Candy represents, but a deeply flawed variation of the type. The bullish nature of the German section of the film is interesting from this perspective, especially in relation to the idea of the character being broadly representative of the British military at the start of the 20th century. Candy has just returned from the Boer War, a conflict fought by the British Empire for mainly financial benefit which was littered by errors of judgement:

Like so many wars, the Boer War promoted legends, convenient national myths and a wide variety of half-truths. It consolidated patriotic sentiment at home and also led to bitter internal disputes, within political parties and the media and among the public at large. It was marked by great acts of heroism and self-sacrifice, both individual and collective, but was also, on closer examination, shot through with scandal, corruption and malpractice. It provoked widespread hostility overseas, where a variety of foreign states, many of them imperial rivals of the British, expressed misgivings over Britain’s conduct... (Judd and Surridge, 2013: 1)

In a sense, Candy’s reaction to the propaganda echoes this conflict. He receives a request to go to Germany from Edith and foolishly jumps to her rescue, a chance to play the hero, despite direct orders to stay away from the potentially highly charged political situation. The start of the Boer conflict was fuelled by the “unrealistic load of patriotic expectation on their braided shoulders” (Judd and Surridge, 2013: 105) and this misguided gallantry is equally present in Candy, acting as the ‘white knight’ and saviour, protecting both the reputation of Edith and the reputation of the British military.

It is worth bearing in mind that Powell and Pressburger treat the political fallout section of the film with slight contempt. The resulting scenes of military bureaucrats pinballing the decision-making between departments is more reminiscent of a Hollywood fast-talking goofball comedy, than a British war film. Kennedy (1997: 45) points out the “neatly satirical” nature of this section of the film and specifically refers to these bureaucrats as “Blimps”. This political sequence, although forgettable given that the film develops into a much more personal story, is the epitome of the Blimpish nature

that is so prominent in Low's work. A simple situation that is complicated to extreme measures through pride and ultimately decided by a sportsmanlike 'friendly' duel. The equivalent of a friendly game of tennis in the park. This is a formative moment for Candy, as he accepts the Blimps treating him like a mischievous child and agrees, without much protestation, to take part in the outdated duel for the simple reason that it fits with the code-of-honour that he and the whole of the British military holds dear. Powell and Pressburger punish Candy by scarring his lip in the resulting duel. Interestingly, he grows a moustache to hide his scar, and conforms to the staple British character of the "debonair gentleman", as popularised by Leslie Howard and David Niven (Spicer, 2003: 8). Although there is a bitter edge to this, as Edith points out that a German would be proud of the scar and display it as a badge of honour. Once again, the implication is that Candy would rather hide behind the mask of the British military gentleman, rather than display his flaws. As he grows older, the moustache morphs him into Low's cartoon version of Colonel Blimp (Fig. 2) which acts as a subtle visual mockery of what Candy eventually becomes throughout the course of the film.



Figure 2: Low's cartoon (Left) and the older version of Clive Candy (Right)

Before leaving the hospital, Theo politely enquires about his intentions towards Edith, which allows Candy to gallantly step aside and allow Theo and Edith to wed. However, he and Edith never had a romantic relationship, and were never likely to, so again there is a disingenuous feel to the scene. He was beaten by the better man but needs to save face by acting as the hero. Moor (2012b: 61) points out that Candy's own self-image appears to be based on "his identification with stereotypes and idealisations", he presents himself as a hero, without the heroic acts. There is an allusion to the Boer

War within this characterisation, a campaign that was presented as a success despite its many failings. Candy is similarly seen as a war hero and goes to great lengths to protect the honour of the military actions in Jordaan Siding against the German propaganda, further linking him to the protection of the legacy of the Boer War. Given the earlier allusion to Pressburger's political intentions, there appears to be a subtle undermining of Candy as a hero throughout the film, not just in his final pompous Blimp incarnation. The problematic oxymoron of a 'Colonial Hero', a hero from a war of atrocities, is not tackled head-on within the film but is an underlying factor. His award of the VC from his time South Africa is a source of personal pride, but in fact also represents a trophy tainted with innocent blood. In many ways, Candy is "a hapless prisoner of his class tradition" (Christie, 1994: 47) who, despite being drawn sympathetically, is a character whose arrogance and aloofness always clouds his perception. We pity him for these failings, rather than respect him as a traditional hero. This points to a much broader political assault on the concept of 'heroes', one that stretches back to the 1902 section and runs through the entirety of the 40 year timespan, rather than just the concerns of WWII which often becomes the focus for academic analysis.

The duel itself is merely another exercise in following procedure and acting in the appropriately heroic way. When the idea of fleeing is suggested, it is countered with the phrase "Politically speaking, such an action would be disastrous", this is another example how the film is based around the outward appearance, rather than the actions themselves. Moor (2012b: 72) comments specifically on the fixation on the minutiae of the details, rules and form of the event, which further emphasises the military practices as ritualistic ceremonies without much substance or meaning in the modern world. The duel is simply a political game which is played out in order to perpetuate the idea of the hero-myth surrounding the military in this period. As is the case throughout the film, there is an illusion to the idea of the creation of 'dominant fictions' that shape society's view of the military, which is also echoed in the real-world approach of the selling of the 'the people's war' ideal during WWII (Moor, 2012b: 132). While initially perceived as a heroic act, the officer fighting for the pride of Britain, it points us towards the absurdity of the decision-making process behind the scenes during this period. Political machinations are absurdly presented here, the full scene is supported by a comedic upbeat score, not unlike a silent-era comedy, in which

characters run from room to room to solve the political dilemma. This pushes the sequence past satire, into a cartoonish parody, and can be easily seen as the most politically cutting moment in the film. Not only do Powell and Pressburger undermine the essence of what it is to be heroic, they also use this scene as a mirror to the current action in WWII. Given this, the focus on Candy's transformation into the Blimp character, and its links to Low's original work, is actually quite tame and delicately handled due to the fact we see Candy as simply part of a broken system. This section firmly places the film in the realm of the political satire, a film built around the concept of critiquing the concept of imperialist rule and war mongering. This also makes the film feel like it is far closer to Low's comic illustrations, when in fact this appears to have only been a slight signpost of familiarity for the audience.

Overall, the depiction of Candy is complex, as he is squarely placed as 'hero' of the film while simultaneously his narrative arc becomes a critique of the concept of heroism in the time of war. Acts of masculinity are presented as ritualistic, but these moments of machismo serve no real purpose. The duel being a prime example of this subtle criticism of the wider military fascination with formal procedures. All of Candy's actions are, by association with Low's work, also intrinsically linked to a wider satirical swipe at the military. His flawed masculinity mirrors the flawed military system and more specifically the actions taking place in and around the film's release in 1943.

Flashback structure

It could be said that the film conforms to "the British practice of using the past to explore the present" (Murphy, 1992: 21), in this case literally walking the audience through 40 years of history to the present day. However, much is made of the real-world incident relating to Churchill and it can be argued that this has become somewhat of a 'red herring'. As discussed above, the film is not scathing enough in relation to Candy as a character, none of his actions have any serious consequences or impact the people around him, which means the character, not the film as a whole, fails to be an aggressive critique of the military. When compared to the tragic scene in *The Cruel Sea* (Charles Frend, 1953), in which Cmdr. Ericson is forced to give the command to leave his men to drown, the critique in *Blimp* is very much a polite satire of the military's outdated ideology. Although Pressburger clearly had a political agenda, the message relates much more to learning from these past mistakes and

avoiding passivity in the face of the current threat in 1943. Powell himself admits that the film is a comedy in which the true message is revealed in the Turkish bath scene: “there is no such thing as a gentleman’s war, and that we have to fight dirty if we are to beat the Nazis.” (Powell, 2000: 399). The scenes set in 1943, that bookend the entire film, are pointedly political as they echo the military concerns of the nation. In simple terms, we are not playing by the same rules as the opposition. However, the middle section of the film is quite redemptive of Candy as a character, we grow to like him, understand him and expect his wisdom to shine through in the final chapter. Obviously, by the very end of the film, he does finally concede that the world has changed, but only after he has already suffered his humiliating defeat by the younger officers. In hindsight, the younger officers echo the young Candy’s bravura, but are similarly doomed to repeat the same mistakes of all the historic British officers.

Reading the film from this perspective raises a different interpretation of the Turkish bath flashback scene at the start of the film. The scene involves Candy, as an old man, fighting with a young officer and falling into one of the baths only to emerge, after a long tracking shot, on the other side of the bath as a young man back in 1902 (Fig.3). Moor describes this process as a being “magically rejuvenated”, which implies a mystical element at force within the scene, while he still refers to the scene as an “extended personal flashback” (2012b: 55). As there is no physical cut in the scene, it is a continuous take, convention would state that this plays out more like a time-travel sequence than a flashback as such. If this is the case, then the narrative plays out slightly different: Candy travels back, and regains his youth, to make exactly the same mistakes as before, because that is what Blimps do. In some ways, this actually makes the film’s satirical edge much sharper.

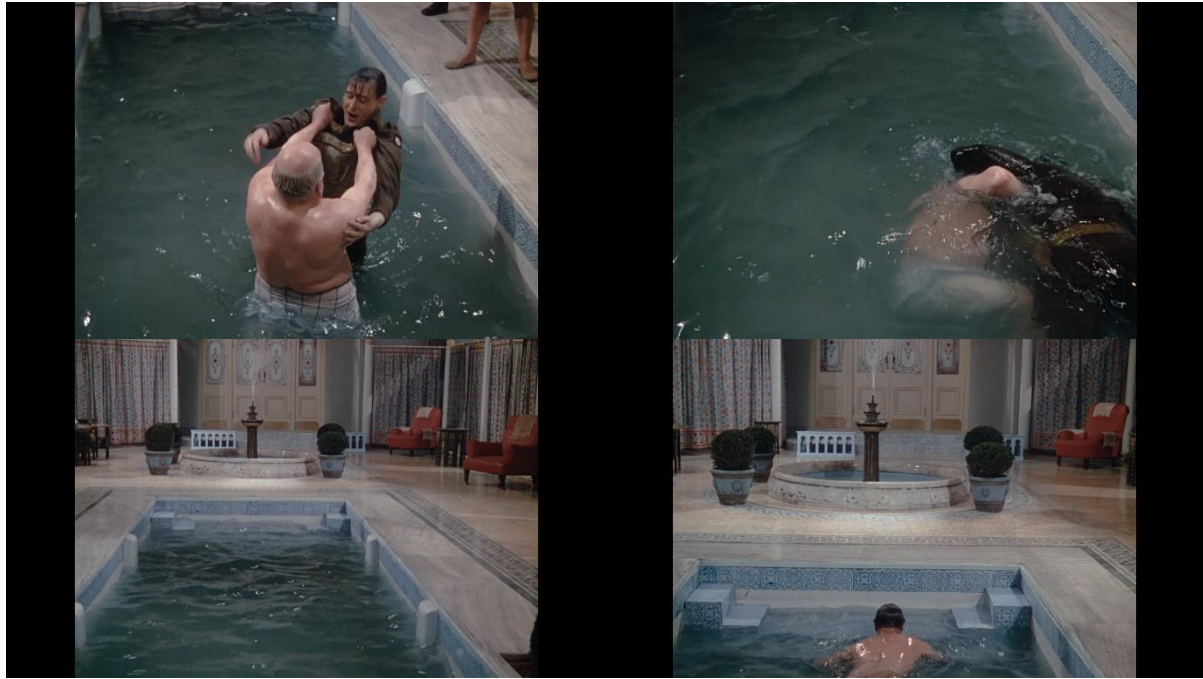


Figure 3: The famous tracking shot which transports Candy 40 years into the past

This idea of a 'rejuvenation', as Moor has posited, is an interesting concept to elaborate on in relation to the wider context of the film. If taken literally, Candy falls into the water and a new version of himself rises out, a doppelganger of his younger self. The appearance of a double can be directly linked to the idea of creating an ideal self, so the double embodies a version of "hyper-masculinity or hyper-femininity" (Ruddell, 2013: 79). The humiliation that Candy is subjected to in the modern day, by the younger officers, is the catalyst for this split. A need to go back to a time where he was still relevant. In this respect, we can analyse the Turkish bath scene in a very different way by looking at the film, not only as an extended flashback for the purpose of regaling the story to the audience, but also as a desperate last gasp by the elder Candy to locate his ideal self. Ruddell (2013: 36) also discusses the concept of the "narcissistic ego" fitting nicely into the description of character's who suffer "splintered identities" in film and further discusses Lacan's concept that "identity is fictional, delusional, and based on a false premise". This equally fits into the earlier discussion regarding Candy as the failed embodiment of a hero stereotype, his identity is delusional in many ways. When the reality of his hero status is shattered, the trauma of this event causes Candy to fracture and travel back to a more idealistic time.

Interestingly, without using the specific words, Aldgate and Richards also describe this scene as more akin to time travel, rather than referring to it as a simple 'Flashback', the more conventional filmic term for this event:

In a fit at such 'impudence', Candy struggles with Spud. They fall into the baths, and with a neat visual flourish the film goes back in time to Candy's own impetuous youth and begins to recount the highlights of his story from that point onwards (Aldgate and Richards, 1999: 85-86)

Moor (2012b: 67) discusses the "hybrid" nature of the film's construction, playing with ideas and conventions, trying to actively "resist [the] constraints of genre". This scene, like many others that will be discussed within this film, when analysed in more depth, is laden with ambiguity and the true intention is not signposted by the filmmaker. This scene's deeper meaning is also conspicuously not referenced by Powell in his autobiography (2000), in fact he avoids metaphysical analysis of his own work across many of his films. The similarity between this and the later floating crane shot that removes us from Candy and Theo's duel is striking. This camera movement also travels in time, moving us to several days later while the characters are in the hospital. This later scene follows more closely to convention, as it simply condenses the passage of time, but it does imply that this is a camera movement that connects closely with the idea of travelling through time. Although this idea of time travel could be easily dismissed as a conceptual theory, it does echo the opening scene of another Powell and Pressburger film, *A Canterbury Tale* (Powell, 1944). The opening scene of this film begins in the 14th Century with the original characters from Chaucer's stories, we then follow a bird of prey into the sky before the camera picks up a passing fighter jet. The film then continues in the modern day, as if the characters and the story have travelled through time. Christie (1994: 49) likens this scene to the bone/spacehip scene in *2001: A Space Odyssey* (Stanley Kubrick, 1968) which links the dawn of mankind with futuristic exploration of space. Similarly, Powell links these similar pilgrimages across time and space as if they are "magically connected" (Christie, 1994: 49).

Although Powell had directed a section of *The Thief of Bagdad* (Ludwig Berger, Michael Powell & Tim Whelan, 1940) which was a particularly lavish production, *Blimp*

was Powell & Pressberger's first technicolour film. *Blimp*'s mise-en-scene conforms fairly closely to the concept of the British realist tradition, in that it sticks to historically accurate locations and sets, especially in comparison to some of the other more expressionistic Powell and Pressburger films. Their post-war films, specifically *A Matter of Life and Death* (Powell, 1946) have a much brighter colour palette and use visual trickery much more frequently, such as the experimental point-of-view eye opening scene, the stairway to heaven and the shifts to monochrome for the scenes in heaven, which partially distances the film from comparisons with the real-world. There are a few complex camera movements in *Blimp*, but these are fleeting in a film that stays relatively grounded. These are clearly important shots within the film. The rising crane shot out of the duel, as discussed, magically removing the audience from the scene is another example of these technical anomalies in an otherwise grounded film (Fig.4).



Figure 4: Rising single shot of the duel that appears to pass through the roof of the gymnasium

It is worth noting that this doubling of Candy, via the Turkish bath sequence, can also be linked to the ballet fantasy sequence within *The Red Shoes* (Michael Powell, 1948) and clearly pin-points a continuation of a similar motif throughout the Powell and Pressburger productions. Leading up to this sequence Vicky Page has been suffering the mental strain of the pressures of the ballet rehearsals and the love triangle she has become embroiled in. During the performance she suffers a breakdown which results in what can only be described as an out-of-body experience, transported to a nightmarish expressionistic version of reality to perform the ballet. Although the Turkish bath and the nightmare Ballet are seemingly unrelated, they do both stem from a traumatic event: Vicky's mental breakdown and Candy's loss of dignity. The visually fantastical elements take over the film at the point of both of these traumatic events. Moor (2012b: 214) identifies this "doubling of self-on-self" within Vicky's character, her role in the ballet and her actual self, which further leads to her instability and loss of identity. However, although not as clearly defined as in the *Red Shoes*, this can also be attributed to Candy. He similarly cannot detach his present-self from the, seemingly, perfect image of his past-self. Michael Powell (2000: 438) has stated that some of their films in this era appeared "conventional" but were actually filled with "subversive material" and this appears to be apparent within several of the more fantastical moments within the this film. Despite the lavish production design and impressive use of early technicolour, the visual elements throughout the majority of the film still feel very much connected to a sense of reality, which makes these sequences stand out for further examination. I would argue that, in this instance, the concept of magically morphing 1943 directly into 1902 is clearly a comment on the lack of progress and development of the British military in the preceding 41 years. Candy is literally the visual embodiment of the lack of progress, he changes visually, but his values are almost identical to his elder double.

The narrative of *Blimp* follows the exploits of Clive Candy throughout his career as a military officer and uses a complex version of doubling. Candy is mainly used to undermine the British military in a relatively unambiguous manner. However, there is also a much more literal version of doubling within the film that runs parallel to Candy's story. While the nature of this is more opaque, it focuses subtly on the changing role and influence of women during the first four decades of the century.

The Three Women

The three main women within the film, Edith, Barbara and 'Johnny' are all played by the same actor, Deborah Kerr (Fig. 5). This is only referenced briefly within the narrative, after both wives have died, a painting of Barbara is admired by both Candy and Theo while discussing her similarity to Edith. This can be seen as another example of a split or double, in this case a triple, which adds another surreal element to the seemingly grounded narrative. The use of the term 'tripling' may be misleading here, as technically all of the characters are not present in the same time and place, they are distinctly separated across different chapters of the film. Powell (2000: 405) describes Edith as Candy's "ideal women" whom he continues to search for throughout the entirety of his life. It was conceived by Powell that the three parts should be played by the same actor, which would naturally link their characters together, so he finds her again in the First World War and again in the Second World War. As the characters of Barbara and 'Johnny' are built in the image of Edith, we could simply describe each as a double of Edith.



Figure 5: Deborah Kerr as Edith, Barbara and "Johnny"

The film is told very specifically from Candy's perspective, he is in almost every scene. Although not narrated, it would not seem out of place if a narration had been added to the film to guide the audience through his story. In this sense, we are seeing the world through Candy's eyes and all the characters are formed from his memory, his interpretation of the truth. Hence, all the women are drawn in the image of his first love, Edith. Throughout the narrative he "is always trying to fill the vacant niche with women of the same size and shape." (Christie, 1994b: 17). This does point to Candy being an unreliable narrator and also points to other instances where the story being presented may have an element of falseness. Early in the production Powell had pursued Wendy Hiller for the female lead in *Blimp*, maybe due to her chameleon-like role as Eliza Doolittle, a woman who transforms herself from a common cockney flower girl into a society lady throughout the course of the film in *Pygmalion* (Anthony Asquith & Leslie Howard, 1938). In Powell's early letters to Hiller (Christie, 1994b: 16-20) there is a clear indication that the 3 roles are entirely interlinked "...although they are three

totally different women they must, of course, be conceived by one actress as a complete piece of work". From a purely visual point of view, having the three roles embodied by the same actor instantly draws attention to the characters within the structure of the film. It can be argued that without this device the three women would merely be supporting roles within the narrative i.e. they would fall into the 'love interest' category. As this larger connected entity, they embody the whole of the female involvement across the entire film and collectively form the basis of the feminine counterpoint to Candy's outdated attitudes.

Edith, the first of the three women, sets this feminist theme in motion by challenging Candy's slightly patronising attitude to her interest in political and societal issues. Although she originally invites Candy over to Germany to act as the traditional male 'white knight', she also counters his words with the statement "While you men have been fighting, we women have been thinking" and proceeds to question the role of women in 1902: "What careers are there open to a woman?". Although never mentioned explicitly within the narrative, Edith clearly represents the suffragette movement. The Pankhursts setup the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) in 1903, a year after the discussion between Candy and Edith, a milestone in the feminist movement (Connelly, 2013: 17-38). This does not feel out of place in the scene, in fact it blends nicely into the narrative due to Edith rebutting Candy's discussion of women with "good manners" being important to the war effort, "My brother told me that good manners cost us Magerfontein, Stormberg and Colenso.". A cutting remark that actually sums up the film's criticism of the Blimps in charge of the country, but here the gender divide is clearly placed as another issue at the root of the problem. The discussion aptly precedes the incident in the café which leads to the duel, being a condemnation of both the petty fighting and overly formal mannered routines that are synonymous with Blimpishness. In essence, Blimpishness also becomes shorthand for the failing of masculinity due to Edith's presence and actions within the scene. Edith's condemnation of the failings of the British Army in several conflicts during the Boer War is then also framed as a battle of the sexes. The parallels between the gradual move away from colonialist actions and the rise of the suffragettes is pinpointed in this meeting of minds between Candy and Edith. This could be described as a fork in the road between two opposing movements. If we follow this trend throughout the timespan of the film's narrative, in 1913 the International Woman

Suffragette Alliance (IWSA) “stressed anti-militarism as a principle of the suffrage movement” (Connelly, 2013: 67) actively protesting against the war. Candy in his role as a ‘Blimp’ is entirely defined by his masculinity, military rank and hunting trophies. In this light, the concept of a ‘Blimp’ represents the opposite of reform and progress, but equally this is framed entirely around the failings of the male gender.

If we look at Edith as the original, a woman Candy admires for her forthright attitude and intelligence, who is willing to challenge his attitudes, then we must look at the doubling of this character via Barbara and ‘Johnny’. The use of the doubling here is interesting, as the visual similarities naturally makes them an extension of Edith and subsequently her political attitudes. In response to Edith’s earlier statement regarding a woman’s role in the workforce, Barbara and ‘Johnny’ have important jobs within the war effort: the former a nurse in Flanders, and the latter an army officer. We can interpret these 3 roles as a multi-generational extension of the same independent values. As I suggested at the start of this section, if taken as one entity, the three women outline the development of women’s independence at the start of the century, from the emergence of the suffrage movement towards independence. The changing role of women during both wars, where they had taken on many of the roles vacated by men who had left to fight in the war, also clearly impacted the social balance in this era. This period in WWII was particularly important, as women could be conscripted and have more sexual freedom, both facts that were dealt with “in an extremely nervous and selective way” by the British film industry (Harper, 2000: 30). However, contrary to the industry practice at the time, this widening gender divide is foregrounded by Powell and Pressburger on several occasions. As already outlined, Edith’s independence is a key element in the early section of the film. Candy marries into a higher class and takes Barbara’s Surname, becoming Wynne-Candy. She, in essence, is the dominant figure in their relationship. Finally, Angela Cannon is given the nickname ‘Johnny’ which, as the only female officer in the film, further plays with the concept of gender roles reversing. Candy is the male counterpoint in all of these paradigms, as he fails to change throughout the 40 years while the women’s movement is developing.

Interestingly, ‘Johnny’ is referred to as ‘Mata Hari’ by the home guard forces when she double-crosses them and tries to warn Candy of their plans the start the war exercise

prematurely. This subtle reference to the well-known spy, who was infamous in WWI and used her role as an exotic dancer as a cover for espionage for the Germans, further links to the concept of duplicity and double lives. Linking back to Powell's intentions, he refers to this narrative arc by stating that "Clive never gets over it. Edith remains his ideal woman, and he spends the rest of his life looking for her..." (2000: 405) which again returns us to the concept of doubling being interlinked with the creation of ideals. Candy's failure to pursue Edith, and his failure to live up to the hero ideal, forms the female doubles later in the narrative. However, due to their development throughout the decades, the characters are clearly not doubles, in the strictest sense, but form a much more sophisticated version of the split personality theme. Instead, I'd rather posit the idea that these three characters are an ongoing development of a counterpointing motif by Powell and Pressburger, which highlights the changing roles of women while the men stay more static. The difference between the original Edith and the final incarnation, 'Johnny', is stark. Edith, despite her more liberal politics, is relatively conservative, reserved and her clothes are coded as more feminine i.e. a formal dress. There is a contrast between Edith and the roguish behaviour of Candy, whereas 'Johnny' is coded in her army uniform (Fig. 5) and exhibits behaviour closer to Candy's, such as the double-cross described above. Again, while masculinity, in the form of Candy, stagnates, the women represented by Kerr develop in different directions and this is clearly a commentary on the resourcefulness and adaptability of women during WWII.

The two versions of doubling above can be specifically read as extensions of Candy himself: the flawed man repeating the same mistakes over and over; then the man fooling himself into searching for the ideal woman. However, the next example breaks away from the film's focus on Candy and looks at his adversary, friend and arguably his mirror image.

The Good German

Blimp was released in 1943, during WWII, and several elements of the film directly comment on the current conflict, most notably through the relationship between Candy and Theo. Within the film's narrative, Powell and Pressburger take a particularly neutral stance in relation to the British/German political relations and often use Theo as exemplar of the everyman torn between duty, country and self. However, this

impartiality is in stark contrast to many of the films being produced at the time. Propaganda in film during the second world war has been widely documented in relation to the Ministry of Information (MOI) and their funding of certain productions that would carry messages in support of the British government's aims and "contribute to the war effort" (Drazin, 2007: 177). Documentary was a major vehicle for this softer form of propaganda in this era (Chapman, 1998: 52) however the MOI also supported several fiction projects as well. Understandably, war movies were a focus in this respect, as major issues could be depicted directly on screen, without the need for a more subtle approach. When discussing *Blimp*, Moor makes reference to Alexander Korda's "Empire" films (2012b: 68) as a direct precursor, due to "their apparently simplistic construction of national, racial and gendered identity, and their imaginative investment in the virtues of adventure". This is something that Powell and Pressburger attempt to avoid in their film, specifically the element of heroic adventure, which are removed from the film entirely as we never see any combat throughout *Blimp*.

Powell and Pressburger were commissioned to produce a fiction film by the MOI to support the war effort and gained £60,000 worth of investment for their next feature (Murphy, 1992: 13). Their resulting film, *49th Parallel* (Michael Powell, 1941), mainly focuses the crew of a crashed German U-boat in Canada and their attempts to cross the border to find refuge in America. This was mainly aimed at currying favour with the, then neutral, Americans. The MOI had originally pitched a film focusing on mine-sweepers which was instantly rejected by Powell, who instead tabled the idea of setting a film in Canada which would depict the situation in a light that would draw attention to the imminent threat to the American border (Powell, 2000: 347). Although Powell was ostentatiously attempting to get his film financed by any means possible, this incident also provides us with an insight into the astuteness of Powell's understanding of both world politics and the power of popular film to influence world events via soft propaganda. *49th Parallel* is a pre-cursor to *Blimp* in the respect that the whole film stems from a purely political message, which is then subsequently wrapped up in an entertaining package. The resulting film was probably not what the MOI were originally intending, expecting something more in line with a heroic war movie. This off-kilter approach to propaganda is present in *49th Parallel* and, similar to *Blimp*, the film is also set in a recognisable version of reality, adding to the weight of its messages. This once again links back to Powell's statement regarding the use of

“subversive material” which is cleverly hidden under the veil of a seemingly formulaic shell (2000: 438). The film also has another important element which is carried over into the *Blimp*, the presentation of the German officers as rounded characters, rather than one dimensional stereotypical enemies.

Many war films in this era, and arguably throughout the course of film history, have resorted to the good/evil paradigm as shorthand. Obviously, this is not a unique trait in war films and is seen across many genres. This binary opposition of good/evil extends beyond the realms of cinema and is a concept that has been explored in relation to many cultures. Paul Fussell (Fussell, 1975) discusses this phenomenon and its development in the first world war, especially in relation to the polarising effects of the physical boundaries laid out by the conflict. This resulted in a state where “...civilised ambiguity and nuance were in serious jeopardy...” (Fussell, 1975: 80) which furthered the simplistic good/evil paradigm, more akin to the boundaries one would see presented in a children’s fairy-tale. This is not an isolated wartime issue, but is heavily present in the act of creating fiction and the way artists, in various media, have taken a revisionary approach to representing these conflicts in a simplistic and uncomplicated manner, which often lends itself to a more dramatic narrative, eschews factual accuracy and subtlety:

The drama of the binary here resides not in the actual event but in the postwar tendency of imagination that has imposed a dramatic binary action upon it. (Fussell, 1975: 80)

This was a standard approach to war movies in the early 1940s and the technique both fuelled this natural desire for clear binaries and supported the war effort through a sense of simplistic patriotism to support “the essential wartime ideology of popular national unity” (Chapman, 1998: 81) . However, the concept of portraying a real-life opposing force or ‘the enemy’, to use the more extreme polarising description, in a positive light was a rarity in the 1940s.

Blimp distorts this model by depicting Candy and Theo as equals throughout the film, but wrongfoots the audience by setting up the initial meeting as a traditional rivalry that conforms to the binary theory in almost every sense. Theo is originally introduced in

the duel sequence. They are literally opponents representing their respective nations in a mini battle. Candy has arrived in casual clothes and is rather jovial, while Theo arrives in full military attire and exudes an air of cold professionalism. The music score also heightens the tension by cueing Theo's entrance with menacing music. In this respect, the stereotypes of the plucky charming British hero and the strict efficient German villain are perfectly presented throughout the duel scene. It is a perfect setup that counterpoints the differences between the two nations: "Pedantic German efficiency and pride face British complacency and Gamesmanship. We are looking at the war in miniature." (Kennedy, 1997: 45). Andrew Moor (2012b: 72-73) focuses on the ritualistic nature of the scene, which he considers to be more of a comment on the nature of military fixations on class, form and honour. This is an over-arching theme throughout the film, so serves as another case in point. Interestingly, Moor points out that the actions of the actors, cinematography and editing of the scene also sets up the concept of the characters' being doubled on screen: "soon to be blood brothers", they mirror each other, and are spliced together. All that separates them is nationality". This opening encounter between Candy and Theo sets in motion the idea of two characters who are mirrored but split due to their country of origin. Moor also points to the sequence exhibiting the "...visceral, and potentially the homoerotic" which, if taken literally, attempts to cast Candy and Theo as not only doubles and rivals, but also as potential sexual partners. Although any machismo driven sequence can be attributed with the label of being homoerotic, the later developments in the plot see them settle down and live together, like a married couple, so this could also be seen as a valid point and a potential alternative reading of the film.

The end of this sequence is also very interesting for several different reasons. As the duel begins, the camera jibs up, out of the top of the building and into the sky where we see the snowy skyline of Berlin. Firstly, the film takes us away from the action before it begins, cementing itself as an anti-war film, it never glorifies any conflict throughout the film. Secondly, due to the jib shot, we see the characters and then the building as miniatures, which highlights the sequence as a kind of living diorama. This mini-conflict is itself the war in a microcosm, the war in miniature. Finally, this echoes the opening of *Citizen Kane* (Orson Welles, 1941), the crane shot that reveals Xanadu and the overlaid snow from the snow-globe (Fig. 6). Given the fact that both *Blimp* and

Citizen Kane present a flawed character's life in flashback, it can be argued that this is a subtle visual homage by Powell.



Figure 6: *Citizen Kane* (left) and the end of the crane shot in *Blimp* (Right)

Directly following this sequence, Theo and Candy become friends while in the hospital and the standard binary opposition of good/evil breaks down. They are presented as equals rather than being presented as opposing forces, as they were in the duel sequence, instead they echo each other in many ways. This is presented to the audience via the love triangle between Theo, Candy and Edith. Candy concedes to Theo, which considering the original good/evil setup, in effect equates to the Hero surrendering to his German counterpart. Within the context of the film, this does not feel particularly out of place as it simply takes a potential bitter rivalry and turns it into a friendship. However, as Chapman (1995) has suggested, this should be perceived in relation to the contemporary audience in 1943 which would be very much equating this paradigm to the current situation in WW2. More specifically, at this point in 1943, German equals Nazi, especially so given Theo's military status.

This complex counterpointing of Nations was not lost on the MOI and is referenced in their report on the early script in June 1942:

The over complication of ideas is much more dangerous. The authors attack the British outlook on life as expressed in the terms of sportsmanship and fair play. They show this in contrast to the German (not Nazi) efficiency and ruthlessness. They suggest in the end that Germans can only be defeated with their own weapons. (Christie, 1994a: 33)

The Nazi threat is only alluded to on a couple of occasions throughout the film, hence the MOI's concern over the complicated and subtle messages that are present in the film. The first, and most prominent in the narrative, is the allusion to German underhanded tactics which is the crux of the contemporary sequence in which the rookie home guard officers take Candy as a prisoner of war in their exercise. In this sequence the rookies act like the Nazis and strike first, without warning. The second is Theo's dialogue scene when he flees Germany to return to Britain which is much more impactful and tackles the Nazi threat from a personal level rather than from a broad tactical position. In a long monologue scene with an immigration officer, Theo outlines the fate of the German people after losing the first world war, professing that his "outlook on life is against the Nazis", he has no connection to his children "They are good Nazis...as far as any Nazi can be called good...We became poorer and poorer...everyday, retired officers and school teachers were caught shoplifting...The price of everything rose, except of human beings.". He also raises the prejudice Edith faced due to being of English heritage, "We had lost our children to the Nazi party. [when] she died, none of my sons would come to her funeral". Theo's story is undoubtably anti-Nazi, but can also be read as being simultaneously pro-German. He is condemning Hitler's contemporary Germany, while lamenting the losses of the Nation after WWI. In this sense, Candy and Theo have a similar narrative arc, they both look back wistfully at the past and comment on the changes in society which have, in both their respective nations, made the present a much more ruthless place to live.

This sequence of events draws a direct comparison between the British and German colonial aspirations during the early 20th century. Again, as I have touched upon above, Powell and Pressburger firmly place the audience between the two rival nations without prejudice against either. The two friends slowly develop into a metaphor for military success and failure. Just as important in this metaphor is the waning power of both the respective nations and the end of their imperialistic goals.

Colonialism: The beginning of the end

The doubling device, which is present in both Candy and Theo, becomes key to the overall message of the film. They are equals when they first enter the duel, but directly

after this point their fates split. The lack of impact on Candy's lavish lifestyle is not a focus of the narrative but is foregrounded whenever Theo is reintroduced into the narrative. Theo has struggled and lost everything while Candy lives in a large house with servants and has spent the majority of his life travelling the world on hunting trips. When they are finally reunited, Theo is destitute and forced to live with Candy. His gains are, like his hunting trips, tainted in blood, acquired through the spoils of imperialistic wars.

There is an implication throughout the film that Candy is detached from the reality of war. Theo, as discussed above, is used as a sympathetic victim of the wars while Candy has lived through the same period with very little impact on his own circumstances. Arguably, the duality between these two characters and the way their fortunes split becomes the most damning element of the film's narrative. Both nations are arguably similar in their imperialistic hunger for domination over other nations, but somehow the British have emerged from this period as the wealthy victors, whilst the Germans are cast as the broken villains. However, Candy's ignorance and arrogance is always foregrounded and works as an allegory for the British military and colonialism throughout the film. Later in the narrative, Theo is invited to a semi-formal dinner by Candy only to be uncomfortably placed around a table with ignorant 'blimp' archetypes discussing politics and war. This meeting takes the recognisable tone of "...kind but patronising" (Kennedy, 1997: 62), an enormous amount of power is wielded between this room of blimps, while the content of their discussions seems wildly underinformed and desperately short-sighted. The scene is almost a visual representation of Colonial rule. The image of the old British generals smoking cigars around a lavish dinner table while discussing politics and military strategy, is undermined by the underlying nature of their discussion, bringing to the fore the rottenness at the core of the ever more flimsy grasp on reality of the colonial leaders. Kennedy (1997: 62) quite rightly reflects on this scene in relation to future conquests: "It is clear that a peace built on these terms cannot last, that our home is not safe".

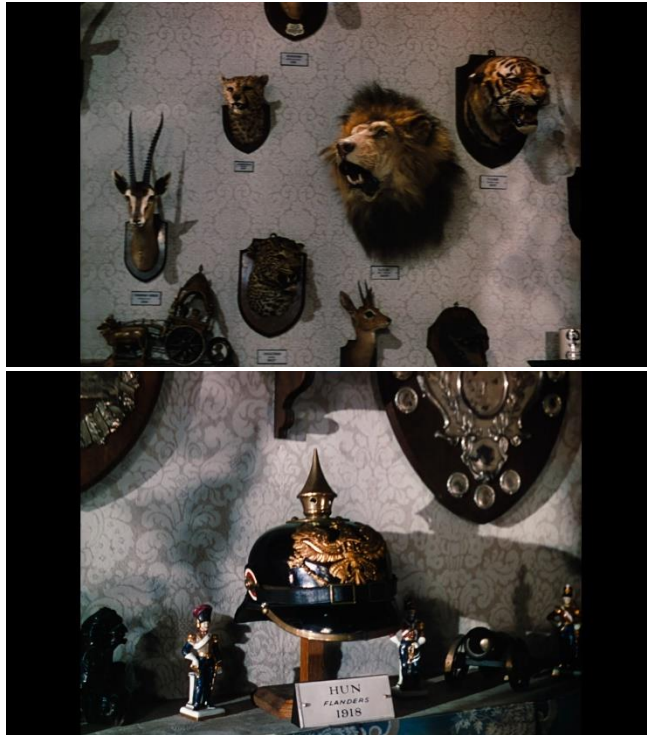


Figure 7: The trophy room (Top) and the Hun trophy (below)

This commentary on colonial practice is also present in the hunting montages, in which Candy's stuffed animal head hunting trophies appear in his dedicated trophy room with plaques stating the date of the hunt. One of the trophies is a German Hun helmet reading 'Hun. Flanders. 1918.' (Fig. 7). Although this is most definitely a joke made in poor taste, the target of the joke is ambiguous on first viewing and only becomes apparent in relation to the film in its entirety. At the moment this image appears within in the film, it reads like a jingoistic piece of iconography that proves we, synecdochally, beat the Germans in WWI. This is how this image would be interpreted in many films in this era. However, within the context of the film, this merely reads as a comment on the British military foreign policy being akin to travelling around the world hunting trophies as a conquest, as a matter of pride. Similarly, after her death, Barbara's painting is displayed in a similar fashion. Another collected trophy of Candy's travels. These elements are seemingly disparate, but do form a collective whole of Candy's nature:

This connotation of hunting with sexual and emotional inadequacy directly critiques the popular justification of imperialism. Not only does it imply that the imperial adventure is a flight from domesticity, but the focus upon the

collection of trophies rather than upon the supposedly skilful hunt forces us to read that imperialism as a grotesque acquisitiveness. (Moor, 2012b: 75)

The fact that Powell and Pressburger use this seemingly patriotic image ironically is perhaps another example of why the MOI were so concerned about the overall message that the film carries. Candy's idealistic approach to war is a common issue throughout, his inability to accept that his ideals are outdated, but this theme is also extended to Kerr's characters. Candy becomes fixated with his one ideal, represented by Kerr, and cannot seem to drag himself away from this image. By extension, this is the problem with the British military attitude.

This reading does in fact shed more light on other elements of the film which appear to question the military practice of the British army over Candy's years of service. The first narrative action, if the film is ordered chronologically, is Candy receiving the letter from Edith regarding the German propaganda against British colonial actions in South Africa. Candy claims that Kaunitz is spreading propaganda claiming "...that we're starving them in concentration camps, shooting mothers, burning babies. You wouldn't believe the things they've invented". Despite the protestations by Candy, there is an element of truth to Kaunitz's claims. Judd and Surridge (2013: 187-196) outline these atrocities in some detail. The British army set up over 100 concentration camps in South Africa during the Boer War which resulted in the death of over 25,000 women and children. Although this was not genocide, as is the case with the Nazi camps, the deaths within these camps were caused by the British neglect of the prisoners and mainly attributed to issues regarding poor treatment, hygiene and malnutrition. Lord Kitchener's 'scorched earth' policy was also a divisive tactic that was used during the Boer war. This would involve destroying farmland, crops or any other useful assets on mass to deplete an area of natural resources. In the short term, this was intended as a method of starving an opposing army of areas to restock, but also caused immeasurable long-term damage to the infrastructure of a country as many of the farmlands were unsalvageable in the aftermath.

Given that the film was released in 1943, it is unlikely that Pressburger was using *Blimp* to comment on the current use of concentration camps by the Nazis. Reports from the concentration camps only started to appear around April 1945 based on the

account of the American forces that discovered them (Wachsmann and Caplan, 2009: 168). However, Pressburger's jump from 1943 to 1902 and the subsequent juxtaposing of the ideals and methods of the British in the Boer War with the current 'ruthlessness' of the Nazis is rather prescient given the true horrors of WWII had not been uncovered at this point. Strangely, this comparison becomes much more powerful when looking back at the film from a post-war perspective and would have, more than likely, been even more of a concern for the MOI given the palpable links between British concentration camps and the tactics used by the Nazis. Although this section of the film is simply used as a brief narrative device to place Candy in a position where he meets both Edith and Theo, the allusions to the Boer War are elements that should be taken more seriously in relation to the Candy/Theo relationship. As already discussed, the Theo's personal life is left devastated by the aftermath of WWI and, although not explicitly stated, the economic ruin of Germany post-1918 does echo the 'scorched earth' approach to the Boer War. However, the rise of the Nazi party in this time can be attributed to the lack of support and compassion for the German civilians post-WWI. The Candy/Theo relationship is an example of this compassion in action, especially in the final act where Candy financially supports his friend without any prejudice, even though their countries are currently at war.

Within the film there is an even-handedness to criticising all sides and this can be attributed to Emeric Pressburger's roots as a Hungarian émigré who arrived in Britain in 1935. There is perhaps more than a passing resemblance between Theo's story and that of Pressburger's, he had similarly lived in Paris but had come to Britain for work rather than to necessarily escape the onset of the Nazis as was the case for Theo (Macdonald, 1994: 118-119). This has clearly had an influence on curtailing some of the more 'flag waving' tendencies within the film which were present within British cinema in this period. Given the public opinion towards the Germans in 1943, it makes sense that the only way Theo could be drawn sympathetically, would be to have him act in a way that was beyond reproach. A perfect example of a German, set against the atrocities of the Nazis, which balances the scales. Candy is more problematic, as he embodies the best and worst qualities of the nation within a single character. This does make the doubling and counterpointing between these two characters seem balanced in favour of Theo. However, if you take the film as a holistic product, the actions of both nations do balance out, albeit there is a vast area of grey

over the course of the 3-hour running time. Christie's (1994: 20) description of Pressburger's method is quite apt in this instance: "to turn the tale inside out, to explore its beginning in its end, and its interior through its exterior". It is exactly this kind of ambiguity that caused Powell and Pressburger to run into multiple issues with the MOI throughout the production of *Blimp*, specifically regarding the counterpointing of the British/German ideological standpoints (Christie, 1994b: 30-36).

Blimp is strangely complex film for 1943, a time still dominated by Alexander Korda's problematic Empire films (Moor, 2012b: 68) and other 'flag waving' patriotic war films which cast the British officer as the unquestionable hero. *Blimp* flagrantly complicates this paradigm by presenting us with a deeply flawed character whom it is difficult to fully rally behind, but yet there is hope in the final moments of the film, maybe he and Britain have finally learned from their mistakes. Interestingly, on agreeing to let his *Blimp* character be used as inspiration for a film, David Low's only demand was that "Powell and Pressburger take full responsibility for the production and, most of all, that *Blimp* be proved a fool in the end" (Aldgate and Richards, 1999: 79). It can be argued that Powell and Pressburger did not fully deliver on their agreement with Low. Candy is introduced as a foolish character, but after seeing his life unfold, we empathise with him deeply, despite his flaws. However, the element of the film where Powell and Pressburger did keep their promise to Low is not contained within the character of Candy, who is the visage of the *Blimp* cartoon, but in the wider depiction of the Blimpishness of the British military as a whole.

Candy provides an interesting template for flawed masculinity, specifically in relation to how this can be used to illustrate the instability of Britain's role and identity as we move into the post-war era. This, in effect, is the source for the doubling motif within *Blimp* and will be an area of study that will be further developed in later chapters. Gender is an area that has been largely ignored in relation to *Blimp*, particularly Kerr's multiple characters, but clearly this theme plays a much larger role in Powell and Pressburger's world view than has previously been explored. There is an argument that the role of Women in the early 20th century is actually a key theme in *Blimp*, but due to the richness of the film's other parts, this area has been repeatedly ignored and underdeveloped. It is fair to say that colonialism is an underlying theme throughout *Blimp*, but is never at the forefront of the film's narrative, even given the criticism of

the Boer War. However, I think I have argued that it was clearly a major concern for Powell and Pressburger, especially in the way that Theo keeps reminding us of the ramifications of war and the people left behind in the aftermath. The counterpointing of Candy and Theo is a subtle use of the doubling motif which enhances this anti-war message throughout the film. This analysis also moves away from the reading of *Blimp* as a film that relies solely on Candy's role as a sympathetic blimpish character who simply represents the flaws of the military. This is true, but there is also clearly a much richer dissection of British society taking place within the film.

Chapter 2 - Kind Hearts and Coronets

This chapter will examine *Kind Hearts and Coronets* (Robert Hamer, 1949) in the light of the immediate post-war period focusing on areas that have been largely overlooked in previous studies, specifically the links to social history of the period and the doubling motif via the lead protagonist. Newton (2003) alludes to the lead protagonist's mixed-heritage and Moor (2012a) skirts around concepts of fantasy, but neither fully attach these to social history or move away fully from reading the film entirely out of the context of realist traditions. The chapter will be building on their work and attempt to reframe the film from a more fantastical perspective.

The film's narrative concerns Louis Mazzini seeking revenge on the D'Ascoyne family who, he believes, have robbed him of his birth right. Louis's mother had married a poor Italian man and had subsequently been disowned by her family, the D'Ascoynes. Louis's father dies around the time of his birth, which further sends his mother into poverty. After the death of his mother, Louis requests that she be laid to rest in the D'Ascoyne family plot, but his request is denied. This incident then spurs Louis to seek revenge on the family by killing all of the D'Ascoyne heirs that are ahead of him to be next in line to become the Duke of Chalfont, thereby reclaiming his legacy and birth right. There is a sub-plot regarding his middle-class childhood friend, Sibella, whose family he lodges with when his mother dies. She scorns his advances due to his lack of money and marries another man, Lionel. When Louis's fortune begins to change, he and Sibella begin an affair. When Lionel is found dead, potentially a suicide, this leads to Louis's incarceration. The film is told in flashback via Louis's journal/memoir he is writing on death row. The ironic final act sees Louis being acquitted of the crime, but he accidentally leaves his memoir/confession in his cell which outlines all of his other crimes.

Kind Hearts and Coronets is adapted from Roy Horniman's 1907 novel 'Israel Rank: The Autobiography of a Criminal', but can be described as typical of the Ealing comedies of the period. A well-written, satirical dark comedy of manners which relies on the studio's impeccable knack of using character actors, most notably Alec Guinness' iconic role as all eight of the D'Ascoyne family. On face value, the film still fits into the "rather cosy, conventional, petit-bourgeois vision of England." (Barr, 1996:

110) that can be loosely defined as the Ealing style, yet unlike many of the other comedies of this period, the satire veers into much darker territory and is tinged with cynicism that borders on nihilism. As is often the case with British films in this period, the film is typically analysed using a more realist approach (Barr, 1998: 119-130) whereas this chapter will attempt to reframe elements of the film from a formalist perspective as well.

The film tackles several social issues of the period, but the lead protagonist's rise through the post-war class system, is particularly pertinent in this era. The overarching theme of the previous chapter, gender and flawed masculinity, is also present here. However, this has developed from a colonial sense of duty, and the failure to live up to that perfect image of the British gentleman, into a deeply troubling view of masculinity desperately attempting to gain respect via any means possible. Race, something that is rarely discussed in relation to the film, will also be explored via the representation of Louis, his mixed heritage and via the use of derogatory language within the film. All of these factors constantly point to the idea of doubling and splits, specifically in relation to Louis's status as both rich/poor and English/Italian, but also to the use of masquerading and performance that is a returning theme throughout the film. The motif of doubling is once again very prominent within this film, but has often been discussed in relation to the literal image of the multiple faces of Guinness as all eight of the D'Ascoyne family (Murphy, 1992: 213). However, in the actions and multiple faux personas of the lead character of Louis Mazzini, the film's overall theme is that of duality and deception. This chapter will explore how this doubling motif is also a product of the immediate post-war war era, links specifically to class and race, and how the analysis of the film can be expanded by moving away from a purely realist methodologies.

British film traditions

Within British cinema of the 1940s and 1950s we see the rise of both Gainsborough and Ealing Studios, the latter of which will be of particular interest across many of my chapters, however *Kind Hearts* built on the styles of both popular studios to create a rather unique hybrid. Gainsborough predominantly focused on period melodramas and literary adaptations often with a penchant for hyperbolic theatrical performances. They released several successful films towards the end of the war, including *The Man*

in Grey (Leslie Arliss, 1943), *Fanny by Gaslight* (Anthony Asquith, 1944) and *The Wicked Lady* (Leslie Arliss, 1945), and continued to be a presence throughout the 1940s. James Mason's role in *The Man in Grey* spawned a trend for, as Andrew Spicer (2003: 23) defines them, "Byronic male" characters, "strikingly handsome" and mysterious Gothic villains. As a collection of films, the Gainsborough output can be described as rather gloomy and gothic melodramas, but also veer away from the realist traditions of the time, especially in relation to the set design and lighting, and acted as a counterpoint to Ealing's more grounded British films (Murphy, 1992: 42).

Charles Barr (1998: 80) sees the cluster of Ealing comedies in the late 1940s as an "...authentic response to certain forces in post-war Britain...". The studio focused mainly on films that were set in modern day Britain and often involved a sense of community spirit or post-war collectiveness, as typified by *Passport to Pimlico* (Henry Cornelius, 1949). Which, in essence, is a film that actively welcomes the idea of political revolution, although wrapped up in a cosy little comedy. Lee Freeman argues that Ealing were partly responsible for setting the more left-wing mood of the British people leading up to the end of WW2:

Ealing has tended to be associated with the wartime transformation of British society that contributed to the Labour Party's historic electoral victory in 1945, where shared experience of war helped to shape a new social and political consensus, increasingly democratic and egalitarian in nature. (Freeman, 2012: 71)

Their films consistently engaged with low-level political issues via the communities or 'everyman' characters that sit at the centre of the films, echoing the working-class audience. Although seemingly slight in nature, probably due to being presented via the vehicle of the comedy genre, the films do present "...pivotal issues of class, social democracy and post-war reconstruction in relation to the ethos of the people's war." (Freeman, 2012: 71). Ealing's grittier output, such as Hamer's previous film *It Always Rains on Sunday* (Robert Hamer, 1947), tackle crime and working-class issues in a much more direct fashion using film noir as a template. In a similar way, *Hue and Cry* (Charles Crichton, 1947) depicts the life of a gang of working-class street boys who foil a criminal as, what is in essence, another version of a community coming together

in a crisis. A common theme, but this time using a crime caper plot as the vehicle for the message. In effect, using various genres, Ealing were attempting to form a vision for a better Britain by presenting a consensus of the perfect community which included the more 'cosy' settings, which are often seen as its staple, but also presented much darker themes and debates within its output. Freeman (2012: 71) similarly sees this period as Ealing being "...consistently engaged with the new consensus" while simultaneously keeping their style intact.

Strangely, *Kind Hearts and Coronets* seems to straddle both of these competing cinematic trends. It is grounded in classical realist elements: the location shooting of the modest town house streets and the scene outside the local village pub. In the most reductive sense, the central theme is actually focused on social mobility: a poor boy becomes a Duke. If the means to this end were any different, then this would feel closer to the wholesome Ealing comedies. However, Louis Mazzini, accompanied by his sinister voiceover narration, gives the film a more gothic undertone. Louis, himself, conforms almost entirely to the concept of the "Byronic Male" (Spicer, 2003: 23); womanising and murder seem to be trivial actions throughout the film. Charles Barr (1998: 120) reads *Kind Hearts and Coronets* as "...out of time, timeless; already set in the past, and immune from dating; could have been made at any time" which gives the film a strange 19th Century Gothic mood which is constantly undermined by the present-day setting. This want to recapture the past and somehow place it in the present-day could easily be read as yearning to return to the past, or more cynically, as a comment of the lack of change in the upper-classes. The timelessness of the gentry. However, from a broad cinematic trend perspective, the film perfectly captures the strengths of both Ealing and Gainsborough in a single package.

Post-war British society

The period between the release of *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (Michael Powell, 1943) and *Kind Hearts and Coronets* in 1949 is key in the formation of modern British culture. There was still a relative sense of conservatism and traditionalism in the air:

Britain in 1945. A land of orderly queues, hat-doffing men walking on the outside, seats given up to the elderly, no swearing in front of women and

children, censored books, censored films, censored plays, infinite repression of desires. (Kynaston, 2007: 58)

However, several key events took place in this period that had a profound effect on British society, specifically the end of WWII in 1945, the formation of the NHS in 1948, the passing of the National Assistance Act in 1948 which abolished the Poor Law System and was the final step in creating the British Welfare State. The Labour government of 1945-51, under Clement Atlee, can be loosely defined as the “age of austerity”, while the Conservative government of 1951-64 is often defined as the “age of affluence”. These are fairly loose definitions, as rationing still continued until 1954 and communities experienced vastly different levels of ‘affluence’ as they moved into the 1950s (Addison, 2010: 51). In Britain, there was an expectation that winning the war would result in an increase in the quality of life of the average British citizen, and obviously the NHS and the Welfare State did support the working-classes, but WW2 itself actually financially crippled Britain resulting in the Anglo-American loan in 1946 (Hennessy, 1992: 457) which supported the rebuilding of Britain both literally and socially and resulted in the Marshall plan in 1948. As Kynaston (2007: 222-223) outlines, the Labour government had largely focusing on new socialist legislation to improve standard for the working classes sat in the immediate post-war period. They had also sat on the fence regarding the anti-communist agenda of the Americans. However, the financial lure of the Marshall Aid Plan, which was essential for the reconstruction of Britain, forced the Labour government to align with the Americans against Russia. This partially hampered the left-leaning, socialist ideals of Atlee’s Labour government, who were now beholden to the whims of American policy. The restoration of Britain was secured, but at what cost. As a side note to this allegiance to America, Glancy (2006) argues that cinema from 1920s onwards has resulted in a mild form of Americanisation in countries across the world. Given the glamour of Hollywood in this period, there is an element of escapism which is attributed to the fascination of British audiences with the American ideal. Glancy (2006: 447) specifically makes reference to competitions run for younger readers to search for “doubles” of famous Hollywood actors. As much as this is simple wish-fulfilment in the 1920s, it does form an adult community in the 1940s that has moved away from an entirely British sensibility, to one that encompasses a strange duality, via cinema, with their American counterparts. However, post-war British cinema, and specifically *Kind*

Hearts, appears to attempt to cling on to the tradition of British culture. This can element can explain the 'timelessness' that was discussed earlier in the chapter.

There was a closing of the class divide during the war and the immediate post-war period, but this was mainly due to rationing and a lack of resources being produced and imported into the country causing a lack of items in shops. Money in this specific period of time, did not necessarily equate to a much higher standard of living, in fact the middle-classes experienced a period of "relative deprivation" throughout the late 1940s and into the 1950s (Addison, 2010: 52). The closing of the class-divide did raise the hopes that the wartime spirit and togetherness would develop into a fairer society, however this did not materialise. In simple terms, people fought and died to protect Britain, but somehow social norms were resumed within a few years. Little benefit actually trickled down to the working classes and "Despite the levelling intentions of wartime collectivism, class society remained intact." (Street, 2009: 72). What was once seen as a single community, was again split into two separate entities. This phenomenon is key to understanding *Kind Hearts and Coronets* and its depiction of class, specifically in the way doubling is used as a thematic trait and recurring motif throughout.

The rich/poor dichotomy

The common theories regarding post-war class issues rely heavily on the concept that class structures became irrelevant, or at least less important, in this era due to the 'people's war' mentality. While this is partially true, towards the end of the Atlee era, we also begin to slowly return to a landscape where inequality returns. The contracting of the class structure, partially was inevitably going to return to the previous levels of disparity and the poorer communities would be left behind. The fictional character of Louis Mazzini (Fig. 8) can be seen as a product of this generation. He is particularly interesting due to his split personality, he represents both the working-class poor and privileged rich, a double of both competing divides of the class system in the latter years of Atlee's premiership. The term 'working class' is obviously relative here and mainly used to illustrate Louis's fall from his noble birth right at the start of the film. By the time he is an adult, he has moved into a fairly modest role as a shop assistant which would likely place him closer to lower-middle-class. Taking into account Pierre Bourdieu's work on forms of capital (1986: 241-258), Louis cannot be entirely placed

into the category of working-class, even at his lowest point, as he embodies too many elements of social capital, education and his knowledge of upper-class customs which have allowed him to climb the economic strata. However, a major element of the satire within the film relates to Louis's dissatisfaction with his status, lower-middle-class is beneath him, as he believes that only a rise to the very top would be proper given his birthright. In essence, he embodies the start of the age of affluence, the rebuilding of Britain after the war and the attempt to recapture the strength that was lost in the war.



Figure 8: Louis, early in the film, while working in the haberdashery

Before we are introduced to Louis in the opening scene, the prison officer asks another staff member how he should be addressed 'Your Lordship' and is instructed that 'Your Grace' is the appropriate greeting given Louis's title. The prison staff jovially quip that they would 'Never had the pleasure of killing a Duke', as if they are in awe of being in the presence of the upper class. Ironically, this also pre-empt the flashback where we realise Louis indeed did kill a Duke. This scene is pertinent to the main theme that dominates *Kind Hearts and Coronets*, in that Louis is simultaneously about to be hanged for committing murder like a common criminal, yet his standing and title still garner him a level of respect that appears to be unwarranted given the circumstances. This is Louis's goal throughout the film, to be respected at the level he deems fit. In the early stages of the narrative, Louis suffers from delusions of grandeur, partially brought on by having a high-class education while still living a relatively working-class existence in Clapham: he is financially poor and forced to lodge with his neighbours. His existence is partially patronised by the kindness of this middle-class family. Although, as is common throughout the film, this is merely seen as a reward for his

excellence. In simple terms, he has been educated above his class and begins to resent his given social standing. The D'Ascoyne empire casts a gloomy shadow across his humble existence. His murderous schemes stem purely from his greed for social status, not from his want for financial gains. In fact, he becomes financially comfortable at the mid-way stage of the film. Class, in this instance, trumps money.

There is little doubt that Louis is a sociopath, unaware of his own delusions. His narration of the events are often detached from any sense of moral grounding and his words serve only to justify his abhorrent actions. Although delivered in a cutting but comical manner, somewhat reminiscent of a throwback to an Oscar Wilde character, the content of his nihilistic inner monologues are truly disturbing given the actions that they lead to. The "Wildean" nature of the original novel, and how this tone was then taken forward into the adaptation by Hamer, has been identified previously (Barr, 1998: 119) and Michael Newton (2003: 69) similarly links Louis to Oscar Wilde, but not just to one of his fictional creations, he directly sees him as a pale imitation of the man himself, especially in relation to the court scene. Although it is fair to say that the film often straddles a fine line between 'Wildean' wit and nihilistic vitriol. Louis's descriptions of his love interests throughout the film, point to a similar lack of respect for other human beings. In many of his conversations with Sibella, he trades simply in back-handed compliments:

'I'd say that you were a perfect combination of imperfections. I'd say that your nose was just a little too short, your mouth just a little too wide, but that yours was a face that a man could see in his dreams for the whole of his life. I'd say that you were vain, selfish, cruel, deceitful. I'd say that you were adorable. I'd say that you were...Sibella'

It is a complicated statement, that both shows his love for Sibella while seemingly also showing his hatred and disdain for everything she stands for. He feels he is too good for Sibella, but resents her for the ignominy of her family's patronage of lodgings which he describes as being '...galling to accept the status of a poor relation'. This is an on running theme and can be seen as a projection of his own duality, he simultaneously believes himself to be better than the D'Ascoynes, as he is a self-made man, but also wants to claim his birth right to finally become a D'Ascoyne.



Figure 9: Louis and Sibella during one of their many barbed verbal battles

The film, taken on face value, can be seen as ruthless inditement of the concept of social mobility in the post-war period. The hopes and dreams of being able to prosper in post-war Britain are taken away and Louis believes that the only way to work his way up the social hierarchy is to commit murder. Read literally, this is a working-class person who murders rich people. However, Louis identifies as upper-class, as a D'Ascoyne by birth right. Barr (1998: 120) points to the theme of "class resentment", something that is rarely raised in the Ealing canon, but is embodied here by the lead protagonist Louis Mazzini. Given this, it is never clear whether the aim of the film is to mock the working-class, middle-class or upper-class. Louis represents both the working-class brashness and the entitlement of the upper-classes. In simple terms, his identity is split. He is both and neither. This duality appears throughout the film's narrative in an almost Jekyll and Hyde manner. We see Louis acting with all the grace and majesty of a Duke, whilst simultaneously listening to his murderous plans and vitriolic narration. The inner and the outer are different people, the mask of the upper-class respectable gentlemen is used throughout. He disguises himself as a gentlemen throughout the film, in fact the his first victim is initially hunted down at the Maidenhead boat club, where Louis has to spend a week's wages to afford suitable attire to gain entrance (Fig. 10). This allows him to infiltrate the D'Ascoyne's world, not through anything particularly cunning, simply via mirroring the behaviour and customs of their class system. Again, this points at both targets, the impatience and want for a quick

fix to social climbing of the younger working-classes, but also the institutionalized rituals and costumes of the 'old money' upper-classes.



Figure 10: Alec Guinness (centre) in the first of many appearances as a member of the D'Ascoyne family and Louis (right) in his "disguise"

Durnat (2011: 53) discusses this phenomenon as an example of a working class "daydream and wish-fulfilment" in which they "take middle-class characteristics as their ego ideal". When attached to Louis, this theory rings true. He creates a secondary, upper-middle-class, persona to hide within their society. This also communicates the message that the class system is rigid and one must, for want of a better word, infiltrate a class rather than naturally move into their 'ego ideal'. This is not necessarily true, but within the world of *Kind Hearts* it does draw a clear distinction between societal class boundaries. The overriding theme of individuals attempting to climb up the social ladder is of particular importance in this debate, as it specifically relates to circumstances in British culture in the immediate post-war years. Another film that came out in the same year, *Passport to Pimlico* (Henry Cornelius, 1949), also echoes this thematic trait but rather than it being individual ambition, the community of Pimlico fight to become a sovereign state and break away from Britain. In both cases, this can be aligned with the shifting dynamics between classes in this period and the opportunity for social mobility felt like a very real possibility under Atlee's rule. However, as Addison outlines (2010: 65-72), the working-classes and middle-classes were more secure due to the support structures created by the NHS and the welfare

state, but the “relative deprivation” of the middle-classes did not necessarily translate into more opportunities for the working-classes to prosper. In fact, the British economy was still heavily reliant on the “Labourer and semi-skilled worker” (Addison, 2010: 111), roles mainly filled by working-class men, who were still seen as the main breadwinner. Working-class women, who actively slotted into roles while the men were at war, mostly reverted back to their roles as housewives. In this respect, the shortening of the class-divide in post-war Britain is an interesting footnote, but one that only existed for a very short period of time. The lack of opportunities for the working-classes to move into other industries created a system that blocked social mobility. This moment of two classes overlapping, and the subsequent disappointment as it slipped back to normality, is clearly present in *Kind Hearts*.

Louis Mazzini is a perfect example of the crossroads of this class struggle. Upper-class by birth, but dragged down to working-class by circumstance, and then uses his social capital move himself back into the middle-classes. His job at the tailors is seen as an ‘ignominious occupation’, but actually quite respectable and middle-class, not the usual manual labour job. He is given patronage and support, but these only serve to anger him more. He is given more opportunities than the standard working-class man, due to his social capital, but even moving into the middle-classes is seen as beneath him and ultimately leads to his murderous revenge on the D’Ascoynes. The fact that Louis is disgusted at the thought of being middle-class, is one of the major satirical critiques in the film and points to the upper-classes wanting a sense of permanence, not movement or progression. The short-lived sense of togetherness and the ‘people’s war’ mentality, suddenly gives way to self-entitlement and personal ambition as we move towards the 1950s.

The eight faces of the D’ascoynes

Alec Guinness’s depiction of the eight D’Ascoynes (Fig. 11) is the most literal depiction of doubling, even if simply through the actor’s ever presence throughout the film. From a visual perspective, Guinness is instantly recognisable in each role, even when playing Lady Agatha D’Ascoyne. It can be argued that his performances are simply an extension of his comedic roles in other Ealing films, and this does make his inclusion feel like a gimmick rather than an essential part of the construction of the film. Given the fact that this is a major feature of the marketing campaign (Fig. 12), it does point

to this being more of an opportunity to play off the popularity of Guinness's chameleonic film persona, especially as there is very little attempt to hide Guinness's features (Newton, 2003: 56). I would also argue that the realist tradition is broken within the film, due to this self-conscious decision, which points to a reading of the film that is not purely satirically dialogue driven, but actually uses this visual device as a further comment on British society.



Figure 11: Alec Guinness playing seven of the D'Ascoyne family in a single shot, while at the funeral for the eighth



Figure 12: Advert for Kind Hearts of Coronets featuring Alec Guinness as a prominent part of the campaign

The face of Guinness as a repeating image across all of the D'ascoynes does, on a purely visual level, intrinsically link the concept of wealth with a single visage. Hence all the 'old money' in the film is faced the same. Although doubling can often be attributed to the concept of difference, i.e. a mirror image, this is not the case here. Similar to the concept presented in the last chapter, regarding Deborah Kerr's multiple roles which represented development and progress, here we see the idea of doubling representing the concept of permanence, a repetition of the same image of the upper-classes. Although the D'ascoynes are different characters, they all represent a flawed upper-class and as such all of them are represented as faceless ciphers of one another. It could be said that Louis, and in turn Hamer, is choosing to eradicate every person who represents the faceless British upper-class, not just the D'ascoynes.

Andrew Moor (2012a: 124-134) reads the doubling motif of the D'Ascoynes as a much more complex issue that relates primarily to identity and representation, specifically leaning towards a queer reading of the film. He argues that actors within this era could already be described as having an affected acting style and "could be said explicitly to 'act out' gender expectations [in] odd ways: drawing attention to the ways we are socially pigeonholed is one of the hallmarks of queerness" (Moor, 2012a: 127). This morphs the idea of this doubling motif from the focus on the upper-classes and privileged Britain, to a much broader commentary on the lack of identity of the British people in the post-war era. This doubling element breaks any "sense of stable or fixed identity, and this would be emphatically queer" (Moor, 2012a: 127). Both the director, Hamer, and the lead actors, Price, were closeted homosexuals, and it was posthumously revealed that Guinness was Bi-sexual, in an era where it would have been impossible for them to come out. Being openly gay in the 1940s was not really an option, in fact there was some way to go before acceptance, The Gay Liberation Front was not even founded until 1970 (Addison, 2010: 219). Homosexual offences were still being tried in court all the way up the sexual offences act in 1967, although it was seen an "underground" culture in Britain throughout the 1940s and 1950s (Addison, 2010: 98-99). Given this simple societal fact, it would be fair to assume that if this were intended as a queer film, then this would have only been introduced as an unwritten subtext, not something that would have been openly discussed during the production. This also gives further credence to Newton's (2003: 69) allusion to the real-life Oscar Wilde in his analysis. This is further rationale for looking at the

production of *Kind Hearts* from the perspective of the creative personnel and how their political personal outlooks may have bled into the fabric of the film. Whether the film was deliberately intended as queer is debatable. However, its treatment of identity does place it within this sphere, while simultaneously pointing to another instance of identity and doubling within British cinema during the post-war era.

Narratively, if reading the film as queer, it brings new meaning to Louis's treatment of women throughout the film. Sibella and her family, as discussed above, are in essence his patrons after his mother dies. She serves a purpose from a financial perspective. Similarly, his relationship with Edith is purely linked to social climbing and opportunism. Moor (2012a: 129) similarly sees this as another role that Louis plays, this time the role of "romantic suitor". The concept of masquerading and mimicry is key to Moor's definition of *Kind Hearts* as a queer film in the same sense that this key element is also key to my study. The film cannot be taken as entirely serious, or truly said to be set in reality, due to this artificiality which is pervasive throughout. Louis's subterfuge is in keeping with the narrative, his aim is to infiltrate a places and trick people, but Moor (2012a: 132) similarly looks upon Sibella as constantly being in 'character' and "performing femininity to excess" and, as alluded to, this is also true of Guinness' performance(s). This implies that every person within the film has something to hide, another person behind the mask. Michael Newton echoes the concept of the characters within the film simply playing roles throughout:

we should think of Louis primarily as an actor. Whether it's that of the stage lover, the photography enthusiast, the colonial bishop, the perfect gentleman or the concerned friend. (2003: 68)

These are literal guises Louis adopts throughout the film, but Newton is pointing to a much more pervasive issue regarding Louis's persona, or lack thereof. Within this analysis (Newton, 2003: 68-71) there is a focus on the key trail scene in which both Louis and Sibella give evidence. At this point, Louis finally becomes incoherent, lacks wit and, as Newton aptly describes it, behaves like "an actor who cannot remember his lines". For a brief second, we see the real Louis, the one hiding behind the mask. A vulnerable young man whose persona has been a composite of literary references and fictional characters. Given the doubling motif throughout the film, this moment

gives credibility to the duality of Louis's persona: the public performance and the weak underbelly. Interestingly, Newton (2003: 70) refers to Sibella as "Louis's double...both of them are artists of real life, manipulators, storytellers, deceivers: actors". The final scene between Louis and Sibella takes place with the prison bars acting as their dividing mirror (Fig. 13). The difference being that in the trail scene, she convincingly proves to be the better actor, and dooms Louis to his fate by lying about details of her husband's death. In effect, Louis reverts back to the poor Clapham boy trying to claw his way up the ladder via education, learning that playing the part is a good enough facsimile to fool most people. Whereas Sibella, his middle-class double, teaches him that breeding triumphs. She has, despite her role-playing, a fully formed persona of her own to fall back on, unlike Louis's empty husk.



Figure 13: Sibella visiting Louis in Prison

Louis's Otherness

Building on Moor's interesting queer reading of the film, it can be argued that the film broadly uses the masquerading and doubling to further this concept. However, rather ironically, given the introduction of this radical thematic subtext, the film is also tinged with a conservatism regarding otherness. A line is clearly drawn between people who belong and people who are seemingly deemed outside of the British ideal. Class boundaries and heritage are of paramount importance within the narrative, but also shine a light on the xenophobia and fear of otherness in 1940s Britain. Given Louis's

Italian father and upper-middle class British mother, the film can similarly be analysed in more depth using Louis's heritage as a backbone of the discussion.

As alluded to earlier in the chapter, *Kind Hearts and Coronets* is an adaptation of Roy Horniman's 1907 novel 'Israel Rank: The Autobiography of a Criminal'. The film uses the same basic premise as the book, changes a few names, but most importantly replaces the protagonist's Jewish background with Italian heritage. The anti-Semitic nature of the source material is by no means subtle or understated and the character's Jewishness is placed at the forefront of the narrative early in the text, describing himself as looking "dark and Jewish" (Horniman, 1907: 9). The character's social climbing in the film is primarily related to escaping poverty and reclaiming his inheritance, whereas the novel complicates this by also using this search for aristocracy as a way to erase his Jewish heritage. The anti-Semitism has been almost entirely removed from the film adaptation by Ealing and Hamer due to "post war sensitivity about anti-Semitism and their own moral sense" (Newton, 2003: 35). In the previous year, another of the film's stars, Alec Guinness, had been involved in the controversy in relation to his portrayal of Fagin in *Oliver Twist* (David Lean, 1948), which has been widely criticised as being anti-Semitic. None of this anti-Semitism is identifiable within the final film text, however it is replaced by a slightly troubling xenophobic element. Louis's half-Italian heritage is referenced throughout the narrative, mainly as a way of undermining his breeding. Newton (2003: 36) sees the decision to use the surname Mazzini as linking to the "...myth that Italians are both more foppishly stylish and more vengefully murderous than the average Englishman", as well alluding to Giuseppe Mazzini's time in London. Replacing the Jewish element of the book with the Italian creates similar issues related to the negative connotations implied via his national identity.

Italy held a strange position in post-war Europe. In WW2 war, they declared war on the United States in 1941, then switched sides in 1943 and declared war on Germany. In essence, they were both allies and enemies to the British in a very short period of time. By 1949 the true impact, and the resulting financial aftermath, of the war had been felt across Europe. As discussed above, there was a widespread bitterness regarding the war and this was translated into a suspiciousness of our European neighbours. In this respect, the shift from the source material's use of Jewish to Italian

can be seen as equally problematic; he is the embodiment of duplicity within the film, echoing a rather cynical and simplistic view of the Italian's shifting allegiances during the war. Although simplistic, it echoed the feelings and fears across Britain at the time. Hennessy (1992: 402) alludes to this suspicion and fear of European nations in relation to the formation of the EEC (European Economic Community) in 1950. Due to the cold-war, there was still a fear that these same partners may repeat the actions of 1940, if Russia were to attack. Given the discussions in the previous chapter regarding the representation of Theo Kretschmar-Schuldorff in *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (Powell, 1943), there is an interesting approach to the way Louis Mazzini's otherness is tackled within the film. Theo is unapologetically German, and patriotic, but wants to distance himself from the rise of Nazism. However, Louis distances himself from his Italian father's heritage and strives to reinvent himself. Sibella refers to Louis as 'Italian' at one point, only for Louis to interject with 'Half'. In effect, Louis distances himself from his 'otherness' and attempts to cement himself in the British gentry by becoming the Duke at the end of the film.

This is an interesting development of shifting attitudes between the two films: one of hope; and the other in cynicism. There is a vision of a utopian ideal of Powell & Pressburger's film, a hope that normality will be resumed and bonds would be built with our European neighbours. After 6 years of war, this was more than likely a feeling amongst the majority of liberal, left-wing British and was manifested in the surprise election of Atlee whose socialist politics echoed these values (Hennessy, 1992: 67; Addison, 2010: 10-12). The film's message is literally 'put these differences aside and move on'. This is personified via Candy and Theo's relationship. However, *Kind Hearts* exhibits an abject cynicism regarding both the British upper-class and a xenophobic representation of the half-Italian protagonist. The film comes towards the end of the 1940s, several years after the war ended, and is clearly influenced by the realities of post-war Europe unlike *Blimp's*, in hindsight, naïve hopes for the future. Given that both films can be broadly defined as satire, it is telling that Powell's target, the out-of-date 'Blimps', are mocked then ultimately humanised and redeemed. Hamer's satirical targets, the British upper-class D'ascoynes, are all murdered by a mixed-race character from a lower class, whom we can then presume, given the cliff-hanger ending, is executed for his attempt to social climb. *Kind Hearts'* satire leaves no redeeming morsel for the audience, Louis is not an avenging angel or held up as a

martyr to the class war. The upper-classes are held up as outdated and elitist while the 'victim', who in essence has been stripped of his birth right due to racism and bigotry, instantly reverts to murder as a way of revenge. Painting the working-class side of Louis as impulsive, crass and violent.

More troubling than the faint air of xenophobia that remains in the film, is the flagrant use of racist language towards the end of the film. In an exchange between Louis and Sibella, during her prison visit, they both use the N-word in relation to the playground rhyme "eenie meanie", specifically as code to refer to the D'Ascoyne's that Louis selected to be killed. Louis later uses it in his narration to refer to both Sibella and Edith, his wife and lover, one of whom must be killed to for him to gain his freedom: "After all, I could always decide afterwards which one of these two little n****rs would finally have to go". The removal of the anti-Semitic elements of the source material is undermined by the inclusion of this scene. It weaponizes Louis's heritage as a minority, giving him a blunt reminder that he will never truly fit into the class he aspires to. Although instigated by Sibella as a way of reminding Louis of his place in the pecking order, it is also acknowledged by Louis as he finishes her sentence. In effect, he labels himself. By this point in the film, there is no sympathy for either character, they are both despicable human beings, but this does seem to unnecessarily introduce a new facet to their relationship: White privilege over the poor immigrant's son who came to lodge with them. Louis is similarly complicit in this scene, which points to his own modus operandum of trying to escape the trappings of his own heritage. This, unfortunately, replicates the core issue with Horniman's novel, in that it represents a man who is embarrassed of, and seemingly, wants to erase his otherness. In a more serious film, this type of complexity could be explored in more depth, but here it just feels like a rather nasty coda which appears to damn Louis for his breeding rather than for the multiple murders he has undertaken during the film. Again, this points to the rigidity of the class structure in Britain. Despite becoming a Duke, he will never quite be accepted at this level as he is bound by his heritage. His attempts to disguise himself are simply the mask which, when removed, reveals Louis as the working-class boy from Clapham. This points to a key theme that is pervasive across the whole of *Kind Hearts and Coronets*: the art of hiding oneself or pretending to be something/someone you are not. The basic concept of doubling/splits is self-

explanatory in this instance, but I would argue that this is particularly pertinent in the debate regarding classism in the immediate post-war period in Britain.

As an acknowledgement more than an analysis, the Windrush arrivals in 1948 may be an obvious link here, but given *Kind Hearts*' release date of 1949, it feels like it is unlikely that this had a major impact on the use of language or representation as a whole. Basil Deardon's *Pool of London* (1951) is better placed historically, geographically and has a narrative that places representation at the forefront of the film, so this will be discussed in more depth in a later chapter.

Reality or Fantasy

As has been established here, there is a consensus between many critics regarding the surreal nature of *Kind Hearts*' version of reality: Barr's claim that it is set out-of-time (1998: 120); or Moor's allusion to the performative nature of everything on screen (2012a: 132). Despite this, the film constantly attempts to ground itself in a recognisable version of reality. However, there are a few moments where this version of reality is truly compromised which implies the film may be more fantastical if tackled from a certain perspective. Early in the film, around 20 minutes in as we close on the end of the first act, Louis's advances are spurned by Sibella, she mocks his social standing and his desire to become a Duke. As she leaves the room, he looks forlorn and Louis's voiceover narration takes over:

"If there was a precise moment at which my insubstantial dreaming took on solid purpose, that was it. The D'ascoynes had not only wronged my mother, they were the obstacle between me and all that I wanted."

If we accept this as a point of trauma, a moment where his desires have been shattered, then we could easily conceive this as the point in the narrative where Louis has lost his grip on reality. Directly following his voiceover declaration, we cut to a scene of Louis in this modest lodging room at night as he walks over to a painting of the Chalfont Estate castle, the Duke of D'Ascoyne's residence. The close-up image of the painting perfectly cross-fades with an image of Louis entering a real-life version of the image, then entering the castle (Fig. 14). Now this can be simply interpreted as a clever visual trick to denote a temporal shift to a future event where Louis is visiting

the Estate, but for one detail in his voiceover, which states that he has never seen the Estate in person and knows it only from his Mother's painting. The painting looks identical to the Estate he walks in to, implying this is a Louis's fantasy version of the castle. His "insubstantial dreaming" has now taken physical form and substance. We could, from this point forward, read the entire film from a dreamlike perspective. In simple terms, we are witnessing Louis's murderous fantasy where he finally becomes the Duke.



Figure 14: Louis staring at the painting, zooming in, then transitioning to the actual castle

The concept of a character, within a given film, splitting into 2 separate entities or personas is discussed at length in Ruddell's chapter 'The Monster Within' (2013: 55-78). Specifically relevant to this discussion is her analysis of *Black Swan* (Darren Aronofsky, 2010) as Natalie Portman's Nina takes on the gentle ballet role of the white swan and becomes possessed by the "monstrous" alter ego when performing as the black swan (Ruddell, 2013: 62). The imagery within this film is much more literal than *Kind Hearts*, she literally changes into black and white costumes, but the more important element here is the point of trauma that both Nina and Louis face are the catalyst for their split and descent into becoming the monster. Strangely, both films' point of trauma revolve around the image of a painting: Nina's mother, who similarly suffers from mental illness, paints creepy paintings for therapy, which later come to life during Nina's hallucinations; and Louis's painting of the D'Ascoyne estate on his bedroom wall. Paintings and split personalities do appear to be interlinked as a kind of visual grammar shorthand in both film and literature: Dorian Gray's painting, as a double of the evil elements of his persona; a few years later, *Vertigo* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1958) uses the famous gallery painting to double Madeleine, who herself is in disguise. This motif does appear to point to a more complex reading of *Kind Hearts*.

This reading would explain many of the complicated matters discussed earlier in the chapter. The characters are stilted and performative simply because Louis is painting

them as caricatures from a Dickens novel. As alluded to earlier, the popularity of the 'Byronic' male in the popular Gainsborough films throughout the 1940s serves as a suitably dramatic archetype for Louis's fantasy. The well-dressed womanising villain or, more accurately, anti-hero. He sees himself as doing the wrong things, but for the right reason. However, the Gainsborough films with the 'Byronic' male are period pieces (e.g. *The Wicked Lady* is set in the 17th century), so the version of this character in *Kind Hearts* feels anachronistic. The misogynistic actions of Louis, while still prevalent in 1940s, belong in the past. Sibella's spurning of his advances earlier in the film do seem to offer a simple explanation for the creation of this character, returning to a time before the suffragettes and woman's liberation. This misogynistic tone appears to be compounded within the film as Louis kills Lady Agatha D'Ascoyne, a suffragette, in the process of reaching his goal of becoming a Duke. Agatha is killed in by being shot down, by bow and arrow, while leaflet dropping in a hot air balloon emblazoned with the slogan 'Women of Britain. Fight for your rights' (Fig: 15). Metaphorically shooting down the whole of women's liberation by using Agatha as a synecdoche for the movement. However, the ridiculousness of the death stands out within the film, among the traditional tropes of poisonings and shootings, and therefore feels like it is pointedly aimed at highlighting a disrespect for the suffragette movement.



Figure 15: The bow and arrow sequence

The mise-en-scene, despite the film being set in contemporary 1940s Britain, also leans towards the gothic in several scenes, again linking to the concept that the film sits somewhere between the contemporary and the past, both visually and thematically. Gloomy rooms that are lit solely by the fireplace appear throughout and there is a reliance on chiaroscuro lighting, which are a far cry from the Ealing naturalistic tradition and appear to be closer to the period films of the era, specifically Gainsborough and David Lean's Dickens adaptations (Fig.16) Similarly, the use of vertical space is also reminiscent of these films, specifically in relation to showing the

scale of some of the richer properties (Fig. 17) moving from very tight framing in the humble London flats to much wider framing when we enter the lavish homes of the D'Ascoynes. Louis is often dressed like he is a character straight out of a Dickensian adaptation as well (Fig. 18), again hinting at the film's anachronistic form. It is important to remember that we have to constantly frame the film based on the narrative construct of the flashback. A flashback that we are being fed via Louis's storytelling, we are being regaled the story as he writes his journal/confession in the prison cell, so the world and the events are apocryphal. In his version of the story, he is a smart, debonair gentleman that is an unfortunate victim of circumstance. In this respect, again, we have a split in Louis's persona. The Louis in the prison cell, and the fictional version that is in his journal/confession.



Figure 16: Gainsborough style gloomy lighting



Figure 17: Vertical space and gothic set design



Figure 18: Anachronistic Dickensian costume

If we wanted to stretch this theory to breaking point, it could also be suggested that Louis never actually killed any of the D'Ascoynes. These may have all been genuine accidents. Louis's version has him framing each murder to appear to be an accident to fool the police. As he is on death row due to being wrongly accused of killing Lionel, Sibella's husband, and sees no escape, the journal could easily be seen as a fantasist's attempt at creating a legacy for themselves, even if it is entirely fictional. As convoluted as this theory is, it would explain the anachronisms within the film. The fact that we still left with a sad ending, despite the fact that this is Louis's fantasy, is probably the biggest irony. Even within his own fantasy, he still dooms himself to failure. Even with alternative readings of the film, it is still difficult to move away from the overall cynicism, sense of defeatism and lack of humanity within the film.

As is evident from this chapter, *Kind Hearts* can be read from several different perspectives, however each reading does appear to mirror the social state of post-war Britain. The two extremes of the spectrum, light-hearted mimicry of Gainsborough's output or full-blown existential psychological fever dream, reveal interesting debates regarding the period and link to the overall theme of doubling. Ironically, the visual doubling of Alec Guinness's eight D'Ascoyne characters, although it is a gentle mockery of the faceless nature of the upper-classes, feels more like a marketing gimmick, than an integral part of the film, especially when in compared to the analysis of Louis's split personality. The satirical elements of *Kind Hearts*, especially in relation to class, have often dominated discussions regarding the film and clearly these are

the most prominent elements of the film's narrative on first reading. The working-class boy who forces social mobility through murdering his way up the pecking order, each victim undone by their pomposity or ignorance, is a perfect reflection of the feeling of post-war Britain. A country eager to drag itself out of the restrictions and depression of the war, but more disturbingly the film forefronts the anger and violence that surfaces through this disillusionment.

Gender has a more prominent role in this film than I anticipated, especially the mirroring of Sibella and Louis. There is also a slight echo of *Blimp*'s three women via Louis's relationship with Sibella, Edith and his mother, as the 3 women, again, appear to form a cross-section of British society. While this is not as pointed as the *Blimp* example, this does feel like a developing theme within the era. Moor's queer reading of the film (2012a) interestingly turns the romantic elements of the film on their head, while simultaneously linking this to the concept of masking or hiding behind a persona. The act of masking links to his class, 'otherness' and potentially his sexuality. The creation of these alternative personas again links to the ideas of escaping the trappings of post-war Britain.

The more complex of the issue of Louis's 'otherness' slightly complicates a purely class reading of the text. He is judged both by class and his half-Italian heritage. Ironically, the person who judges him most harshly is Louis himself. This, in part, creates the duality within Louis's character and is the source of his self-loathing: a poor working-class Italian; and a privileged well-educated English gentleman. This splitting of Louis identity, again points to post-war issues regarding mainland Europe, echoing the doubling motif in *Blimp*, but focusing on Italy rather than Germany. The next chapter will build on the theme of 'otherness' and Britain's relationship with the rest of the world, and specifically the impact of post-war immigration.

Chapter 3 – Pool of London

Pool of London (Basil Deardon, 1951) is an important film in British Film history particularly in relation to diversity on-screen. The film stars Earl Cameron as Johnny Lambert, a Jamaican working in the merchant Navy, who begins a mixed-race romance while on shore leave in London. At a time when there were few prominent roles for minority ethnic actors in the British film industry, Cameron's role is unique, as it is also the first time an interracial relationship was depicted on-screen in a British production (Daniels, 2014). The film itself comes only a few years after the influx of Caribbean Windrush emigres on 22nd June 1948 and is an early response to the growth of multiculturalism taking place in Britain. Johnny is not a part of the Windrush diaspora, he is just on shore leave, however it is nonetheless an interesting milestone in British film's reaction to cultural diversity. It is also a very early example of a person of colour being cast in a lead role in British cinema, and is specifically cited by Stephen Bourne as a film landmark film due to its serious attempt to present a black character as a "...human being and not a stereotype" (1998: 223) something, he states, that had not been done successfully since *The Proud Valley* (Pen Tennyson, 1940).

The plot revolves around a crew of merchant sea men who dock in the Pool of London, a stretch of water on the Thames between London Bridge and Bermondsey, for a weekend of shore leave. The two main protagonists are Dan, an Italian American petty smuggler, and his best friend Johnny, a fairly innocent man from Jamaica. Dan is involved in an increasingly complex smuggling plot, which involves him unknowingly taking possession of a package of diamonds from a local bank heist. Dan hands them over to Johnny to carry onto the ship; due to Dan's past misdemeanours, it is more likely than Johnny will be able to get past the routine checks. While the police are in pursuit of Dan for his involvement in the heist, he hunts Johnny down to unburden him of the diamonds just before he is about to get caught, saving his friend while simultaneously damning himself to a long prison sentence. Both men also pursue relationships with white British women over the weekend, Dan picks up his long-term on/off relationship with Maisie, and starts a new relationship with another sailor's girlfriend, Sally, while Johnny meets and bonds with Pat, a woman who works at the ticket booth of a theatre, over a succession of filmic meet-cute set-pieces.

Within my analysis of the film, Paul Gilroy's theories regarding "doubleness" (1993: 4), a state where someone exists between two cultures at the same time, are used to highlight the duality of diasporic communities in Britain: bringing traditions from their own culture with them into the country but also taking on facets of British culture and developing them over time. Given that the release date of the film sits between Windrush and the Notting Hill riots, the issues faced by ethnic minority communities attempting to settle in Britain has a particularly poignant historical resonance. The doubling motif is also present in the dual narrative threads of Dan and Johnny. Rarely on-screen together, their paths cross superficially at key moments within the generic crime plotline, however their romantic endeavours appear to create a mirror image of how race was beginning to become a prominent issue in the 1950s Britain. The dual narrative creates what Andrew Higson defines as a "fascinatingly hybrid film" that ultimately makes for a "...complex text [that is] difficult to synopsis adequately on paper" (1997: 162-163). Due to this complex overlapping of ideas and narratives from different origins, the film appears to be constantly hinting at a deeper meaning while, on the surface, simply playing out a few generic steps in a simple genre film. The social commentary that takes place in the film is often in flux, fighting against these generic elements, not just of film noir, but also against some of the trappings of British realism. Given the points above, it seems like a logical starting point would be the filmic Transatlantic influences that are clearly a huge part of the make-up of *Pool of London*.



Figure 19: Dan played by Bonar Colleano (left) and Johnny played by Earl Cameron (Right)

Noir, place and the true aftermath

The film noir genre was particularly popular in American cinema in the 1940/50s, and is often cited as a genre that taps into the common underlying fear of a criminal underbelly in inner-city areas. The British Noir is similarly concerned with the criminality arising out of larger cities, but comes to prominence in the immediate post-war era. Robert Murphy (1992: 168) defines this British strand as “British Morbid films” rather than attaching them entirely to the American genre. Robert Murphy (1992:168-169) discusses this cycle of films in some depth, but constantly comes back to the notion that the films are too “diffuse” and spread across too many genres to fully pin down an exact formula. Several themes or tropes appear to be more prevalent in this cycle, specifically the “man on the run” or “a man who has been physically or mentally damaged by the war”. The fact the war appears to be catalyst, either because the character is involved in the underworld or, more typically in the British iteration, the black market gives the films a unique place in post-war cinema. Films like *It Always Rains on Sunday* (Robert Hamer, 1947) and *The Third Man* (Carol Reed, 1949) are some of the most relevant precursors to *Pool of London* due to their common themes of smuggling, black market dealing and a similar visual style (Fig. 20). Obviously, *The Third Man*, although not set in Britain, revolves and black-market drugs and includes several sequences conforming to Murphy’s idea of the “man on the run”.



Figure 20: left-to-right - *Pool of London*, *The Third Man*, *It Always Rains on Sunday*

It Always Rains on Sunday would likely be the template for these Morbid post-war films. Set in an impoverished, bomb hit area of post-war London, the film revolves around a woman, unhappily married to a man on his second marriage, caring for his children from the previous marriage. When her former lover escapes from prison and seeks refuge from the police, she hides him in her family home. There are bittersweet romantic moments, and inevitable chase sequences as her ex-lover is captured by the police. The fact that Jack Warner is the detective who arrests him, whose ever-present as a police officer in various films and TV in this era, feels almost like an inevitability casting wise. The concept of attempting to inject social issues into an otherwise generic genre film became something of a trademark of Ealing's relatively experimental films. Josephine Botting (2012: 175-184) specifically links many of the outlying quirkier films, ones that veer away from classical realism and more overtly into a recognisable genre such as Fantasy, Horror or Noir, to a more creative use of metaphor and propaganda. *Went the Day Well?* (Cavalcanti, 1942) is a good example of this, as despite its harrowing portrayal of an English village being invaded by the Nazis, it is a Fantasy film based on a hypothetical scenario, that taps into a nation's fear much in the same way as more direct propaganda.

However, in so many ways, it is still easy to look upon *It Always Rains on Sunday* as setting up a collection of recognisable elements that are taken forward into British film over the next decade. Given its roots in the Ealing system, *It Always Rains on Sunday* is quite clearly closely related to *Pool of London* as it also captures the bleakness of London in the immediate post-war period, the inclusion of a working-class life, and main protagonists being involved in petty crime which leads to more serious criminal activity. The morbidity that Robert Murphy alludes to comes more from the lack of hope within these films, and the bleakness of the post-war London surroundings, and

these elements move the films closer to an early version of working-class social realism that would become more prevalent in the late 1950s. This social element, which has been referenced several times in relation to both Ealing's darker films and their cosier fare, is something that is present in *Pool of London* and something that partially defines this cycle as separate from the traditionally genre trappings of American Film Noir.

Sarah Street (2009: 83) also argues that "British Noirs", like American Film Noirs, are a "...notoriously heterogenous subgenre..." and incorporate elements of melodrama, horror and thrillers. Street points out that these British Noir films "...could be said to display the classic, thematic, iconographic and stylistic characteristics of American film noir in a British context". This is a particularly poignant statement in relation to *Pool of London* given Bonar Colleano's lead role as Dan, with his thick New York accent and double-breasted suits. Like the cargo of the ship, he appears to have smuggled over the convention of the Film Noir into London at the same time. However, the main point here is that this is a recognisably British film wrapped up in a generic American genre, which makes for a strange experience. This is specifically why my interests lie in *Pool of London*, as a further development of this cycle of the Morbid British Noirs, one that starts to hybridise and crack under the strain of the competing cinematic and social elements, rather than what would seem to be the obvious choice of the more tightly packaged *It Always Rains on Sunday*.

As discussed in Chapter 1, the UK signed up to the Marshall Plan in 1948, so there was a dependency on US finance at this point, and there had been for a few years. Similarly, the British film industry would need to start to diversify to tap into the American market, which was specifically an area that Rank had focused on towards the end of the 1940s (Murphy, 1992: 221). *The Lavender Hill Mob* (Charles Crichton, 1951) was produced in the same year as *Pool of London*, however despite its crime caper narrative, it stuck very closely to the template of the cosy British comedy that Ealing had become famous for. However, to slightly extend the smuggling metaphor, these American influences are figuratively smuggled into the film from the other side of the Atlantic via the merchant seamen who then act as the lead protagonists.

The absurdity of attempting to use the usually pristine London as a stand-in for the gritty streets of New York does create a truly unique film. The concrete jungle of New York, blocky, angular, and cold seems to have been specifically built for the film noir genre. Whereas central London's mishmash of architectural designs, from various centuries, and cobbled streets still looks more Dickensian in 1951 as opposed to the imposing modern metropolis of the American noirs. Despite this, *Pool of London* uses London in a unique way by splitting off the iconography from the criminal elements and the more romantic plotlines. The film does not shy away from using the post-war rubble as a backdrop. Sporadically throughout the film, the beauty of the London skyline is shattered by the reality of the, still unresolved, aftermath of WW2. Roberts (2012: 55) comments on Ealing's "...extensive use of real locations [that] captures scarred London" in a collection of films in the post-war era, in particular the "ravaged docklands" in *Pool of London*. Trauma is often attached to the individual or a community of people, but here it is rendered through the city itself, a testament to the sacrifices made during the war. Roberts (2012: 55) furthers this argument by stating that "...Ealing helped render the experience of war comprehensible to a nation long after the war had ended, and in the process provided the template for its post-war films either to follow or to question". Given the nature of *Pool of London's* narrative, it appears that the film is not only reminding the viewer of the sacrifice, but also shedding a light on the darker elements that have risen to the surface in the fallout.

These images of a destroyed London were very specifically used as a metaphor in Ealing's *Passport to Pimlico*. Within that film, the community wishes to remove itself from Britain and become an independent principality. Literally, breaking away from a country that they feel is broken. The majority of the exterior scenes within the film take place within the wastelands of the destroyed buildings from WW2, visually linking the broken buildings to the broken society (Fig. 21). In essence, if we look at the image of a capitol's skyline as representing, in purely metaphorical terms, the country itself or even more broadly a symbol of national identity, then a broken version of this holds a lot of visual weight within a film. The infamous ending of *Planet of the Apes* (Franklin J. Schaffner, 1968) which depicts the downfall of society via the image of the destroyed statue of Liberty is a very literal example of this use of cityscape iconography. In this example a part of the New York skyline, a literal statue, is a synecdoche for the city,

the nation or, as is often the case in American films, could easily be seen as representing the whole of the civilised world.



Figure 21: Bombed out buildings in the centre of London



Figure 22: The heist scene where a character uses destroyed buildings to jump over into a location

In a similar vein, the images of “scarred London”, that Roberts describes, in *Pool of London* are specifically linked to the criminal activity in the film; the aftermath has left a dent in the moral fibre of Britain allowing darker elements to appear. During the heist scene a man is seen climbing and jumping between pillars of bricks to gain access to the building to steal the diamonds (Fig. 22). The docklands, although right in the centre of the city, are only depicted as desolate hinterlands for solitary criminals to scamper across. These sequences resemble no man’s land in a war movie, rather than an urban setting. The night-time chase sequences towards the film clearly owes a debt to *The Third Man*, using the rain saturated cobble stones and back alleys to create dark sweeping shadows (Fig. 23) across many of the desolate London areas with half destroyed buildings. This contrasts hugely with the film’s use of London as spectacle which is deployed in the lighter moments of the film; specifically the National Maritime Museum and Greenwich Meridian are used on Johnny and Pat’s date sequence (Fig. 24 & 25). The opening scene as the main protagonist’s ship docks on the river Thames makes great use of Tower Bridge as an iconic location and St. Paul’s Cathedral is

featured throughout many of the daytime sequences (Fig. 26). Jeffrey Richards (1997a: 31) points out the symbolic prominence of St Paul's Cathedral in relation to storyline, in that it looms over the nefarious activities in the robbery scene, almost to “reinforce the power of conscience and sacrifice” which ultimately redeem Dan in the final stages of the film.



Figure 23: Saturated cobbled streets and high contrast lighting reminiscent of The Third Man



Figure 24: Pat and Johnny at the National Maritime Museum



Figure 25: Pat and Johnny with the looming Great Equatorial Building at Greenwich Meridian



Figure 26: St Paul's Cathedral is a recurring backdrop

As alluded to, *The Third Man* is clearly an influence on *Pool of London* from a visual perspective. However, *The Third Man* is a complex case in relation to its status as a British film, despite being directed by the British born Carol Reed. Its international cast, the Americans Orson Welles and Joseph Cotton are clearly the main draw, while Trevor Howard is a typically uptight British side character. Vienna's gothic architecture, its role in post-war central Europe, and the wider influence of Welles's thrillers are, arguably, more prominent in the film's construction than anything linking to British society. Despite the visual influences, *Pool of London* uses its location in a much more creative way, putting on display both the beauty and filth of the capital, and linking these to deeper societal concerns.

As Higson (1997: 163) points out, there is a rather confusing duality between the two conflicting styles of filmmaking, "Crime Melodrama" and "British Realist Drama", and this is present not only in the narrative threads, but also very prominent in the clash of visual styles. It would be easy to simply pass this off as Ealing trying to capitalise on the use of Film Noir techniques, and tap into an American audience which is clearly a peripheral concern. However, looking more objectively, it may be a case of British film in 1951 being finally ready to accept the darkness of underbelly and begin to fully embrace a mode of filmmaking that can capture this emotion visually. Hitchcock had experimented with incorporating elements of German Expressionism into earlier works, such as *The Lodger* (Hitchcock, 1927), and Carol Reed had brought elements of this into *Odd Man Out* (1947), *The Fallen Idol* (1948) and *The Third Man* (1949), but in those intervening 20 years British realism had prevailed as a sign of quality. *Pool of London* strangely captures this transition, but within a single film, by using both realism and expressionism to depict the bleakness of the post-war city of London.

Working-class culture

From a cultural perspective, there are several elements to the film's depiction of London which are quite progressive and the necessity of a grittier visual style unearths some of the more subversive sides of the city. The use of pubs is particularly interesting within the film. These are not the bright and airy meeting places for a bunch of chums to meet up after work, as you would expect from British cinema of this period, instead they are dark, cramped, nests of thieves and smugglers. Johnny is also coerced into visiting an all-night gambling club (Fig. 27) in which he is first

propositioned by a young woman, whom it is implied is a prostitute, then later pickpocketed by the person who invited him there. On a surface level, you could look at this as a simple genre convention taken straight from film noir; the seedy underground club with nefarious characters plotting and scheming, waiting for the inevitable 'patsy' to walk in. However, as is evident throughout several of these chapters, the issue of class is always looming large over British film and it would be remiss to ignore this factor here, and simply brush this off as a genre trope.



Figure 27: Johnny being carried into the seedy gambling club by nefarious friend

Criminal activity is inextricably linked to the working classes within the film, and more specifically to working class social activities. Ironically, these working-class men have more than likely come back from serving in the war 6 years earlier and now forced into criminal activities to try to create a better life during rationing. Heroes to villains in less than a decade. While I believe it would be harsh to claim that *Pool of London* entirely demonized the British working classes, there is a lack of regard for wider context or characterisation within these sequences. The issue of class is not entirely attached to the British characters. Dan and Johnny are clearly working-class, quite likely living hand-to-mouth on their merchant navy wage. Again, due to this relative poverty they engage in petty criminal activity, which sadly compounds the message that working class people can only social climb via illegal means. Linking back to *Kind Hearts*, Louis's social mobility is similarly predicated on crime, in his case a succession of murders. However, given that his upper-class breeding, and heritage, were stripped

away from him, the crimes are simply framed by him as a means to end to reclaim his privilege. Despite the films being set in Britain, Louis (half-Italian), Dan (American) and Johnny (Jamaican) are effectively depicted as outsiders, and as such do not appear to fall under the same criticism as the British who are clearly framed as villains in both films. The concept of the roguish anti-hero appears to be at play in *Pool of London*, specifically in the image of Dan with his New York swagger. However, unlike American film noir, where the outsiders are the villains who the heroes should be wary of i.e. Peter Lorre in *The Maltese Falcon* (John Huston, 1941), instead the film is quite critical in its depiction of post-war British culture. In this respect, it can be argued that the film actually relies on a level of self-loathing which inverts the dynamic of the film noir. I specifically avoid the term self-deprecation here, as I do not believe this is satirical in its intent, instead it feels like lamenting on the loss of the British community spirit that was so treasured during the war years.

It is questionable whether Deardon was trying to make a political statement with this film, especially given the illusions to generic film noirs, but it is difficult to take the film purely on face value given the director's other forays into, as John Hill (1986) broadly defines them, "social problem films". Hill acknowledges Deardon as the director who embodies this social problem film movement in the late 1940s and in 1950s and states "there can be little doubt that the largest and most consistent body of work belongs to [him]" (Hill, 1986: 68). The films in this movement straddled the line between entertainment and education, something that can easily be attached to Ealing as a whole. However, Hill also points out the main difference in Deardon's films, in contrast to the broader Ealing mould, as being their lack of the use of comedy or satire as a conduit for these more educational/political elements. Also adding that the visual style of Deardon's films are routed in the traditions of early British documentary, specifically Grierson, with its "emphasis on education and propaganda... [however] there was no particular reason why such functions should not also be performed by the fiction film" (Hill, 1986: 69). One of Deardon's later films, *The League of Gentleman* (Deardon, 1960), specifically tackles "the inability of peacetime society to provide the excitement and solidarity represented by the war" (Hill, 1986: 69), although in a slight contradiction to Hill's earlier comments, this does take the form of a slightly comedic romp involving ex-army officers banding together to commit a bank heist. Again, and clearly this

theme is no coincidence, the once celebrated soldiers are now redundant and forced into a life of crime.

Taking this into account, and as I posited above, is *Pool of London* actually attempting to lament on something that has been lost in British society? The more seemingly pulpy elements of the film are clearly for entertainment value, and while the issue of race via the character of Johnny looms large, there are clearly other more subtle issues being depicted in relation to post-war working-class British society. Conversely, these pulpy elements relating to crime and urbanity are two notions that have racist connotations in film history, specifically relating to genre films focusing on ethnic minorities and depictions of Italian Americans, and sadly this film compounds some of those widespread issues that would go on to plague films for several decades.

Class and Youth culture

Whereas the class and upbringing of the main protagonists is not something that is dwelled upon in the narrative, their chosen profession of merchant seamen does imply work as shorthand for their level on the social ladder. Again, linking back to the borrowed Film Noir conventions that this film holds on to dearly, class is not a major concern but simply the circumstances that the characters find themselves in. Whether this be a wrongfully accused person, a patsy who was set up, a heist gone wrong, an attempted insurance scam, etc. None of these are necessarily dictated by class and a character's moral choices often dictate the outcome, as they ultimately do in this film. However, this is a British film in the 1950s, therefore class is never truly off the agenda, and *Pool of London* is no exception.

As discussed above, the film does not shy away from showing the physical destruction caused by WW2, but similarly it highlights the social impact of rationing and other post-war issues. This is particularly noticeable in the depiction of various social activities which the characters are involved in. In essence, due to the fact they are on shore leave, there is almost a tourist's eye view of London's attractions. Throughout the 1950s, Deardon often depicted youth activities within his films, and Jeffrey Richards (1997a: 31) suggests that his approach was often "distinctly critical of the new leisure culture", although this related to boxing in *The Square Ring* (Basil Deardon, 1953) and horse-racing in *Rainbow Jacket* (Basil Deardon, 1954), which are obviously more

closely linked to gambling. However, given Richards' statement, it does shine a light on how social activities also link to crime in *Pool of London*.

The most interesting element of this is the use of dance halls in one key sequence. Dance halls were incredibly popular in the 1950s and were widely used a place to meet the opposite sex, and were a massive part of a new emerging youth culture which would eventually lead to less formal dance halls in the late 1950s. Gillett (2003: 137) points out the strange contradictions of the dance hall culture, in that they were a place for both "finding intimacy...and an escape from the workaday world", but were also largely sanctioned and did not hold alcohol licenses, so appeared on face value to be relatively quaint venues. Kynaston (2010: 583) outlines the experiences of women who had favoured dancing as their favourite pastime, whereas earlier in the book (2010: 198) the male perspective of dance halls was very much about a "mating game" and generally seen as a place to "fraternize". This type of behaviour is very much what is on show in *Pool of London*. John Hill links several of Deardon's films to this theme:

...the world of music and dance is associated with sexual desire and social or family disruption. For Deardon, music and dancing is inextricably bound up with the primal and dionysiac, consistently upsetting rational order and control... (1986: 74)

The links between class, crime and youth culture are highlighted in one key scene. Dan is at the dance hall to meet Maisie, a working-class woman, and one of his seemingly disposable girlfriends, who appears to only be interested in his access to illegal black-market nylons. When he confesses to not having any left for her, having given his last pair to Johnny "for his girl", she slaps him and refers to Johnny as "that dirty..." before being cut off, then confronts Johnny and his date, Pat, saying "You must be hard up to go with *him* to get them" then storms out of the hall. Dan then sidles up to the bar and starts chatting to Sally, with her meticulously curated RP accent, claiming his date left and they should make a night of it, which sets up a later relationship sub-plot. Within this single minute of screen time, several elements of early 1950s culture are not only highlighted, but also criticised. Firstly, there is a strong sense that the young women are for sale, and the currency is black-market goods, but

also that this is a safe space to discuss criminal activities. Dan's misogynist attitude of moving straight over to another woman also links to the male fraternizing outlined by Kynaston. Johnny's race is not commented on for large sections of the film, including several interactions in this sequence, but the fact that the racist comments come from the working-class Maisie also appear to be commenting on the undertones of racism and ignorance in working class Britain. On the whole, it paints dance halls as a brightly lit, lively, den of iniquity, which should be considered a serious moral concern for young people.



Figure 28: Pat and Johnny being confronted by Maisie (centre) in the dance hall

A later scene within the film, strangely echoes this sequence but tackles it from a different generational perspective. Johnny is upset after realising his relationship with Pat is doomed, drowns his sorrows at a local bar and is seemingly befriended by a local patron. Last orders and the inebriated Johnny is dragged along to a seedy late night venue by his new friend; it is a basement hazy with smoke and disreputable older male characters. Johnny is propositioned by a woman, who it is implied is either a prostitute or simply trying to scam him in his drunken state. Johnny is pickpocketed by his new friend, and when he realises becomes violent and hits several of the people in the bar. He is thrown out, face down onto the pavement by a group of men, with the barkeeper adding the phrase "They're all the same", clearly referencing

his race. In effect, the scene is a carbon copy, but also a photo negative of the mood of the dance-hall sequence, which creates a strange commentary on the state of the generational divide while simultaneously pointing out the similarities with their attitudes. This is a prime example of what Andrew Higson describes as the “parallelism and interconnectedness...” (1997: 165) that is present throughout the film, which feeds into the broader doubling and duality motif. The younger generation have swapped the smoky dirty pub for the bright and vibrant dance hall, but both venues are full of crime, misogyny and underlying racism.

The outside influence of both Dan and Johnny elicits violence, both verbal and physical, and both scenes unearth the underlying xenophobia that is still present in the post-war period. This invisible binary of ‘us-versus-them’ that is present in both *Blimp* and *Kind Hearts*, specifically aimed at the German Theo and half-Italian Louis, is also present here but the film adds a specifically racial element to the film due to Johnny’s skin colour.

Race / Social commentary

This version of London is in sharp contrast to the fine dining, rowing clubs, country manors and high-class tailors depicted in *Kind Hearts*. Whereas *Kind Hearts* focused on social mobility and class climbing, *Pool of London*’s characters seem almost oblivious to the class system, instead their aim is seemingly to earn just a little bit more money and to have the ability to enjoy social activities. Class is arguably a larger concern in British culture and has been highlighted several times throughout the first two chapters, however here we also see the inclusion of more overt themes regarding race and xenophobia within the narrative, and how these are not exclusively linked to class or specific generational traits.

The fact that the Windrush Caribbean community that settled in London is not represented within the film is not that shocking, as ethnic minorities were woefully underrepresented in this era of British cinema. Horace Ove’s *Pressure* (1976) was the first British feature film to be directed by a black director and include a predominantly black cast. The narrative of *Pressure* tackles the generation that followed on from the original Windrush, so the characters are British-born in established communities, but still dealing with racism in the 1970s. Before this point, black actors were mainly

featured as supporting actors, or their involvement in lead roles were underplayed in the marketing materials. Ashley Clark (2020) argues that Earl Cameron was a significant actor in many film in the 1950s and 1960s, but was rarely featured on the marketing material or the promotional posters for these films. The original posters for *Flame in the Streets* (Roy Ward Baker, 1961), despite its progressive plotline, failed to showcase either Johnny Sekka or Earl Cameron who have significant roles within the film. Earl Cameron (Bourne, 1998: 158-159) discusses this in the context of wider production practices and specifically about *Pool of London's* pre-production, stating that Basil Deardon and Michael Relph wanted to discuss complex issues within their films but faced resistance from Micheal Balcon who "...was not happy about including the racial theme", although their insistence did lead on many of the later "so-called social problem films" towards the late 1950s which eventually led to Deardon directing *Sapphire* (1959).

While Earl Cameron's Johnny is not actually part of the Caribbean diaspora that settled in England, he is merely a visitor, his short shore leave weekend experience creates a snapshot of the issues faced by this community throughout the 1950s. The film is clearly prescient to the later problems faced by this diaspora which culminated in the Notting Hill riots between 29th September and 5th April in 1958, where the white Teddy Boys violently attacked black communities. David Kynaston (2015: 169-170) outlines the precursing events in Nottingham the week before on 23rd August, which eventually led up to the Notting Hill riots, and specifically states that the violence stemmed from the white Teddy boys' "...atavistic dislike of black men having white girlfriends...". Although these incidents initially came as a shock and began to raise questions about immigration limits, a suggestion that was quickly quashed, they did also start to make the wider British community aware of the underlying racism that the Windrush diaspora had experienced throughout the 1950s (Kynaston, 2015: 175). The catalyst for the Nottingham incident is of particular interest in this study, due to the inclusion of an interracial relationship between the Jamaican Johnny and British Pat. *Pool of London* pre-dates the later tensions by 7 years and in many respects treats this scenario with a level of maturity and deft, which is to the credit of Deardon, as this could have so easily been used in a more salacious and bombastic manner. Johnny encounters several instances of racism throughout the film and, while the audience accepts and acknowledges the injustices against him, he often simply shrugs them off and moves

on; in effect he is not drawn as a victim within the narrative and does not become a martyr.

As discussed in other chapters, this is an example of the darker elements of British culture pushing themselves above the surface in seemingly unexpected films. The film is a thriller, but very much a PG thriller (or Rated A in 1951) so it is a fairly pulpy B-Movie experience, not a film that is attempting to tackle and resolve complex racial tensions. Andrew Higson describes the film as “highly episodic” (1997: 164) and goes on to state that this points to the exact reason why the film is so complex and difficult to define. It feels several sub-plots rather a single plot holding a narrative together, and this is why the racially motivated elements can often be lost, or hidden, in the mix. Higson further discusses that the narrative’s racial elements were not really picked up in the critical debates about the film (1997: 167). If you highlight the relationship between Johnny and Pat, it becomes a much more interesting insight into British culture.

The film itself is clearly on the side of Johnny. He is the soul of the film, innocent, sympathetic, caring and hardworking. While on the boat, his oil covered vest and messy exterior contrasts massively with the rest of the white crew, implying he is the only one putting in any hard work. When he meets Pat while she is working at the box office of the theatre/vaudeville club, he has already been established as a kind and warm character, as a counterpoint to Dan’s rather brash demeanour; therefore their attraction is not framed as taboo or complex. However, the catalyst for their meet-cute is tinged with racism; he is told to leave the hallway by a customer who proclaims that they “get enough of your lot paying for their seats”, which upsets Pat and she defends him. They later bump into each other in the rain at a bus stop and they go for tea, a very British meet-cute, but the racism is never mentioned not even in passing. The above sequence of events epitomises Deardon’s approach to the racial elements of this film: without warning the film’s narrative is interrupted by racial tension, specifically white against black, it is not addressed or commented on within the film space, and then the plot continues as normal. These moments are intermittent spikes in the waveform rather than sustained period of discomfort. The scene in which Johnny is drunkenly ejected from the bar could have been followed up by further violence in the street, similarly he could have reacted to Maisie’s racist comment in the dance hall,

but he does not, instead Deardon shies away from these options in favour of returning to another plotline. In essence, we peek behind the curtain and see the ugly side of Britain but are quickly asked to leave before we make a judgement.

The end of the relationship between Johnny and Pat is quite possibly the most ambiguous sequence within the entire film. After enjoying their tour around London, Pat invites Johnny to Camberwell Palace Theatre, but he has to decline to return to the boat before it departs. They agree to write to each other, and the possibility of romance is left open. However, the boat is held in dock for an extra night due to the police investigation, so Johnny runs over to Camberwell to meet Pat. As he arrives, from a distance he is initially happy to see Pat alone, but his happiness fades as she is greeted and then surrounded by her white friends. There are several readings of this sequence, but two seem the most obvious: is it the fact that he knows there is no future between them, but she could have a future with her new male companion; or is it racially motivated, as he does not feel he will be accepted by the crowd. The former echoes the bittersweet nature of *Brief Encounter* (David Lean, 1945), however the latter points to a more politically contentious reading in which, due to the racism he has faced, he is fearful of walking into a group of British white people, or even more specifically, the British white men who are accompanying the women. Higson (1997: 167-169) broadly discusses this point in relation to the critical discourse around “the race question”, specifically honing in on the idea that the interracial relationship is often seen as “extraneous to the central crime thriller” and therefore not explored in any detail by a myriad of critics over the years. Higson also discusses a point I alluded to earlier, the duality within the split plot lines and this leading to the confusing nature of both a realist drama taking place alongside an action thriller. This is linked very specifically to not only the plot, but also to the visual style of the film’s 2 disparate strands: one being very stylistic and cinematic, incorporating a lot of close-ups and expressive lighting; the other feeling like a simplistic “soap opera” favouring wider shots. This, in effect, reduces the social issues that are raised in the film to a sideshow rather than the main event, the exciting thriller plot is broken up by slower paced dramatic sequences that seemingly have no bearing on the crime plot, despite Deardon’s clear good intentions to open up a serious discourse on race.

Paul Gilroy, in his book *The Black Atlantic*, specifically discusses the concept of “doubleness” (1993: 4) which define, and complicate, a person’s experiences of both their origins and their place of birth or residence. Johnny clearly experiences this sense of duality, even though London is his temporary, almost nomadic home, he still tries to embrace the culture and people of Britain and start a romantic relationship. As he attempts to do so, he is the only person of colour within the film. Seemingly, if you take the film at face value, there are no minority ethnic communities in London. Gilroy (1993: 81-83) specifically points to the lack of deep-rooted identity of black cultures in the UK around this time, citing the origin of many of these as being in-and-around the post-World War II period. Gilroy further discusses the “complex cultural exchange” that has appeared in Britain over the past 60-70 years, wherein many completely disparate diasporas began coopting elements of each other’s cultures, such as Gilroy’s example of Asian communities taking on the “sound system” traditions of Caribbean communities. Obviously, here Gilroy is focusing on the visibility of different cultures in Britain which often uses mainstream and/or commercial trends as a signifiers, whereas David Olusoga’s (2021) more recent work has highlighted much deeper, and more complex, historical roots that span back several centuries. However, the film ignores this and chooses to place Johnny in an entirely white community and specifically isolates him using several sequences where his race is used to distance him from the British people.

The term that best describes the state that Johnny experiences within *Pool of London* is “non-identity” (Gilroy, 1993: 81), which to some extent can be seen as the phase that many diasporic individuals would have felt in the late 1940s/early 1950s Britain. Prior to black communities being fully formed in Britain, there was a moment in time where it would have been extremely difficult to acclimatise to British culture without the support of also having the familiarity of, or at least a version of, one’s own indigenous community in situ. As has been suggested several times in this chapter, if you were to isolate Johnny’s story away from the thriller plot, you would in fact be left with a quite touching story of a lonely man trying to find connections and roots in a strange new city. His journey becomes one of trying to fill his “non-identity” with new experiences and fit into local traditions. He frequents British staples such as pubs, cafes, dance halls, theatres, as well as the more tourist-centric natural maritime museum and the Greenwich Observatory. In the absence of natural connections, he

tries to blend in, and arguably does this way better than Dan, and the contrast between their attire is of note: Johnny's simple jacket and shirt, aside Dan's particularly out of place double-breasted suit. In essence, Dan displays his difference with pride, while Johnny attempts to create a new identity. Gilroy's idea of "doubleness", having two identities or cultures on top of each other, is strangely hidden within *Pool of London* and shows that Deardon had a much deeper understanding of the struggles that were being faced by individuals, and communities, being displaced by immigration. Further to this, the film also pre-empts the idea of many "self-consciously synthetic cultures" (Gilroy, 1993: 82) which developed from this merging of cultural experiences.

Historical Racism

Ultimately, despite Johnny's efforts to fit in, the story concludes with racism and is weirdly portentous as it mirrors the Notting Hill climax later in the decade. Similarly, it can be argued that the bar room brawl at the end of the film looks back in time and echoes incidents that had happened during the war, specifically linking to American soldiers stationed in London. David Olusoga (2021: 489) discusses the issues faced by black American GIs who were assaulted in pubs and dance halls in 1942, and how this spurred actions to further educate both the Americans and British on race relations, and their countries differing opinions. Although, the "...British sentiments were profoundly different from those that prevailed in the American south..." (Olusoga, 2021: 489) there was still a lack of enlightenment on this issue of racial mixing. That fact that Olusoga specifically mentions pubs and dance halls as problem areas in British society, specifically in the war and post-war period, appears to track with these being the exact locations where Johnny is insulted and then later assaulted during the film. The tentative relationship with Pat and the possible backlash they would face, if they were to explore a relationship, also appear to track with historical events. There was already a broad social stigma surrounding mixed-race children that had been fathered by black American GIs, so much so that many of these children were abandoned (Olusoga, 2021: 489).

Again, this points to Deardon's clear goal of trying to explore the topic of race and social problems, but also the more complex pre-empting of the impending rift in society. The fact we experience this from Johnny's perspective is arguably what makes the film so unique, we empathise him as a lonely innocent individual forced into

a complex post-war melting pot of fear and uncertainty. In this respect, Johnny can be compared to Theo Kretschmar-Schuldorff in *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (Michael Powell, 1943) from the first chapter. They are both characters that are villainised for their skin colour and country of origin, respectively. Both are seemingly outcast by association, rather than individual actions. However, despite their minor complicity with nefarious acts (Theo in the German army, and Johnny's handling of stolen goods) they are presented innocents who are struggling to overcome historical bigotry which is aimed at whole communities, not taking into account individuals. To stretch an analogy, Louis in *Kind Hearts* (Robert Hamer, 1949) is similarly outcast due to his Italian heritage. Not from society as a whole, but from high society. In essence, this can be seen as another example of Gilroy's "doubleness", living with the baggage of your heritage while trying form a unique identity in Britain. It does however link to Durgnat's point that within filmic realms "Race is a form of class" (2011: 300), and can also be extended to broader readings of heritage and emigres on screen.

John Hill (1986: 83) has a slightly more cynical reading of Johnny's character within the film, which is worth pointing out as it is not only an interesting opinion, but also one that points to a perceived lack of complexity in the film as whole. Hill argues that Johnny's passive nature is a sign of British filmmakers creating simplistic black characters. Johnny is "polite, deferential and reflective" and in effect always does what is considered to be 'right' within the film, and therefore he carries a lack of "threat" to the audience. Hill argues, this could be read as a sign of "over-compensation", which ultimately creates an unrealistically idealistic character. He argues that this is addressed in Deardon's later film *Sapphire* (1959) where there is a larger cast of black actors and therefore more complexity within their representation on screen. While I do not entirely agree with Hill's point, it is difficult to argue against the idea that Earl Cameron, as an actor in 1951 British-produced cinema, almost single handedly represents the black community on screen, so therefore his portrayal would set a watermark. However, if his character were depicted in an entirely negative light, this would also be an oversimplification, and demonise the black community. This full argument sadly points to a lack of representation on screen in 1951, therefore there is no counterpoint example, rather than specifically an issue with *Pool of London*.

Pool of London is an interesting example of the 'fish-out-of-water' narrative which often can be seen as a way of examining a nation's issues. The outsider looking in, objectively dissecting and/or experiencing the state of the nation. As discussed, Johnny's experiences are quite pertinent as he is ostensibly experiencing the issues faced by future generations, especially in light of Windrush and the Notting Hill riots. However, it is also worth looking more closely at the Dan, especially considering the influx of Americans in wartime and post-war Britain. Johnny's experiences mainly highlighted his race and "otherness" throughout the film. The most innocuous of actions, or even his mere presence raised bigotry and scorn throughout London. Dan's skin colour and nationality seemingly allows him to be way more reckless, without judgement, entirely avoiding the treatment that Johnny faced. If anything, his New York drawl gives him a movie star aura that, again, appears to place him in a slightly different and very much adjacent movie to the social realist elements of the film. As alluded to earlier, but specifically from a racial perspective, there were a spate of pregnancies that arose from British woman having short-term relationships with American soldiers, but it's Dan's plotline that highlights these issues more directly. In the final 3 years of WW2, American GIs were responsible for fathering more than 22,000 children in Britain, and many of these children were raised without knowledge of their biological roots (Lee, 2011). Obviously, this formed a particularly unwanted legacy for American's visiting Britain in the post-war period.

Throughout the film, Dan flits between relationships with 2 different British women. Maisie is seemingly only using him to procure smuggled goods, whereas Sally appears to actually want to pursue a sexual relationship with Dan. The film still reads as Dan being a promiscuous and opportunistic invader on British soil. John Hill (1986: 83) aptly describes his character as a "playboy". He literally is spurned by one woman, and instantly attempts to woo his next victim. In isolation, his actions are a twisted version of *On The Town* (Stanley Donen & Gene Kelly, 1949), dropping into town on shore without any sense of the long-term consequences. However, in one scene with Sally, they kiss on her doorstep and, in a quite edgy scene for the time, she walks back in and leaves the door open for Dan to enter. Sally instigates the sexual advance, and is quite clearly in control of the situation. The scene is of particular interest as it depicts a woman displaying a level of liberation which is quite refreshing for a film in this era. Obviously, Dan's relationship with Sally can be read both ways; he is using

her for sex, but she is also using him as a form of escapism from the drudgery of working-class Britain. As discussed, he is after all, a cheap facsimile of a matinee idol made flesh, and therefore a shiny fantasy object in the dull dimly lit streets of London.

However, this unfortunately points to the stereotyping of women within the film. The 3 women fit nicely into simplistic pigeonholes: Pat is the 'good girl', Maisie is the more aggressive 'dangerous' one, and Sally is the 'repressed housewife' looking for excitement. Therefore, they all have very simplistic drives and goals, which seemingly only get triggered by the actions of the patriarchy. Sue Harper (2000: 78) specifically points out this issue in another of Deardon's films, *Sapphire*, wherein a specific characterisation is rather problematic and points to the female murderer being driven mad by the lack of a man in her life - "Abandoned by her husband...[a later scene] argues the dire effects of sexual repression on a 'respectable' woman...". Sadly, as Harper points out, you would expect something better from "mature film-makers". Given the relative progressive nature of Deborah Kerr's characters in *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* back in 1943, this feels like a step backwards and is probably representative of the shift back-and-forth of gender roles during WW2 and into the post-war period. Women became key to the homeland workforce in wartime, but then were forced into more traditional roles when the men returned from war. *Pool of London*, invertedly I might add, appears to also show this on screen as the female characters return to stereotypical roles.

Given the political turmoil in this period, the duality in *Pool of London* appears to mirror the transitional stage of British society. Labour building social reform strategies in the immediate post-war years to support poorer communities, then the Conservatives coming back into power in 1951 to reign over the age of affluence. The bombsites and crime, counterpointed by the hope for a better future, which is particularly resonant in Johnny and Pat's flirtation with an interracial romantic relationship. The conclusion of the film is similarly poignant, the criminals are arrested, and the innocents set free, as if pointing towards a less turbulent time in the coming decade. There are admirable advances in the treatment of tackling race on screen, specifically in relation to British film, but *Pool of London* being released in 1951 can also be a strong reason for its, almost, naivety in the way it presents Johnny's narrative. However, it can also be argued that this is not a film about racism. Racist attitudes impact characters, but it is

not the focus of the film. The visual use of post-war London is truly fascinating, both in its almost bleak noirish depiction of the dirty cobbled night-time, and its unabashed use capturing of the bomb-out cityscape that is rarely seen on screen. These two elements also factor into a complex ping-pong effect of the use of two parallel genres within the film, the crime thriller and realist drama, being seemingly incompatible, but somehow becoming strange bedfellows.

When analysed from a certain perspective, as has been done in this chapter, doubling and duality is something that appears to be at the forefront of the film in every single scene. Either the narrative, visuals or character themselves appear to inhibit an innate sense of flux. Given Deardon's later film *The Man who Haunted Himself* (1970) which has a pre-occupation with doubling, and includes a literal doppelganger, it appears to be something that may well be present in several of his other films.

Chapter 4 – Secret People

Secret People (Thorold Dickinson, 1952) is an Ealing film produced at a time when the studio was riding on a wave of prosperity after string of successful films in the late 40s and early 50s, notably *Passport to Pimlico* (Henry Cornelius, 1949), *Whisky Galore* (Alexander Mackendrick, 1949), *Kind Hearts and Coronets*, which was discussed in an earlier chapter. These were mainly politically charged, but comedic, satires that were still loosely confined to realist traditions that were popular at the time. As discussed in the previous chapter, after this slew of success with comedies, Ealing who were always relatively diverse with the genres of films they produced, decided to still focus on grittier productions and were equally successful in this field especially with one of their biggest hits *The Blue Lamp* (Basil Deardon, 1950). The film was a relatively straight forward police procedural, and is noteworthy for both the realistic nature of the depiction of crime in the era, but also for its naturalistic acting styles. After this point, Ealing started to branch out into productions which become increasingly difficult to pin down into a specific genre. *Pool of London* has elements of this blending of genres, and also carries on the trend of grittier London-based crime thrillers that *The Blue Lamp* had proved were very popular with British audiences. *Secret People* takes this blending of genres and themes to an even more complex level, and can arguably be seen as one of Ealing's most complex, if not entirely successful, curios in its production catalogue. This chapter will primarily focus on *Secret People* as a case study to explore immigration and diasporic communities, Gender in British Film, and how the film portrays a fictional variation on the political landscape leading up to WW2 and how this is used to explore complex historical issues in Britain's past.



Figure 29: Valentina Cortese as Maria (left) and Charles Goldner as Anselmo (right)



Figure 30: Audrey Hepburn as Nora (left) and Serge Reggiani as Louis (right)

The film is a character study of a young woman, Maria, and her younger sister, Nora, who are sent to Britain from an unnamed country to seek asylum with an older family friend, Anselmo, who is already settled in London running a Café. They are fleeing from an unnamed European country due to the rise of an evil dictator, Galbern, in 1930 (Fig. 31). Their father is involved in the resistance and dies early in the film. The film jumps to 1937, just as Nora successfully applies for British citizenship. While visiting the 1937 Paris International Exposition with Nora and Anselmo, they witness a protest against Galbern, who is present at the exposition and starting to get a foothold in the rest of Europe. She is approached by an old friend/lover, Louis, from her native country, who is now involved in international resistance fighting with an organisation called “The Committee” (Fig. 32), to get involved in a bomb plot aimed at Galbern. The scheme goes horribly wrong and innocent people are killed (Fig. 33), and Maria falls into a deep depression due to the guilt. “The Committee” try to kill Maria, as they feel

she is unstable and a threat to their plans. Maria reaches out to the police as she fears for her life. However, due to her culpability in the bomb explosion, she is used as bait by the police to capture members of the resistance. This results in a violent shootout between the resistance fighters and the police, which culminates in another bomb exploding. The confusion around the explosion allows Maria to fake her own death, and she is forced to go into witness protection. She reemerges with a new persona (Fig. 34) to see her sister perform in a ballet concert, the resistance fighters, including Louis, track her down and kill her. Louis and his men are arrested by the police moments after they have murdered Maria.



Figure 31: The poster of the Galbern that appears in London



Figure 32: Maria surrounded by the resistance group known as "The Committee"



Figure 33: The lavish party (left) and the moment before the bomb kills the innocent waitress (right)



Figure 34: Maria in her new disguise (left) accompanied by police detective Miss Jackson (right)

Despite the synopsis, it is a strangely earnest telling of a story that could easily have been made into a pulpy spy thriller. Trying to attach a specific identity to the film is quite difficult as it does not naturally fit into the Ealing mould of the time, specifically lacking comedy or political satire, it does not have the fantasy or whimsy of *The Archers*, and it is not overtly melodramatic or gothic to align itself with the more Gainsborough Studios traditions. Despite being an Ealing production, it also is difficult to fully comprehend this film fitting into their war film genre, which would arguably be considered to be one of their most successful areas of production in this period, specifically serious prestige films such as *The Cruel Sea* (Charles Frend, 1953) and *Dunkirk* (Leslie Norman, 1958). However, *Secret People* is set in England during peacetime and is concerned, not with soldiers, but with people and communities impacted by wars. In this respect, it probably fits closer to the comedies *Whisky Galore!* (Alexander Mackendrick, 1949) and *Passport to Pimlico* (Henry Cornelius, 1949), or in its seriousness, to the drama *Went the Day Well?* (Alberto Cavalcanti, 1942). As discussed in the opening, it is a complex and fragmented film that almost defiantly avoids any clear classification.

However, community is again a thematic element of the film, but in the case of *Secret People*, the community is a London-based refugee diaspora and this shifts away from the homeland community spirit focus of this era's filmmaking. Instead, this is replaced by an almost completely invisible community, on film at least, focusing less on their bonding to achieve a common goal, and more on the day-to-day struggles and exploitation of simply existing as an outsider in 1930s London. The title of the film, *Secret People*, can obviously be linked to the idea of this invisible community as well as to the more logical conclusion that the title refers to the idea of people involved in espionage. The doubling motif is explored through the lead protagonist Maria and her struggles with taking on several different identities and roles throughout the film. As I introduced in the previous chapter, the concept of an émigré settling into British culture, and the duality that comes with this status, is present again in *Secret People*. However, Maria's narrative arc is more complex than *Pool of London* and involves her being coerced into illegal espionage and resistance movements, which results in her taking on multiple personalities and metaphorical masks throughout the film.

Cold war tensions

With the inclusion of Spies in the film comes the notion of the double-agent, somebody literally working for both sides and/or living a double life. This is a very literal example of how the doubling motif is imprinted on the film, but there are more figurative examples discussed later in the chapter. However, the inclusion of spies in film during the 1950s, and then into the 1960s, starts to become ever more prominent in British film which can in part be seen as a direct reaction to the uncertainty of the Cold War. The instability of Europe in the years directly following WW2 are well documented, but are usually wrapped up in wider intercontinental matters of Cold War tensions between the two super-powers of the USA and USSR. The two nations were involved in arms races such as developing Atomic weapons, and later the H-Bomb, then near-miss conflicts such as the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962. Embedded in this conflict is the notion of state secrets and widespread paranoia of the impending start of another world war. The use of spies, outside of conflict, was a major tool for both nations.

The Manhattan project, which developed the bomb that was used on Hiroshima, was probably the highest profile example of espionage in the first few months and years

after the end of World War 2. This was a joint project between the USA, UK and Canada, however it came to light that it had been infiltrated by Russian spy networks for a long period of time, and as such became a huge source of embarrassment for all three nations and partially led to paring back of military research links between the UK and USA in 1946 (Hennessy, 2006: 137-8). Given the high-profile nature of the incident in the press, especially around the defection of Igor Gouzenko who had defected with stolen documents, the western world had started to create a new enemy in the Russians which led to the start of the Cold War. In Britain, the government were constantly criticised by the British Communist Party for its “subservience” to America, while it showed unwavering support for Stalin despite his transgressions (Kynaston, 2007: 223).

On film, this started manifesting itself with a preoccupation with the East-West split in Europe and the polarising nature of this separation. This split in Europe was depicted in the immediate WW2 period in *The Third Man* (Carol Reed, 1949), which was famously set in the rubble of post-war Vienna. Similar to the discussion of location in the previous chapter, regarding *Pool of London*, the broken and bombed out buildings again echo the instability of the country. Austria was a neutral country sandwiched between the allied Western countries and what was loosely defined as the Eastern Bloc, including East Germany. *The Third Man*, due to its massive success, unintentionally set a precedent that even neutral countries in Europe were still riddled with instability, crime and shady characters, like Harry Lime, that were profiting from the fallout of the war. The film paints an unsavoury image of post-war Europe and the darkness of the fictional version of Vienna, both literally and figuratively, gives the film a slightly hyperbolic gothic horror element. Ronnie D. Lipschutz discusses this image of Europe on film from an American perspective, using both *The Third Man* and *The Big Lift* (William Perlberg, 1950) as examples, pointing out the polarizing effects of both of these films, specifically the notion that “the ‘good’ Germans were on our side, while the ‘bad’ Germans were in the East”, which very much “...distinguished the good from the bad” in an overly simplistic manner, while the both films “...also reflect the moral and political ambiguity with which most Americans saw postwar Europe” (2001: 25). This overly simplistic filmic trend of dichotomising East and West can be identified in cinema all the way into the 1980s and the end of the Cold War.

Ealing's production gamble?

Secret People was an unorthodox production from the outset, as it was a project that had been developed specifically by the director, outside of a studio, and then was brought into Ealing in the pre-production phase by Thorold Dickinson (Duguid *et al.*, 2012: 13). At this time, especially within Ealing Studios, this was not common practice as Studios usually developed film projects internally for a specific market. This probably explains the tone of the film, it is a well-intentioned passion piece that attempts to explore tensions that arose in Europe in the years between WW1 and WW2, but narratively it sometimes lacks the polish and assured vision of Ealing's more generic war films. Balcon's approach to running Ealing in this period, as outlined by Harper and Porter (2003: 59), relied heavily on "repackaging notions of 'Englishness'", but this was often done by simply avoiding elements or production methods that were associated with American productions. While this level of patriotism and loyalty to the uniqueness of the British character is responsible for producing some of the best British films of the period, it also very rarely translated into something that can be easily pigeonholed into a genre, in the same way that an American studio production could. *Secret People* differed from Balcon's usual approach as it more closely mimicked the trend of Film Noir-tinged espionage thrillers that Alfred Hitchcock had originally popularised in Britain, with films like *Sabotage* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1936), before he took these productions to America in the 1940s and they were fully embraced by Hollywood. Balcon referred to this production and Dickinson's involvement as a "welcome blood-transfusion, a stranger bride in a family tending towards in-breeding" (Harper and Porter, 2003: 59) which in part implies that the film was not only a change of direction, but also a welcome one within a Studio that had started to become stale. To caveat this statement, the mid-late 1950s are seen as the "stagnant and inert" period for Ealing (Duguid *et al.*, 2012: 12), however this rot can be traced back to around 1952 as the quality of the productions starts to wane and, barring the odd exception such as the *Cruel Sea* (Charles Frend, 1953) and *The Ladykillers* (Alexander Mackendrick, 1955), Ealing's hot streak of hits had ended back in 1951.

The director, Thorold Dickinson, is arguably best known for the original version of *Gaslight* (1940), not to be confused with the more famous Ingrid Bergman Hollywood vehicle in 1944, and for *The Queen of Spades* (1949). Both films exude overtly gothic

undertones, both visually and narratively, and can broadly be defined as tapping into the traditions of Gainsborough Studios' melodramatic gothic output of the era. Both films are also aided by the presence of Anton Walbrook in a leading role, who was discussed earlier in Chapter 1 due to his role as Theo in *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (Michael Powell, 1943). With *Secret People*, Dickinson cast a collection of relatively unproven character actors, including the young Audrey Hepburn in her first major role, and also trusted a more international cast to add (relative) authenticity to the character's origins: Valentina Cortese and Serge Reggiani (Italy), Charles Goldner (Austria) and Hepburn (Netherlands). Due to some of the above factors, this change of tact by Ealing did not pay off, and *Secret People* was not a success at the box office. In fact, its premiere was widely surrounded by controversy, mainly due to confusion over the communist themes present in the film:

The opening performance of *Secret People* at the Odeon Leicester Square were disrupted by communist demonstrators who, believing that General Galbern represented a fascist dictator (Mussolini or Hitler), interpreted the film as an attack on communist opponents of fascism. (Shaw, 2001: 47)



Figure 35: Galbern doing a nazi salute during the Paris sequence, which backs up Tony Shaw's assertion that Hitler/Mussolini were the template for the character

The film would ultimately be re-edited and the plans for wider release parred back. Gregory Dart is rather vague on the nature of the cuts, simply stating that the protests "...panicked Ealing into making cuts, repackaging it as a second feature and giving up all plans of foreign distribution." (2008:204). Interestingly, then film-critic/journalist and

future Film Director Lindsay Anderson chose *Secret People* as a subject for an on-set production book name *Making a Film: The Story of 'Secret People'* (Anderson, 1952). In the opening section, Anderson apologises that the book does not cover the post-production element stating that "...regretfully curtailed is the account of processes which the film goes through between the end of shooting and its full completion." (1952: 5-6). This also leaves the exact details of the post-premiere cuts as a rather frustrating ongoing mystery. Due to the film's lack of success, Anderson's project now feels like a completely ill-conceived idea, or at the very least an incredibly ambitious idea that was unfortunately attached to an unsuccessful film. However, the confidence of Ealing, Anderson and the publishers to support *Secret People* shows a belief that there was serious quality in the script and ideas in the development stage of the film. As is commented on in *Ealing Revisited* (Duguid *et al.*, 2012: 13) the film was expected to be a big hit, and using outside talent was seen as way of capitalising on some of the success of Ealing studios in the preceding years, and moving the Studio in new directions. However, instead this became the beginning of the slightly maligned period of Ealing's output, loosely defined as spanning from the mid-50s, although Duguid *et al.* argue that the films in this period benefit from a "revisionist perspective" (2012: 13). Specifically looking at the film from this revisionist's perspective, despite the many flaws, and controversies, the film is a fascinating case study. It tackles the personal issues faced by normal people in those troubled years in between the wars. More importantly to this chapter, it also tackles this from a unique perspective – A woman, forced into immigration who finally gains citizenship, only for the past she escaped to come back and invade her newly adopted country.

Identity and fractured personalities

Identity is a key theme within the film, and it is explored on many different fronts. Most notably the sense of national identity and how Maria's specific situation bounds her to a sense of duty to her newfound patriotization to Britain, but also the draws her back of the values of her native country. This thematic element is one of many doubling and split motifs within the film, and links very clearly to the concept of a character embodying multiple personas.

The opening section of the film depicts Maria being displaced from her home country and fleeing to Britain, and from then attempting to gain her status as a British citizen.

When she achieves this, she changes her surname from Brentano to Brent. In effect, erasing her nationality. This is her first transformation in the film, no longer a victim and refugee, she is now a bona fide part of British society. Anselmo, her surrogate father in Britain, comments that the government “won’t eat you up in this country”, which both acts as a slight against the unnamed European government she has fled, but also somewhat blinkered view of the country she has aligned herself with. From a government standpoint, many of the concerns around immigration in the 1930s stemmed from a purely economic perspective, specifically not wanting to flood the country with specific professions in an already struggling job market, while the British public were mostly ignorant to the extent of the persecution of Europeans fleeing fascist countries (Pistol, 2017: 43-45). However, Maria’s persona in this section is stable and settled, as she begins to plan for her future as a British citizen.

The second of Maria’s identities relates to her cooperation with the secret agency, ‘The Committee’, who coerce her to smuggle the bomb into the party. In this section of the film there is a shift in Maria’s personality, to one that is more reckless and vengeful which ultimately results in her planting the bomb and accidentally killing the waitress at the party. The catalyst for this shift in her personality takes place in Paris during International Exposition, as the protests for/against General Galbern rage in the streets. Firstly, she witnesses Galbern being chauffeured up to the entrance of the British Pavillion, which contains the British arts exhibition at the event, and being greeted with open arms by the British representatives as a VIP (Fig. 36 & 37). From Maria’s perspective, the British government have aligned themselves with the dictator that was responsible for killing her father. Here is where we experience the first fracture in Maria’s personality, as she feels betrayed her new home. Literally, within the same sequence, she bundles through the crowd of rioters and bumps into her former friend/lover, Louis, who is responsible for coercing her into the bomb plot.



Figure 37: Maria, Nora and Anslemo reacting to seeing Galbern



Figure 37: Galbern being welcomed into the British Pavillion



Figure 38: Maria and Louis's meet-cute at the protest

In effect, what happens in this sequence is that Maria has a traumatic event, and the past comes back to haunt her, she fights through the metaphorical crowd of her thoughts, being pushed to the ground and is then literally picked up by a Louis, the physical embodiment of a happy memory from her past. As if she has conjured up a dreamlike meet-cute to escape from the present (Fig. 38). This concept of wish-fulfilment via the physical manifestation of 'saviour' characters was also present in *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp*, when Clive Candy seemingly resurrects the image of his lost love, Edith, back into the future women in his life, when they all become the image of Deborah Kerr. Within both of these films the reaction to trauma is to escape the present and either to return to the past, as Clive Candy does travelling back through his memories, or bring the past into the present, by transporting people from their past back into the present-day, such as Louis in *Secret People* and Edith in *Blimp*.

Double Agents and Split Allegiances

The above sequence essential creates two different versions of Maria's personality: The patriotic British citizen; and her new personality which is willingness to engage in the act of terrorism. Simply put, in this section of the film Maria reverts to her personality from the past in 1930. She is madly in love with Louis and is desperate to

avenge her father's death. By doing this she erases the British citizen that she strived to become for 7 years, and instead uses this persona as a cover for terrorist activities. By becoming a double agent, she literally uses both of her personas to carry out the act of terrorism: The respectful British citizen is the mask to get herself into the party; the vengeful European persona carries the bomb. In effect, Maria is British by name only and still largely seen as an outsider. Obviously, she is both of these people but her personality, and allegiances, are split. The title *Secret People* could be seen as quite prominent in this section of the film, as it can be argued that the secret person is in fact her dormant vengeful persona that comes to the surface when she becomes a double-agent. As discussed earlier in the chapter, Thorold Dickinson interweaves some incredibly complex debates into *Secret People*, some of which are probably too weighty to be fully explored in the relatively short runtime of the film. Due to this, the audience is left with some mixed messages. In this case, the implication is that any refugee, even the mild-mannered Maria, has capacity to become a terrorist. Again, the oversimplification, furthers xenophobic views, rather than apathy towards people fleeing hostile states. Conversely, Dickinson does avoid focusing on the "visually spectacular, 'criminal' actions of terrorists rather than their motives" (Shaw, 2015: 25). The action and explosions are off-screen, but the consequences are emotionally devastating on-screen and Maria falls into a state of depression which is also depicted in an earnest, non-melodramatic, fashion. Despite the criminal activities, the film does still acknowledge she is a victim.

The last of Maria's transformations takes place in the third act. She confesses her crime to the police, and is offered round the clock protection, which in part is her being used as bait to lure out members of the resistance group, 'The Commission'. Not unsurprisingly, this ends in disaster as Maria is caught in the crossfire of a shoot-out between the resistance group and the police. In what would seem comically ironic in another movie, she is presumed killed by a bomb blast. When she awakes, she realises that the police have kept up the ruse of her death to the public, and have now given her a fake identity of Lena Collins, so she can work undercover for them. Anselmo's "won't eat you up" comment at the start of the film becomes equally ironic, as ultimately the British police use Maria as a double-agent for their own gain and put her in danger which sadly leads to her demise at the end of the film. The difference with this final persona is that it is forced upon her without consent, she literally wakes

up a new person. The new given name, Lena Collins, is perhaps more insightful a summation of Maria's journey than originally planned, as it includes both Eastern European and British elements echoing her own fluid persona. It is difficult not to link the above narrative points to the overarching discussion regarding the struggles of integrating refugees in Britain both in the 1930s and 1950s, and in some ways the title of the film relates to diasporic communities being secret and hidden. Also, this could easily be linked to the secret people being the spies and resistance fighters. However, ultimately, given Thorold Dickinson's intentions, I would like to think that the secret person is actually Maria herself. A person hidden behind so many personas and masks, that she never truly is in touch with her true self.

A woman with agency

As Sue Harper comments, "The British film industry underwent major transformations in the 1950s, which radically affected patterns of gender representation" (2000: 73) and with this came a lot more overtly female led films and *Secret People* can be seen as encompassing both the good and bad examples of this new found representation. As the previous section shows, Maria is ultimately punished for being a person who attempts to take a stand and experiences multiple traumatic events throughout the course of the film. However, at the start of the film, the character of Maria broadly encompasses a positive female role model, and one that more closely echoes the change in culture in the 1950s. She has not taken a husband, works for a living, acts as surrogate mother to her younger sister, she strives to complete her citizenship test, and is an integral part of Anselmo's the business. While these elements are not necessarily progressive for a film set in the 1930s, it does at first glance appear to be attempting to buck gender stereotypes of the time by giving Maria a level of agency. Maria is obviously written with a degree of hindsight and distance in 1952, so there is a temptation to attach sociological factors from the 1950s onto the films 1930s setting. While that is most definitely tempting, especially given Maria's independence within the film chimes closely with the prevailing change in gender roles after World War 2, and not as much with the uncertain period between World War 1 and 1939. Sue Harper (2000: 9) specifically hones in on the trite overreliance of looking at British society in the 1930s as a period of "...fragmented, [and] riven by contradictory notions of class and national identity", when in fact the "...cultural and social forms of the 1930s are a great deal more homogenous than is commonly thought" and society, in general, was

particularly disinterested in tackling any cultural changes taking place in relation to woman's independence and changing gender roles. In this respect, Maria's more progressive elements, although slight, do appear to create an apocryphal character supplanted from the 1950s and again the film seems to create a warped displacement of time and space, so it exists in outside of historical reality.

Despite some of the broader elements of the film, Dickinson does attempt to acknowledge misogyny within several sequences in the film. There is a moment early in the film where a patron of the café says to Maria, in a matter-of-fact way, that 'a girl like you can get on without a permit, without work for that matter', implying either a marriage of convenience or that she could become a prostitute. Anselmo scolds the patron and threatens to ban him (Fig. 39). The sequence points to quite an anti-misogynistic message throughout the film, and highlights the abuse of vulnerable women under the patriarchy, especially young women seeking asylum without ties in the UK. This abuse of vulnerable women in the period is clearly a key concern of the filmmakers as prostitution features later in the film, when a sex-worker is asked if the police can use her flat as a stake-out post, she ask one officer if he was 'scared to come alone', with a knowing look, more than implying that the officer is actually a customer (Fig. 40). The film is littered with similar instances of authority figures, almost entirely men, manipulating vulnerable women and while this is not shocking given the film is set in the 1930s, and to a lesser extent that it was made in the 1950s, the standpoint of Dickinson's film is to tell this story from the perspective of a woman who is being manipulated. Kynaston (2010: 555-556) outlines the growing attention prostitution was getting in the government in the early 1950s, and that this was specifically linked to the high visibility of the sex workers in the larger cities, highlighting London's Soho and Hyde Park as being of particular concern. The moral concerns were mainly against the prostitutes themselves, not the patrons, and there was "...very little sympathy for the position of these women...[or that] each prostitute was a unique individual working in a heartless industry" (Kynaston, 2010: 556). Dickinson's inclusion of these scenes seems to be commenting on, not only the double standards of the police, but also more broadly on the exploitation of women from several different perspectives.



Figure 39: The sleazy patron (left) who is scolded by Anselmo (right)



Figure 40: The police officers at the sex worker's flat

Many of the stronger themes of female empowerment are sadly also counterpointed, and ultimately undermined in other sequences. Audrey Hepburn's role as the innocent younger sister, Nora (Fig. 41), within the film appears to conform to almost every clunky stereotype of cinematic storytelling: young pretty girl wants to become famous as a dancer in the big city; she is later placed in a dangerous situation, becoming the damsel in distress; again, is manipulated by man she has fallen in love with. Simply

writing her in the script as a ballet dancer, a profession synonymous with young girls at the time (a position that has obviously changed over time), also seems to point to the inescapable need, rather than a want, to include a traditionally drawn feminine character within the film. Another example of this comes in the form of the Scotland Yard agent, Miss Jackson (Fig 42). A similarly well-intentioned character who is very prominent in the final act of the film and is the lead officer in final operation, which feels like a progressive move overall. However, this is also slightly undermined by some clunky directing and blocking choices, especially during Maria's initial confession at Scotland Yard, in which the male officer sits behind the desk in a powerful position while Miss Jackson fetches not just one, but two, cups of tea in the space of a 2-minute sequence. While this could be read as compassionate, it also undermines the strength of the character with a lazy stereotype.



Figure 42: Nora at the ballet audition



Figure 41: Miss Jackson (centre) during Maria's confession at Scotland Yard

To call *Secret People* a feminist film might be inaccurate, but there are serious ambitions to tell this story from a women's perspective and Maria does represent a move away from stereotypes into more complex roles for women in the 1950s. There were similar films that appeared in this era that tackled similar strong female characters. Most notably, *Odette* (Herbert Wilcox, 1950) was released only a few years earlier and depicted the real-life story of spy Odette Churchill, who was a prominent figure in WW2. Pairing these two films does appear to point to a minor trend of British film trying to account for women's stories that link to more traditionally male orientated roles in spying, espionage and resistance movements. Sue Harper describes it as being primarily a tale of her "...sufferings as a spy..." (2000: 93) and this phrasing is apt given the content of *Secret People* also being concerned with the sacrifices and

suffering women endured in that era, but this also brought to the fore several stronger female characterisations to British film.

The unpolished Spy Film

Like the example above, at its heart, *Secret People* is a spy film, although one that sits uncomfortably in a period before the sub-genre had really matured into what we would recognise today. Given the focus on British film, the obvious reference here would be the James Bond films, however many of the genre tropes and iconographical signifiers are missing, most notably the idea of spies as hero figures, glamorous locations, and the elaborate set-pieces. Instead, *Secret People* presents us with a very grounded gritty depiction of manipulation and the exploitation of innocent people, with meetings mostly taking place in dirty backroom storage spaces, rather than around the Casino poker tables of Monte Carlo.

Spicer (2003: 185-186) discusses the James Bond character, in several of his incarnations, as a product of his time, and that can be said of spy films in general. *Dr. No* (Terrance Young, 1962) had an air of the suave and sophisticated, *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* (Martin Ritt, 1965), like many adaptations of John Le Carre's books, had a grittier noir feel, and *The Ipcress File* (Sidney J. Furie, 1965) embodied both of these elements while somehow introducing sci-fi themes and embraced more art-house techniques which were becoming more popular in the 1960s. In essence these spy films are designed to define spies as being aspirational characters, their deceit and roguish qualities are deemed as necessary evils and applauded, and are clearly aimed at being entertaining depictions of espionage, rather than aiming for social realism. Spicer specifically outlines the way in which Bond films engage directly with changing trends and have morphed to accommodate the changes in audiences' tastes, and therefore are not necessarily guided by the realities of the changing political landscape or the changes in espionage tactics. However, in the 1940s, and early 1950s, the topic of espionage on screen was still treated with a certain level of seriousness, fear and suspicion, which is not unsurprising during the war and first few years of the post-war period. Examples of this range from several studios: Gainsborough's *Cottage to Let* (Anthony Asquith, 1941) melds their usual melodramatic romantic content with the overarching plot of a German sleeper spy infiltrating a research facility; conversely RKO's *Yellow Canary* (Herbert Wilcox, 1943)

focuses on a British double-agent, who feigns her nazi sympathies, and travels to Canada to infiltrate and, ultimately foil, a terror threat. Both of these films involve the British overcoming their wartime enemy, and conform to the rather patriotic standpoint of most of the British war movies of the period. As Tony Shaw discusses "...American and British movies predominantly used the subject of wartime resistance as a vehicle for celebratory action and daring-do" (2001: 46-47) and can be considered, as with many war films of this period, as operating as low level propaganda aimed at the British masses.

Thorold Dickinson did produce an earlier film within this category years earlier, *Next of Kin* (Thorold Dickinson, 1942). As opposed to *Secret People* sensibilities, and unlike the above films which simple leant into war film tropes, *Next of Kin* was produced primarily as a propaganda film by Ealing in conjunction with the War Office (Dickinson, 2008: 65). As discussed in earlier chapters, this was not a rare case as this was fairly common practice in the 1940s and mainly resulted in well meaning, but ultimately polemic films. Dickinson reads his contribution to this sub-set of espionage films differently:

[*Next of Kin*] is a film with purpose. It is not propaganda, in the current sense of the word, for that word has come to have a debased meaning; it now means persuasion by means of revealing much but not all of the truth. This film quite uncompromisingly reveals every point for and against its purpose. (Dickinson, 2008: 67)

Dickinson's protestations at his film being unfairly lumbered with the almost universally perceived pejorative term of 'Propaganda film' are understandable, given that the film's plot is a cautionary tale, that just happens to align with a message that the government where happy to get behind. *Next of Kin*'s plot relates to Nazi spies listening in on everyday conversations, in this case a housewife discussing her son's activities in the war. This was clearly an interesting film for the War Office to be involved in, as it tapped into an issue with making everyday working-class people that bit more vigilant about factors that were not a concern in the pre-war years. The film is quite brutal in its depiction of the underbelly of espionage in wartime, and it does not fully conform to the standard hero narrative you would expect, as several innocent

people die due to their involvement in the resistance. This slightly puts it in opposition to Tony Shaw's description of the standard fare in this period and sets it apart as a more unique case. However, ultimately, the impact of propaganda in this period was two-fold: firstly to inform the populace of real-world threats; but the by-product of this information was that it also, sometime directly or indirectly, spread fear and paranoia. The final scene of *Next of Kin* conforms to this paradigm, as it depicts one of the surviving German agents again listening in on a few people carelessly discussing matters while he takes notes, with the audience leaving the film in a state of paranoia. It would be difficult to entirely disagree with Dickinson's above statement, as he does show both sides of the story, and he does not wrap things up neatly in hero narratives, and this is clearly the idealistic approach he also brought forward into his development of *Secret People*. Idealistic, in the respect of trying to complicate discussion in war films that are often reduced to simplistic binary narratives of good against evil. As an example, propaganda manifests itself in a strangely dichotomous, and almost unfathomably complex, way in *Secret People*. Maria is essentially caught between the extreme right-wing of the Fascist dictator, Galbern, and the extreme left-wing of the resistance army. Both parties appear to be morally corrupt and are involved in both killing and threatening people throughout the film's narrative. Maria sides with the resistance to kill Galbern, seemingly as retribution for her father's death, and essentially acts in a way no better than the fascists she is working against.

Looking at the film as a debate about national fears, rather than a straightforward narrative, might be an interesting way to describe and justify the film's wildly uneven tone. Maria's anger towards Galbern for being indirectly responsible for her father's death is used to manipulate her into committing a similarly violent act against another human. In a sense, it can be argued that Thorold Dickinson is actually debating propaganda and manipulation techniques within the film text. After the bomb kills an innocent person, Maria is called to a meeting with the 'Committee' to discuss the "efficient" work she had done by delivering the bomb to the party. Maria describes the plan as "wicked", to which the nameless man responds "Do you mean unlawful...I must point out the people like Galbern are outside the law, they acknowledge no limits on their powers". In essence, the fear of unlawfulness, is countered by unlawfulness. When Maria wants to walk away, they threaten her life. In relation to the doubling motif, this seems like poignant point that is being put forward by Dickinson, which is simply

that people inhabit both violence and peace in wartime, but out of wartime the violence is not government sanctioned. On this theme, there is a very subtle reference to Mahatma Gandhi at the start of the film, wherein Maria is sifting through a box of her deceased father's possessions and says "he hated violence and destruction" while Gandhi's book is seen at the bottom of the box (Fig. 41). Ultimately, if propaganda is present in *Secret People*, it appears to be pointing towards the utopian notion that violence should be left behind in peace time. Within the film, violence begets violence, and all of the espionage and the resistance fighters' efforts to take revenge ultimately are responsible for Maria's death.



Figure 43: The Gandhi book found in her father's possessions

Thorold Dickinson's approach to spies and espionage paints them as quite devious characters on the edge of society. Ronnie D. Lipschutz (2001: 61-63) discusses this more realist approach to spies in British film and literature, specifically relating it to John Le Carre's work, and points out that this approach "...deliberately does not glorify the business or the 'good guys'" instead they show "...how desolate and debilitating an activity espionage can be". The moral position of the spy is relatively neutral in that there is an "...absence of moral clarity... [and] the notion of good hardly has meaning" (Lipschutz, 2001: 63). Obviously, *Secret People* pre-dates John Le Carre's novels in the 1960s, but similarly homes in on the paranoia that was beginning to surface in the 1950s. In this respect, Thorold Dickinson is trying to make a very different spy film than the ones that would become popularised in the 1960s. *Secret People* is the antithesis of glamorous, it is grim and dark – the people in the secret meetings are

cruel and unseen, hidden in the darkness, and ultimately not punished like a Bond villain would be. The idea of good and evil is also complex and ambiguous within the film, as is evidenced by the real-life protests that surrounded it, as there are several instances of 'good people', or maybe 'ordinary people', to be more accurate, committing horrendous crimes in the name of the 'greater good'. The simplistic binaries, action sequences and glamorous locations that we expect from a spy film are simply not the focus of *Secret People*, and that partially relates to the time of production being shadowed by the Cold War and wider cultural identity issues in Britain.

Exploring the failings of the past

The political uncertainty of the cold war in the 1950s starts to cast a strange shadow over the events that take place between 1930-1937 in *Secret People*, as if the film itself is trying to solve the problems of the past. Returning to Robert Murphy's point of "the British practice of using the past to explore the present" (1992: 21), which I discussed in relation to *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp*'s flashback structure, we again have a film that is obsessed with trying to explore the past through a semi-fictional reconstruction of a traumatic period of history. Given that the dictator Galbern is clearly based on Mussolini or Hitler, as Tony Shaw alluded to in the earlier quote (2001: 47), it seems strange that a fictional narrative would use such a thinly veiled caricature (or double) of a real-life tyrant as the villain of the story without itself actually wanting to comment on, and ignite a debate about, the travesties that they perpetrated across Europe. Maria, as the tragic figure in the centre of this narrative, can also be seen as the debate brought to life. At the start of the film, she is passive like Britain during the rise of these powers in Europe. The film posits a similar question to the oft used:- if you could go back in time, would you kill Hitler? An easy question as long as the circumstances of how this is achieved are not discussed. *Secret People* attempts to break down the consequences of this violent mind-set and how it can infect a nation. The middle section of the film, after Maria has accidentally killed the waitress with the bomb, is particularly poignant as she falls into deep depression and is emotionally distraught due to her actions. Louis, again, makes a strange appearance directly after the bomb scene, looming over Maria like the proverbial devil on her shoulder who has forced her into an evil deed (Fig. 44) and she continues to physically deteriorate throughout these sequences (Fig. 45). Again, there is a pacifist message from Thorold

Dickinson in this narrative arc, as the waitress represents the innocent lives lost in the crossfire war, and Maria physically embodies the trauma of a nation mourning those losses.



Figure 45: Maria directly after the bomb scene, with Louis looming over her shoulder



Figure 44: Maria falls deeper into depression

After the guilt-ridden deterioration, she does the honourable thing and confesses, helps Scotland Yard and “dies” in the explosion in the house. After this point she is reborn in her new persona Lena Collins. From a metaphorical perspective, the rebirth of Maria can be seen as the rebirth of Europe after World War II, the atrocities of the film are acknowledged and learnt from, and she can now continue in her new skin. Again, the specific choice of Lena, Greek but common in the eastern bloc, and Collins, British in origin, appear to be hinting at her character being representative of European countries’ cooperation in the rebuilding of society in the post-war WWII period.



Figure 46: Maria on the hospital bed (left) and reborn as Lena Collins (right)

Ultimately, it is difficult not to look upon *Secret People* as a strange enigma in British film history. It simultaneously appears to be tackling so many competing and complex issues that it appears to get lost in its own politics. Arguably hampered by its own

opaque messages, the mysterious re-edit may also have destroyed the film's meaning, or maybe it was a film slightly ahead of its time. However, on re-examination, the film's message should not be read as entirely black and white, it is an exploration of the past and it intentionally lays bare the complications of Europe's recent past to open up old wounds, not to explain or give answers to these complex issues.

Despite Thorold Dickinson's good intentions, he similarly can be accused of falling into the trap of drawing binary oppositions between Britain and the rest of Europe. Although her country of origin is never stated, it is heavily implied that Maria has fled Italy. The Galbern/Mussolini link also places her origin in 1930 Mussolini controlled Italy. Maria's willingness to defect to the terrorist group and enact some sort of revenge on Galbern implies that her loyalties lie outside the British Isles. In effect, the message the film purports is that despite someone gaining British citizenship, they are still likely to be turned into a foreign agent or terrorist. It can also be argued that this trope is also gendered in this period and mainly attached to vulnerable women who were seen as likely to be the weak link. Given the debates in the last two chapters regarding both Louis in *Kind Hearts and Coronets* and Johnny in *Pool of London*, it is difficult to not look at *Secret People* as a film that, if read in a certain light, could also be interpreted as sadly feeding into the already prevalent xenophobic tendencies in the post-war period. The end of the film, in which Maria dies, feels like a cautionary tale about the risks of the general public engaging in terrorism, and therefore the more complex issues around the manipulation of an innocent person are lost in a more simplistic narrative beat. In this regard, despite Dickinson's protestations, the film actually fits quite neatly into the "Efforts made by British governments between 1945 and 1965 to integrate the cinema within their anti-communist and anti-Soviet propaganda campaigns..." (Shaw 2001: 3).

The doubling motif is particularly interesting in this film, and sadly something that has been widely ignored by scholars up until this point. The complexities of Maria's multiple personas, which explore the nature of British diasporas and emigres from Europe, are interesting in and of themselves, but also appear to link to some of the examples in previous chapters: Deborah Kerr's three woman in *Blimp* and their representation of British women across time in the flashbacks; and the D'Ascoyne's multiple characters representing different versions of wealth, power and class. The real-life double in the

form of the dictator General Galbern acting as a stand-in for Mussolini/Hitler gives the film a strangely political angle, especially given that the British appear to tolerate his war crimes and openly shake his hand in the Paris Exposition scene, and despite the mixed messages that the film ultimately lands-on, this is an interesting exploration of the failings of the past and a lesson about the culpability of passiveness in the face of violent regimes.

Chapter 5 – The Sleeping Tiger

The Sleeping Tiger (Joseph Losey, 1954) is a low budget British psychological thriller starring Dirk Bogarde. The film was released in the same year as Bogarde's breakthrough role in the similarly low-budget film *Doctor in the House* (Ralph Thomas, 1954) and therefore pre-dates his success as a major mainstream leading man throughout the rest 1950s. *The Sleeping Tiger* was not a particularly successful project from a financial perspective (De Rahm, 1991: 98), but is now most notably known as the launch pad for Joseph Losey's burgeoning career as a film director in Britain, after his move from Hollywood, and the start of a collaborative relationship between himself and Bogarde that would result in them working together on 4 more films in the 1960s.

The film focuses on the story of Frank Clemmons (Dirk Bogarde), a young man who is partaking in petty theft and robberies. After a failed attempt to rob Dr. Clive Esmond (Alexander Knox) at gunpoint, he is invited to live in Clive's house to undertake curative psychotherapy for a 6-month period. In essence, he reluctantly becomes a guineapig in order to avoid prison. Clive's wife, Glenda (Alexis Smith), is initially suspicious of Frank but the two bond in a mutually destructive love affair. After Clive gains Frank's trust, he steers him away from his criminal behaviour and seemingly "cures" him. When it is time for Frank to leave, Glenda becomes enraged and attempts to frame Frank by feigning physical injuries, then attempts to kill him in a car accident. Glenda dies in the accident, but Frank survives.

This chapter will specifically explore several key themes that run throughout the film, most notably class, crime, youth delinquency and rehabilitation. However, the role of psychotherapy as a "solution" to the problem is also an interesting topic to discuss in relation to post-war issues, especially given the film's discussions regarding nature versus nurture. The post-war trauma element of the film is important within this chapter, not in the sense that it is an overtly prominent narrative device, but more in the sense that the film depicts two generations that are struggling with the post-war way of life. The changes in society seemingly pulling the older and younger generations apart, which obviously subtly feeds into the overall doubling theme. Specifically in relation to the doubling motif, the film's focus on the redemption arc of

Frank from criminal to upstanding citizen is interesting, as it begins to posit the notion that this generational gap can be resolved by creating a better version of the younger generation; by transforming them into 'better' versions of themselves. This is also accompanied by a complex discussion regarding the gulf between intellectualism and petty crime; they are not simply determined by class structures or dichotomously simplified as polar opposites, like in many films of this era, instead the complexities of the Frank's circumstances add to the debate about young delinquents in 1950s Britain.

Transatlantic connections and Blacklisting

The film's production relied heavily on the talents of several Americans who were blacklisted by the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) during the communist witch-hunt led by J Edgar Hoover and Joseph McCarthy in the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s. In that specific period, the HUAC was primarily aimed at rooting out left-leaning communist sympathisers and Hollywood was targeted due to its history of embracing of émigré intellectuals and artists from Europe, not just in the post-war era.

In 1951, Joseph Losey was on the cusp of a career changing opportunity which would have catapulted him into the Hollywood elite. Having recently had a major hit with *The Prowler* (Joseph Losey, 1951) he was lined up to sign a three picture deal with Stanley Kramer, wearing his producer hat rather than his normal directing one, which would have seen Losey direct both *High Noon* (Fred Zinnemann, 1952) and *The Wild One* (Laslo Benedek, 1953), but sadly this never transpired due to the HUAC investigations (Gardiner, 2004: 9-10). *The Big Night* (Joseph Losey, 1951) would be his last film in Hollywood before being self-exiled to Europe, by ignoring their subpoena and refusing to stand before the HUAC committee (De Rahm, 1991: 93). He would make a single film in Italy, *Imbarco a Mezzanotte* (Joseph Losey, 1952) released as *Stranger on the Prowl* in America, before moving to Britain where he spent the majority of his career. Losey directed *The Sleeping Tiger*, but it was credited to producer Victor Hanbury who received the credit of Producer and Director in the opening credits. The DVD print that I used for this analysis still credits Hanbury and has not been altered. Similarly, the American scriptwriter Carl Foreman was also involved in the three picture deal with Stanley Kramer but was blacklisted around the time of finishing the work on the screenplay for *High Noon*. He worked under the pseudonym of Derek Frye on *The*

Sleeping Tiger, and would continue to work on under this name until the early 1960s. Ironically, he won the oscar in 1957 for *Bridge on the River Kwai* (David Lean 1957), but was uncredited and was not given the award until the 1980s. After a difficult few years, Foreman was instrumental in bringing Losey onto *The Sleeping Tiger* production with him, and to some extent they were seen as a bargain for the low budget production, as the pair were seen as “experienced...[but] inexpensive because of the blacklisting” (De Rahm, 1991: 96). Although *The Sleeping Tiger* was an opportunity for Losey to regain his footing in the industry, it would be forgivable for him to turn in a bland b-movie to show his worth as a director, especially given the modest budget and scale. However, the film still employs many of the traits that would make Losey such an interesting voice in British cinema in the late 50s and into the 60s, and appears to be tinged with themes of class and authoritarianism. His inauspicious treatment in America, during the HUAC communist witch-hunts, seemingly galvanised his will to engage in discourse on screen regarding the limits of power and control, and this would become a key theme throughout his work, culminating in what many would consider his greatest work *The Servant* (Joseph Losey, 1963).

Raymond Durgnat (2011: 293-308) acknowledges the differences between American and British cinematic ideologies, specifically the former’s leaning towards “...competition and conflict...”, while British films are often guided by “...responsibility, co-operation and compromise”. While there are cynical outlier films like, *Kind Hearts and Coronets*, this is largely true of the post-war period leading up to *The Sleeping Tiger*. However, it can be argued that Losey shifted some of these ideological boundaries. Durgnat specifically discusses Losey’s contribution to British cinema in relation to his earlier films:

But the richest application of American patterns to British themes is made by Joseph Losey. His American energy, with a bedrock of puritanism re-energised, rather than diluted, by a sophisticated acuity, takes in psychoanalytical factors, social pressures, and a psychology as aware as Satre’s of voluntary self deception. His earlier British features begin an awkward, yet explosive, and sometimes Marcusean, interrogation of man in society (Durgnat, 2011: 293)

The Marcusian element that Durgnat refers to is present in the *The Sleeping Tiger* via its exploration of class dynamics, questioning of the penal system and the rehabilitation of criminals. However, the “American patterns” refer more to the stylistic and narrative voice within the film, which stems more from the frustrations of the working class and the younger generation, rather than being focused on the more rigid police procedural elements of the film’s wider societal issues. This style of filmmaking which incorporates British cinema’s traditions of tackling social issues mixed with American stylistic genre element became the blueprint for a sub-genre of British films focusing on delinquents and troubled young men in the 1950s.

The Delinquent Film

The Sleeping Tiger can be read as a precursor to the popular trend of British filmmakers tackling harder-hitting societal topics in this era. There was a fine balancing act with these films, as they conformed largely to a “commercial cinematic form” (Hill, 1986:67), rather leaning into the Avant Garde, and were expected to be profitable and accessible to a large audience despite their socio-political focus. John Hill loosely defines this cycle of films as “The Social Problem Film” (1986: 67-126) linking the films through their engagement with difficult topics such as “...juvenile delinquency, prostitution, homosexuality and race...”. The main shift in the mid-1950s was the move away from satirical treatments of these issues, especially crime, and instead this was replaced with more serious films which engaged with topical concerns. This was partially discussed in relation to *Pool of London*, in an earlier chapter, due to its presentation of several issues regarding race. However, the social problem films’ later incarnations developed into not only including these difficult topics but also attempted to solve these issues through their fictional narratives. The rise of these new challenges in society also started to shift the focus away from the profoundly common theme of class structures into more complex territories being experienced by the new generation.

If it was classes that were presumed to be disappearing there can be little doubt that it was ‘youth’, by contrast who were making an appearance ...it seemed that the 1950s was not only the ‘age of affluence’ but also the ‘age of youth’. (Hill, 1986: 10)

Youth orientated films did come in many different forms, some more comedic and light-hearted, and eventually became more profitable vehicles culminating in the boom of commercially motivated plucky pop-star films in the early 1960s, such as the Cliff Richard vehicles *The Young Ones* (Sidney J. Furie, 1961) and *Summer Holiday* (Peter Yates, 1963). While these films featured an unruly gang of young people, their aim was often mild rebellion against authority, rather than representing anything close to serious criminal working-class gang culture or juvenile delinquency.

Early examples of 'Delinquent' films typically steered away from gangs of 'youths' and instead centred on individual young men who had seemingly lost their place in society and needed saving. Phillip Gillet highlights *Cosh Boy* (Lewis Gilbert, 1953) as a particularly stark example of this topic on film stating that "...it marks a post-war tragedy – the juvenile delinquent" and that this film is "presented in the hope that it will contribute towards the stamping out this social evil" (2003:120). Along with *The Sleeping Tiger*, later examples this sub-genre include *Violent Playground* (Basil Deardon, 1958), but the overall message remains the same: violent young people need to be corrected by the older generation. These films tended to "...reinforce dominant concerns about social development...official reports and surveys revealed the state's anxious and confused response to social change." (Street, 2009: 91). These films can therefore be seen as an indicator of the growing gap between the generations, and also often highlight the generational gap and changing value structure of younger people, but also a "...criticism of the social factors which bring it about" (Durnat, 2011: 294)

Class issues or just bad behaviour?

The Sleeping Tiger is an early example of this trend of 'Delinquent' films and focuses heavily on the fears and concerns of older generations of British society. While it would be easy to define Frank as an archetypal dangerous youth, one that fits neatly into the genre conventions of the "delinquent" cycle of British films, that really is not the case. The genre relies heavily on the concept of the working-class youth rebelling, often through violent criminal acts, against authority figures. Whether these be their parents, teachers or the police. Although there was a spike in these films in the 1950s, the concerns raised are universal in the majority of post-war cinema, and relate to the poverty-stricken criminals stealing from the rich. This theme was also partially

illustrated in the heist narrative in *Pool of London*. As with that film, there is often a class divide that is attached to the overall characterisation of youth crime in the films. In contrast, Frank comes from a relatively good background, he's well educated, and his father is a military man. This moves the "delinquent" film into a more complicated territory, as it does not rely solely on the premise of the poor trying to steal from the rich, or the working class rebelling against the middle class. In effect, Frank is one of their own rebelling from within the system. This creates a unique, and somewhat jarring experience, that almost that skews the relationship between class structures throughout the bulk of the narrative. While class is clearly a very important theme in British cinema, the relation between classes often creates the juxtaposition within of the narrative, instead *The Sleeping Tiger* appears to be reacting to the reality of that fact that "...affluence was dismantling old class barriers, 'embourgeoisifying' (sic) the old working class with rises in living standards and an accompanying conversion to 'consensual' middle class values" (Gillett, 2003: 7). In essence, the film is about the 1950s dilemma of the classes and generations colliding in the centre and trying to find a middle ground.

The microcosm of this issue is created by the unlikely, or at least convoluted, scenario of the criminal Frank being forced to live under the same roof as the conventional married couple, Clive and Glenda. Ultimately, Clive's intentions as a psychotherapist are to cure Frank's behaviour rather than let him fall into the penal system. There are claims to altruism, but obviously he also finds him interesting as a test subject. He states in an early scene with Glenda, "It's one thing to practice psychology on a prison ward, it's something else again to have your patient in ideal circumstances", but also his professional fascination bleeds into the class debate "Oddly enough, he's no slum product. Army family, good school". The full discussion implies Clive's fascination stems more from the disbelief that a well-schooled boy could fall into crime, a form of backwards social mobility, as it does any interest in a study of criminal activity. Frank was on track to become a member of the consensual-middle-class, and this can be restored with the help of a good doctor. In fact, many of the references to his behaviour from Glenda relate more to his "rudeness", "bad manners" and lack of gentlemanly conduct, rather than his criminal past. Glenda's preoccupation here links more to her own inability to accept a shift in the younger generation's values, especially regarding the old adage of 'respecting your elders'. The cure for Frank

appears to relate to Clive's ambition to make him conform to traditional values held by the older generation, not to make him a functional youth in the 1950s, but instead to assimilate him into the old order. Clive, in effect, wants Frank to be reborn in his own image.

Frank's initial response is not gratitude, but one of resignation stating that he's "not a guest, I'm a prisoner", a fact that would have also been true if he was handed over to the police, but instead he is forced into being the test subject. Although there is a snide, smug air to Frank's demeanour he mostly plays the part of dutiful surrogate son in the early sections of the film while within the house while in the company of Clive and Glenda. His actions become swiftly more cruel and violent when out of view of Clive and Glenda, playing the role of rebellious child while his surrogate parents are away. The first moment of violence comes directly after Frank has been scolded by Glenda regarding his manners (Fig. 47), she is technically one of his captures so is spared his wrath, instead he turns his attention to the young house maid Sally. He isolates her in a room and attempts to isolate and corner her, but she swiftly brushes off his advances and makes it clear that she's quitting as "the likes of you should certainly wait on themselves". Frank's reaction is to kick Sally to the ground, smashing glasses and teacups all over the floor, then leans over her and to threaten her again "I don't think you'll be leaving at all, because I wouldn't like that. Now clear up that mess" (Fig. 48).



Figure 47: Glenda scolding Frank



Figure 48: Frank Looming over Sally the housemaid

What is interesting in this sequence is Frank's attitude towards both women, and how class and stature appear to function in this most dysfunctional of households. Frank refers to himself as a "prisoner" to Glenda, but in the altercation with Sally the working-class housemaid he demands to be brought a coffee immediately because he is a

“guest”. Frank’s sense of privilege, at this point mainly as a prized test subject rather than his social standing, give him the bravado to bully and abuse the people he sees as beneath him. This is literally present in the staging of the scene (Fig. 48) as he looms over Sally in a position of power. As an objective audience, we are aware that Frank is a hair’s breadth away from being turned over to the police, but Sally still succumbs to the illusion of old class boundaries and Frank still places himself in a place of authority over someone he deems less educated than himself. Gillett’s discussions around the breaking down of class barriers are partially on show here via Sally, as she openly discusses her concerns about Frank earlier in the film with her boss, without fear of reprimand, a dialogue that feels more modern and progressive than the standard housemaid on screen. However, in the true test of the moment, she still succumbs to old class structures – despite the fact she is a hard working employed woman, while he is a criminal and thief on faux house arrest. Losey actively paints Frank against type, by making him intelligent, well-educated and cunning, rather than a wild rebellious working-class boy. While there are obviously grey areas in this dichotomy, the films in this genre tended to lean towards the latter characterisation. Within these early 1950s films “...minor crime is a symbol of class and inter-generational conflict” (Gillett, 2003: 120), and as such Losey shifts the genre away from the film being specifically related to the lower-classes and instead focuses heavily on the inter-generational conflicts. As Durnat states, Losey’s “...approach is altogether at odds with the British critical fashion of the mid-fifties...” (2011: 294), more melodramatic and emotional, relying heavily on the complex mirroring of Frank and Clive, whom are similarly educated men but from different generations, each one representing their respective generation’s values and fears. In essence, in them we see the old Britain versus new Britain, the past and the potential future.

Generational fears and image of the Rebellious Youth

Crime, infidelity and violence are at the forefront of the film’s narrative, all selfish elements creeping into society that jar with the more socialist community spirit of the immediate post-war period. This sense of cosy community spirit, the plucky post-war brits working together to achieve a worthwhile goal, has been discussed in several chapters already and was pervasive across a large majority of popular British cinema in the late 1940s and, to a lesser extent, into early 1950s. However, as outlined in the previous two chapters, the mood in the 1950s was beginning to shift to darker

treatment of topics, and this was also present in the visual style employed to depict these stories. The troubled youth, under the more hyperbolic directorial eye of Joseph Losey, is transformed into the veritable monster within *The Sleeping Tiger*. While the art direction is still grounded in the recognisable, with a sense of the verisimilitude that was attached to the classical realist modes, the lighting, blocking and cinematography leans further into the expressionist modes than any of the films cover in the previous chapters. Although the film hinges heavily on dialogue and social interactions, the film also relies on a visual style that places young people as the monsters in society. A simple comparison between the music venues from *Pool of London* and *The Sleeping Tiger* illustrates this shift in the way the younger generation were being depicted on film. Within the dance hall sequences in *Pool of London* there is still a sense of innocence, happy faces and gingham tablecloths (Fig. 49), but *The Sleeping Tiger*'s Metro club is packed full of images of debauchery and excess such as the man leering at the passed out women in the screenshot below (Fig. 50).



Figure 49: The dance hall sequence in *Pool of London*



Figure 50: The Metro club from *The Sleeping Tiger*

The club is featured several times throughout the film, and always depicted as a seedy underbelly of modern youths. Frank and Glenda plan to visit the club in the early stages of their burgeoning affair, and Frank comments on the clientele ‘the men have no manners and the women are...” to which Glenda responds “cheap blondes, in cheap dresses?”, Frank continues “No, very vogue magazine too, they don’t happen to have so much money”. Glenda then apologises with a witty remark “I’m sorry, expensive dress, cheap remark”. The scene depicts the prejudice of Glenda, as the older women, instantly making quips about the younger generation of women who would visit this type of venue. When Frank calls her bluff and agrees to take her to the club he asks her to “go upstairs and put on something...a little cheaper”, she is giddy as she is going to be allowed to be a tourist, slumming it in the gutter of Soho, but after a short time in the venue is clearly repulsed by the younger generation and flees the club. Given the overall theme of doubling and transformations, Glenda’s transformation from formal evening dress to polo-neck jumper is interesting as she attempts to flit between the life of her husband’s and her lover’s generations in a purely visual manner (Fig 51 & 52). Whether this is defined as trying to “pass” or being a “tourist”, or any other euphemism that comes to mind, is debatable, but in reality it is simply her attempt at trying to hide in plain sight in a place she does not belong. Relating this to Gillet’s point regarding the slow dismantling of class barriers in the 1950s (2003: 7), it seems appropriate that Glenda represents this social shift on screen attempting, although unsuccessfully, to bridge the gap between these two generations. Through this social experiment, one thing that is clear, is that her attitudes and beliefs, and by proxy the attitudes of her generation, do not chime with that of the younger generation.



Figure 51: Glenda in her finest evening dress



Figure 52: Glenda uncomfortable at the Metro club

More than anybody, this visual theme follows Frank throughout the film, whether this be in dramatic, violent sequences or in fairly innocuous situations, he is always depicted in a threatening manner, as a lurking monster. He either emerges from the darkness or from an ominous surrounding, often linked visually with nature as in the examples below where he appears seemingly from the undergrowth in the house (Fig. 53) or rolling around in the dirt and leaves with Glenda (Fig. 54). The focus on the visual elements of the film are also present in the opening scene, as Frank attempts to hold up Clive at gun point. The sequence begins ominously using foggy dark streets and expressionistic chiaroscuro lighting to create prison-like bars on the wall to transform London into a scene from a horror film (Fig. 55). The title of 'London...A Winter's Night' seems to also heavily lean into the gothic traditions which, coupled with

the German expressionist visuals, creates a slightly distorted vision of London as a dangerous landscape of dark corners, fog and shadows.



Figure 53: Frank in the "Jungle" section of the house



Figure 54: Frank and Glenda embrace amongst the dirt and leaves



Figure 55: The moment before the mugging



Figure 56: Frank and his accomplice lurking in the shadows

Of course, the depiction of Frank as being animalistic or monstrous may seem like a rather clunky visual metaphor to single him out as being titular 'Sleeping Tiger', or that fact that latent anger is bubbling under the surface waiting to be unleashed. However, I think this would be a rather simplistic reading of the film that clearly is trying to explore generational differences. The 'Sleeping Tiger' in question is not specifically Frank, but the entirety of the younger generation, waiting in the shadows to destroy the older generations' values. To link back to Street's observation (2009: 91), there was a "...confused response to social change" which caused a level of anxiety in the older generation and, like every generation, they fought against this change. The film's narrative is interesting in this context as, rather than entirely condemning the younger

generation, the offers up solutions and hope for the younger generation, almost positing ideas on how to cure the blights facing the young people in the 1950s.

Psychotherapy

Clive choosing to take on Frank as a patient, rather than send him to the police, is the crux of the rhetoric within the film. The debate in British society plays out in the microcosm of the house. Firstly, should Frank be saved despite his crimes? Is the intellectual/medical endeavour of Clive going to help us understand Frank, and therefore find a way to cure him of his criminal ways? Or, the more relevant overarching point, can the younger generation be saved from themselves? A major part of this debate relates to the Clive's liberal viewpoint, that the justice system is clearly failing the British youth, and that the solution comes in the form of understanding, love and respect. The carrot, not the stick.

The film hinges on a conversion. Treatment frees the thug from his unconscious compulsions, i.e. the argument is not to squeamishness about punishment, but to the efficacy of a certain combination of minimum force and remedial action, as against a mindlessly punitive reflex (Durgant, 2011: 295)

Durgant's description of the treatment as a conversion is of particular of interest, as it strongly suggests that Clive's goal as the psychotherapist is to convert Frank into a different person, and as suggested earlier in the chapter, this person would be in the image of himself. The posits the simple idea that Frank's only way of redemption is to learn from, and in effect, become the same as the older generation.

The fact that psychotherapy is the tool for this conversion, a slow intellectual solution rather than a swift punitive one, is not all that shocking and had started to become a feature of films in both the UK and US. *The Seventh Veil* (Compton Bennett, 1945), a British production, featured a troubled pianist who attempts suicide and is hypnotised by a psychiatrist to delve back into memories of her past to uncover the source of her problems. This plays out in slightly surreal flashbacks where Ann Todd plays multiple versions of herself throughout her lifespan, at one point playing a 14-year-old version of herself at the age of 38. Similarly, Hitchcock eighth American made film, *Spellbound*

(Alfred Hitchcock, 1945) also features a psychiatrist hypnotising a patient, in this case it is an amnesia patient accused of murder and trying to unlock his memories. The hypnosis dream sequence was famously designed by Salvador Dali (Fig 57). In both these examples, psychotherapy is treated as a mystical art, and as such is depicted on screen using methods more closely linked to surrealism and fantasy rather than necessarily grounding them in psychoanalytic theory. However, as Caroline Ruddell argues "...it does seem likely that psychoanalytic concepts, generally, are pervasive whether or not the film-makers have actively read theory." (2013: 29), hence the fantastical visual liberties taken in the depiction of these methods on screen.



Figure 57: The Dali dream sequence from *Spellbound* (1945)

The Sleeping Tiger is unapologetically realist in its approach to the psychotherapy in the film, eschewing such elements as dream sequences brought on by hypnosis, and instead focusing on Clive and Frank's discussions. As Kynaston (2015: 611) outlines, Psychiatric treatment and Mental Health, of any sort, were still seen largely regarded as "mumbo jumbo" and was not really taken seriously until the early 1960s. It could easily be argued that some of the fantastical depictions onscreen furthered this negative discourse. In this respect, *The Sleeping Tiger* gives an intellectual weight to

the area of study rather than simply using it as a *deus ex machina* device to creatively 'look into' the inner workings of a character's mind. The sequences in Clive's office are comparatively bland and do not really conform to the clichés of clients lying on a chaise longue, instead they take place with the characters moving around the space or resemble something closer to a GP's appointment (Fig. 58).



Figure 58: Therapy session with Clive looming over Frank

This more realistic approach to psychotherapy gives these sequences a seriousness which allows Losey to explore the generation gap with a more critical eye. There are several elements of Frank's character that do appear to mirror societal change in the 1950s, the exact changes that the older generation fear, and these form the crux of a debate about the rationale for attempting to save Frank from prison. A recurring theme in Clive's discourse is Frank being intelligent and from a military background, implying that not only is his intelligence a factor in his worthiness for the study, but also a person from a military background would understand authority and deference. As already stated, class is not the guiding principle in *The Sleeping Tiger*, intelligence is the factor

that allows Frank the opportunity to be saved and become Clive's Guinea pig. Glenda comments on this stating that criminals are not glamorous "just stupid animals looking for cages", however what sets Frank apart in her mind is his intelligence, "I can respect a rebel if it's intelligent rebellion, but I hate stupidity". The military reference is interesting, especially if we hark back to *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* in chapter one, and revisit the main narrative thread of Clive Candy being duped by his younger subordinates. The film's narrative played out 40 years' worth of the slow erosion of tradition and deference to the old guard, ending with Clive Candy being humiliated and undermined by his young officers. Frank's character can be seen as the epitome of the continuation of that erosion into the 1950s. However, he is also born into a generation without a war to fight, a disenfranchised youth without an outlet or any taught discipline, a theme that develops into a key British cinematic in the late 1950s with the British New Wave cycle of films.

Towards the end of the film, as Frank begins to open up about the abuse from his father, it becomes apparent that the issues around generational divide that Losey is presenting are not being exclusively laid at the feet of the younger generation. The angry and strict military upbringing has caused the resentment in Frank, who says he hated his father for making his mother leave and being "...a cheat...Mean, petty and cruel". His violent actions are attributed to his father's abuse. This theme of linking youth violence in the post-war era to military influences, is also referenced by Durnat in relation to Losey's *The Damned* (Joseph Losey, 1962) in which Oliver Reed's biker gang (Fig.59) sport navel hats while he "...sports a Guard's broly and accent, asserting, not only the contrast, but the continuity, of militarism and hooliganism." (Durnat, 2011: 307). This link with military iconography can later be seen in *A Clockwork Orange* (Stanley Kubrick, 1971), again linking military behaviour and dress with youth gangs and crime. Clive's therapy ultimately focuses on the concept that Frank's rebellion against his father is the source of his violent and criminal behaviour, in essence "Opposition leads to resemblance" (Durnat, 2011: 307), as such the more Frank rebels the more he becomes like his father "mean, petty and cruel". As British cinema develops from the wartime/immediate post-war period into the mid-1950s and beyond into the 1960s, it is interesting to see the trauma of the war being passed from one generation to the next. With this, we also start to see the trend of associating the military with violence and gang culture, rather than with honour, heroism and

patriotism. The heroes of the past slowly start to become the villains, and are looked upon through the lens of colonialism or wartime atrocities, while the young men and women who were involved in the conflicts carry their scars on to the next generation.



Figure 59: Oliver Reed leading the 'king's gang' in *The Damned* (Losey, 1962)

Daddy Issues and the Oedipal complex

In a film that relies on psychotherapy as a focal point, it is not all that surprising that the crux of Frank's issues are related to his military father. The fact that the film fashions Clive as a surrogate father and savior for the troubled Frank is also very apt, although objectively the surrounding are equally fraught with family tensions. Freudian father/mother issues are littered throughout the film and play an important part of the metaphysical debates that Losey plants in the body of the film. The interplay between Frank's proxy parents, Clive and Glenda, creates a battleground of complex intellectual and sexual awakenings in Frank. It is difficult at times to fully understand if the household is having a positive impact on Frank, or whether he has simply been let off the leash in a dysfunctional adult playground with an obsessed father figure and clearly frustrated mother figure. Colin Gardiner splits their influence into two distinct categories, specifically looking at the therapy as one element, while Glenda attends to socialising Frank back into normal society:

These threads also happen to mirror Frank's two forms of therapy, which Losey deliberately intercuts through dialectical montage: the verbal cure,

represented by Clive's psychoanalytic sessions, and the somatic, libidinal cure, in the form of the riding lessons (and ultimately sex) with Glenda. (Gardiner, 2004: 22)

The method of Clive's treatment is clinical in nature, and is treated within the film with a level of lofty earnestness that belies the simplicity of the content on display. In essence, it boils down to the clichéd "tell me about your father", "why did your mother leave you", "tell me about your step-mother", etc. This is a slightly harsh criticism of a 90 minute film, but even "...Losey himself admitted that the explicit psychoanalytical explanations, on which the story hung its own improbabilities, were a failure" (Caute, 1994: 122), however the undertones of these sequences are of particular importance in relation to the continuing thread of conversion as an important theme within the film. The crux of the doubling motif within *The Sleeping Tiger* relates specifically to the duality between Clive and Frank. Their therapy sessions, however simplistic they may seem when applied to the real world of psychotherapy, are specifically targeted at highlighting that they are in fact mirror image of each other. Often framed as shadows of each other, both facing towards the camera (Fig. 60), as if one character is the consciousness of the other speaking on their behalf. While the film never fully delves into this level of fantasy, the film's mise-en-scene constantly hints at mirroring and reflections throughout, especially in relation to Frank, Clive and Glenda (Fig. 61). This is clearly used a visual metaphor for duality, split personalities and the fragmentation of their personalities. This is a visual trait that is also discussed in relation to Losey's later films, specifically *The Servant* (Joseph Losey, 1963), in which the protagonist is often seen observing other characters via reflections, in effect trapping them by capturing them in a frame (Gardiner, 2004: 144)



Figure 60: Clive (left) and Frank (Right) in a therapy session



Figure 61: The use of mirrors in several scenes

Ultimately, Clive sees Frank as the younger incarnation of himself, the younger mirror image, but one that has lost his way. Clive, in a particularly philosophical moment within the film, laments “that in you, in me, in the dark forest of every human personality, there’s a tiger, a sleeping tiger”, implying that Frank is a manifestation of his own troubles and hidden desires. The start of the film heavily links to this notion as well. The appearance of Frank in the dark and shadowy streets attempting to mug Clive, only to be brought in from the cold and saved by Clive, the monster is brought from the outside into the safety of the house, only to infest it and attempt to take over. The home in the context of the film could easily be seen on a more literal level as the middle-class safe dwelling that it is rendered as. However, figuratively, we can also easily lean into the psychoanalytic themes of the film and read the home Clive’s own interior psyche, and the conflict between Clive and his younger, darker double. Throughout the course of the film, there is a back-and-forth as Frank begins to take over Clive’s role in the house, stealing his wife and pre-empting the younger generation’s values swallowing up society. Despite this scare, Clive ultimately “cures” Frank and turns him into a version of himself, a respectable and stable adult. The older generation has won, and the evil double becomes assimilated into a clone of Clive.

The doubling motif is also particularly prominent in the love triangle involving Glenda, stuck between her husband, Clive, and her lover, Frank. At first glance, there is an obvious oedipal reference in the idea of the surrogate son falling in love with his mother. This is compounded by Frank’s real step mother being a recurring topic in the therapy sessions, alluding to “conventional oedipal conflicts with his father and step mother” (Gardiner, 2004: 19) which appear to trigger Frank’s anger on multiple occasions. However, when we acknowledge the metaphysical reading of Clive/Frank as a split of the same person, this relationship becomes a more complex exploration of the British generational gap: Frank as the reckless and impulsive id representing the younger generation; and Clive the superego in the role of the more rational and experienced older generation. From Glenda’s perspective, Frank is a fantasy object and ultimately performs all of the functions missing in her drab and stale marriage: Sex, going to late night clubs, horse riding followed by romantic trysts in the woods. All of the exciting elements of young love, while Clive is the older more stable intellectual rock. She is romantically involved with both sides of the double, and in effect, two different generations of the same man. The fantasy element of this is, once

again, also embedded in the visual style and staging of Glenda and Frank's dates, especially when compared to her interactions with Clive. In fact, it could easily be described as taking place in two different worlds – one fantasy and one reality. Frank's world consists of sequences seemingly stemming more from the golden era of Hollywood cinema than from a more grounded reality of mid-50s London. The horse riding sequences resemble romance features in a similar way to Douglas Sirk (Fig. 62), the darkened clubs and midnight brandy drinking mimic noirs/thrillers (Fig. 63 & 64). These are clearly escapism fantasies of Glenda's creation. Clive's world is the opposite, drab, lifeless and sterile (Fig. 65). His world appears to partially be an imprint of his clinical and poised nature, being a psychotherapist who is supposed to be in control and stable. Clive's appearances in the film take place almost entirely within the house, apart from the very beginning and very end sequences, as if his world is entirely based around the mock prison he has created and locked himself in. Frank literally escapes at night to visit the club, while Clive watches him from the porch, watching his double escape and enjoy the nightlife. Durnat describes Frank as the "...patient/prisoner..." (2011: 297) whilst discussing *The Sleeping Tiger*, but this statement is made more poignant by morphing them together as one and the same, Frank being the patient and Clive being the prisoner. Ultimately, these two worlds depict not only the differences in the generations, and the gap that would widen in the late 1950s and into the 1960s, but also the pull between both worlds that both Glenda and Frank encounter in the film. In both cases, they are constantly being drawn towards the sensible and stoic British traditional family life.



Figure 62: Frank and Glenda on a romantic break in-between horse-riding



Figure 63: Frank in the Metro club



Figure 64: Frank and Glenda in a stylised pose



Figure 65: Clive and Glenda in the drab office

The real 'Sleeping Tiger'

As discussed above, throughout the film there is a strong sense of duality between Clive and Frank. Clive's goal is to tame Frank's wild criminal behaviour and force him to become a respectable member of society, to rebuild him in the image of himself. Ultimately, Clive achieves this towards the end of the film, this is not entirely through the use of psychotherapy to uncover the aforementioned parental issues stemming from Frank's upbringing – violent father and mother left him – but simply by gaining Frank's trust by, again, saving him from incarceration for another crime. Clive chooses to lie to the police, breaking the law, to save Frank and, in turn, forming an unbreakable bond of trust between the two men. The men become friends, go fishing together, and in most films we would expect this to be the happy conclusion to the film, ending with the young man being saved from a life of crime by the wonderful doctor. The British people will be saved from the rampant youth by the intelligent older gentleman.

However, this is not the conclusion of the film. This is about 60-minutes into the 90-minute runtime. Instead, now that Clive/Frank have in essence become a single entity, the film turns its attention to the third player in this melodrama. Now that Frank has become good and wholesome, Glenda no longer has a lover, her exciting outlet to satiate what Gardiner refers to as her "...repressed animal instincts..." (2004: 19). Clive has stolen Frank away from Glenda, consuming the dark side of his personality and locking it away. This is embedded in the narrative of the film, as Glenda becomes more and more frustrated that she has lost both her husband and lover, but this can also be seen in some of the imagery later in the film. Firstly, in a scene where Clive calls Glenda from a phone box to inform her that he and Frank are not going to be coming home for dinner within the film. In this scene, Frank appears to be trapped in a frame-within-a-frame formed by the windowpane of the phone box, literally boxed into a tiny cage, if you want to stretch the animalistic metaphor (Fig 66). Within the context of the film, this can be interpreted as Clive locking away the evil rebellious part of his personality, the double, the evil twin, away from his wife. This playful visual style also extends to several other sequences in the film; one particular scene Frank is framed between a large phallic ornament and a large round concave window, hinting at Clive's predicament of being stuck in the middle of the father/mother relationship (Fig 67). While this type of visual metaphor is fairly common in horror, as a way to visually represent the good/evil split between characters, this is not something that is

often apparent in more melodramatic, relatively grounded, British thrillers in the 1950s and can be seen as a particularly bold choice by Losey.



Figure 66: Frank locked in the small frame of the phone box window



Figure 67: Frank between the Phallic object and the suggestive window

Durgnat comments on “The doubleness of delinquent and wife...” (2011: 296) linking Frank and Glenda together as two sides of the same coin, in a very similar way to the

way Frank becomes Clive, Glenda has become Frank. As Frank's violent and self-destructive personality is subdued, we see Glenda starting to take on these qualities, as if they were hidden beneath the surface only to be awoken by Frank's appearance in the house, passed on like a virus. In the final two sequences of the film, Glenda's frustration reaches boiling point and she attempts to kill both men, one with a gun, and one in a car accident. In relation to these events Gardiner comments "the sleeping tiger has finally stirred." (2004: 20) implying, perhaps, that the true revelation was that Glenda had also had issues, been subdued by her husband, and the events earlier in the film had broken her from a comfortable suburban slumber. This sequence again implies that people are constantly playing parts in a larger play, Frank playing the role of rebellious youth, then dutiful son. In another sequence, Glenda takes on the persona of Clive, the confidante, in his role as therapist while she talks to Frank as he poses in a similar position to that of a patient on a therapist's sofa (Fig. 68). All of these examples reiterate the complex theme of identity, and the unstable shifting of one's persona, in an unstable and confusing era where Britain was transitioning from one set of generational values to another.



Figure 68: Visual nod to therapy couch

The final section of the film not only includes instability in relation to the character's identity, but the visuals also become unstable, and there is a major shift in the visual

style and tone of the film. As Glenda's frustrations and anger begin to burst at the seams, this also starts to impact the relatively realistic look of the film. As if her anger has broken through the British restraint that has tempered the film up until this point. There were glimpses of this in the dating sequences with Frank, where her desires appear to be transferred onto screen via Hollywood melodramas, but the final section explodes onto the screen as a horror movie utilising expressionistic lighting, heavy shadows and strange camera angles (Fig. 69). The beginning of the film, "The winter's night..." section also hinted at this horror that is present in the film's setting, hiding underneath the surface and waiting to engulf the characters.



Figure 69: Glenda with the expressionistic style towards the end of the film

What starts as a simple, although contrived, narrative focusing on an attempt by a mentor to save a troubled young person from their criminal ways, unravels into a

complex study of the instability of identity in the 1950s. At the start of the film, the 3 main characters seem to be relatively predictable types: The older intellectual; the bored socialite housewife; the young tearaway. However, *The Sleeping Tiger's* depiction of cosy Britain is peeled away, layer by layer, to uncover a much darker and complex problem facing Britain in the 1950s, and that revolves around the breaking down of the "stiff upper lip" and an explosion of emotions and desire. Durnat touches on Losey's approach stating "...he concentrates on a morality about passion in society...on a structure of passionate actions and reactions." (2011: 294) and in effect opens up a debate about what it means to allow these desires and inner urges take hold. Both Glenda and Frank can be seen as victims within the film, as they are punished for following their passions. Frank's personality is snatched away from him by Clive, he is not so much cured, as he is castrated. A shadow of the man he is at the start of the film. Yes, his criminal ways have been thwarted, but there is nothing left of the man. Similarly, Glenda is freed from her boring suburban existence by Frank's energy and charm, so when this is taken away, she cannot return to the life she once lived and this ultimately leads to her madness and death. In both cases, the experiment of trying to control the problem, in fact, kills both people – one literally, and one metaphorically. If we had to attach meaning to Losey's film it becomes rather defeatist in nature: Controlling the problem is not going to work, it is inevitable.

Dirk Bogarde's Frank is arguably one of the more sympathetic troubled youths in the Delinquent film sub-genre. More complex and misunderstood than some of the more violent counterparts that would come later in the 1950s. In Frank there is a hope that the younger, more free-thinking, and violent generation of rebels can be steered by the older generation to fix their ways and ultimately create a sense of permanence in Britain, rather than the change that the public were so scared of. The film offers a solution to the problem, a way to eradicate the violence in the youth, a way to turn Hyde back into Jekyll. A filmic representation of the "nanny state" in a microcosm, trying to manipulate issues too large and unwieldy to control. Clive's goal, more than anything in the film, is probably the biggest fantasy within the film and offers up a level of wish-fulfilment to the British audience, but one that ultimately did not come true. Britain started to become more and more fragmented and, as alluded to earlier in the thesis during Chapter three, this led to violent scenes such as the Notting Hill riots in 1958. Britain's filmic output started following this trend, moving into darker grittier

themes with the emergence of the British New Wave which embraced a more cynical outlook than Clive's utopian psychotherapist. It can be argued that Frank's character, unchecked, becomes a prime candidate for a character type in the British New Wave films which makes the attempted intervention in *The Sleeping Tiger* even more prescient.

Although *The Sleeping Tiger* can be seen as a dry run for Losey's later claustrophobic identity-warping masterpiece *The Servant*, it is also an early example of his ability to include an immense number of complex issues into a relatively simplistic scenario. Similar to *The Servant*, the film also relies heavily on the concept of duality and the subtle swapping of personalities throughout the film to highlight both the connections between these seemingly disparate characters. Despite its moderate success at the time, Losey's film is made up of a "...remarkable intellectual sinew..." (Harper and Porter, 2003: 192) and one that should probably be seen as a landmark in British cinema due, in part, to the way it attempts to complicate the British way of life, especially class and generational concerns, in a way that was strangely perceptive of the developments both in cinema and society.

Chapter 6 – The Ladykillers

The Ladykillers tells the story of an elderly woman, Mrs Wilberforce (Katie Johnson), who regularly tells preposterous farfetched stories to anybody who will listen including the local police, but is generally seen as an innocent lonely old woman. She takes in a lodger who uses the pseudonym 'The Professor' (Alec Guinness). He organises recital practice between himself and his friends, but unbeknownst to her they are actually a gang of thieves planning a robbery and using the house as a cover. After the robbery, through pure coincidence, Mrs. Wilberforce becomes aware of their true identities and demands they turn themselves in to the police. They then plan to kill Mrs. Wilberforce, but through bickering and infighting, all the members of the gang are killed either by each other or in ridiculous circumstances. Mrs. Wilberforce is finally left with the money as the police do not believe her story and patronisingly say she should keep the money.

The Ladykillers (Alexander Mackendrick, 1955) sits on the edge of the Ealing Studios' body of work, in a literal sense, as it is chronologically one of the last Ealing films to be produced and shot in the studios before they were sold to the BBC (Barr, 1998: 174-181), and figuratively as it does not conform entirely to the cosy nature of many of the previous Ealing comedies. Ealing Productions moved to Borehamwood and the films that followed had moderate success, most notably *Dunkirk* (Leslie Norman, 1957). However, *The Ladykillers* was the last successful Ealing comedy film under its old banner. In this sense it marks the end of an era of British film and also the end of a unique sub-genre of British comedy. *The Ladykillers* has traditionally been analysed based on its roots within Ealing Studios, and more specifically as an Ealing comedy, rather than taking a more objective viewpoint and looking at the film from a broader perspective. This chapter will tackle the film from several perspectives: Genre conventions with British cinema in the 1950s; doubling via socio-political messages and coding; and the use of Britishness as an ever-expanding shorthand in cinematic language. The intention of this chapter is to analyse *The Ladykillers* outside of this pre-prescribed notion of Ealing, to open up a wider analysis of the film's content and meaning.



Figure 70: Left to Right - Professor Marcus, One-Round, Harry, Claude & Louis



Figure 71: Mrs Wilberforce

1940-50s Community Spirit

Ealing films have often been attached to a wider discussion regarding community spirit and camaraderie, which clearly stems from a collection of films that have these themes at the centre of their narratives, *Passport to Pimlico* (Henry Cornelius, 1949) being a prime example. The films embody a sense of the post-war wave of communities bonding together to rebuild Britain:

"Ealing has tended to be associated with the wartime transformation of British society that contributed to the Labour Party's historic electoral victory in 1945, where shared experience of war helped to shape a new social and political consensus, increasingly democratic and egalitarian in nature." (Freeman, 2012: 71)

However, *The Ladykillers* does not entirely conform to this earlier formula, and as such does not get analysed in relation to political change. Therefore, it feels appropriate to engage with discussions regarding the political/social elements in the output of Ealing Studios on a broader scale, as I believe this facet is still present in *The Ladykillers*, but has been widely overlooked.

As discussed, the Ealing style involves this common theme of community spirit, usually depicted via a band of people fighting for a common cause or against a common enemy. This theme often gets linked, and quite accurately so, to the togetherness of the 'war effort' and more specifically to the idea of the "people's war" (Freeman, 2012:71), where communities banded together to reconstruct Britain. This idea has been well documented in relation to later films (Barr, 1998: 160), such as *Hue and Cry* (1947, Charles Crichton), *Passport to Pimlico* and *The Titfield Thunderbolt* (1953, Charles Crichton). These areas of debate link Ealing Studios to a strong heritage of filmmaking built around political and community-based motivations and themes. If we take Ealing films in the broadest sense, there is no doubt that there is a consistency in their themes and that these films are specifically linked to the Ealing style which Michael Balcon supported as a way of counteracting low-morale in the immediate post-war era. The fear of morale sapping media output directly after the war was a major concern, as Robert Murphy describes:

"After the war, critics were concerned that the proliferation of Spiv films and disturbing psychological melodramas uncovering the sordid underbelly of British society would endanger the project of building a better and brighter Britain." (Murphy, 2012:86)

Ealing's, and more specifically Balcon's, solution related to creating films that depicted Britain and the British character in a good light and were focused on creating a "...fusion of documentary and entertainment in stories of everyday heroism and British indomitability..." (Murphy, 2012:82). This can be loosely defined as the Ealing style. The group of directors and writers working under Balcon in the early 1940s developed a style that "...is one informed by the propaganda needs of World War II... [and] emphasized Britain pulling together during wartime.." (Duguid *et al.*, 2012: 6).

However, *The Ladykillers* is working as a contrapuntal beat against this Ealing style, by subtly undermining the British character throughout the film. The gang of crooks typify this point perfectly as they echo a dark version of the community spirit that is the crux of the Ealing genre. Rather than an innocent group banding together to fight a criminal, as in *Hue and Cry*, instead we are faced with the counterpoint of a group of criminals banding together to kill an innocent old woman. In this respect, *The Ladykillers* undermines the community spirit focus and could easily be considered an anti-Ealing film, while still possessing many of its defining characteristics. The earlier comedies "...made between 1946 and 1953 are marvellous evocations of Britain at the beginning of the 50s, still gripped by austerity and unrecovered from the battering of the war" (Murphy, 2012: 90), but celebrate the strength of the British community spirit. *The Ladykillers* falls outside of this era, as it was made in 1955, and has a much more cynical outlook. The shift in tone, purpose and ideals appear to echo the weariness of British society after 10 years of post-war austerity. The director of the film, Alexander Mackendrick, also discusses his own cynical thoughts about the plight of Britain and his general fears regarding the erosion of national values, which appear to specifically move away from the Balcon style:

The fable of *The Ladykillers* is a comic and ironic joke about the condition of post-war England. After the war, the country was going through a kind of quiet, typically British but nevertheless historically fundamental revolution. Though few people were prepared to face up to it, the great days of the Empire were gone for ever. British society was shattered with the same kind of conflicts appearing in many other countries: an impoverished and disillusioned upper class, a brutalized working class, juvenile delinquency among the Mods and Rockers, an influx of foreign and potentially criminal

elements, and a collapse of 'intellectual' leadership. All of these threatened the stability of the national character. (Mackendrick, 2004: 104)

This shift in mood is clearly evident in some of the lighthearted Ealing films of this period, as already discussed, in the satirical elements of *Passport to Pimlico* and *Kind Hearts and Coronets*, but this is especially evident from 1951 onwards. This pivot point is marked by one of Alexander Mackendrick's earlier films Ealing films, *The Man in the White Suit* (Alexander Mackendrick, 1951). The film revolves around a low-level scientist, Alec Guinness again, who invents a fabric that is indestructible and therefore never needs to be replaced. Several agencies realize that this would likely put their clothing companies out of business and attempt to scupper the manufacture of the fabric. Mackendrick's film shifts from the mild satire of the previous Ealing output and moves towards a more socialist perspective, as is evident from his quote above. More specifically, *The Man in the White Suit* sets up big business and the authorities as the villains. The effect of *Man in the White Suit* is to "...pull you into a bad dream" (Botting, 2012: 176) moving the audience from a safe place into a more sceptical view of Britain and how the working classes are treated by the government. Given this film's perspective on the impending power struggles in Britain, it is likely that this stance was taken forward by Mackendrick into his later films. Mackendrick also directed *The Sweet Smell of Success* (Alexander Mackendrick, 1957) which is a scathing satire of the American press. However, *The Ladykillers* is very rarely analysed in societal or political terms, which when taking a very literal approach to reading the narrative is understandable, but feels like a misreading when focusing on Mackendrick's work either side of the production.

Looking at *The Ladykillers* through a cynical eye, it reads less as a 'call to arms', a reaction to wrongdoings, like *The Man in the White Suit*, but instead feels more like a deep resigned sigh of acceptance. The mid-1950s is a time where people had given up on large scale social reform, community spirit had dwindled, and the film's sarcastic tone mirrors this. The lack of political or satirical foregrounding, is perhaps the reason many theorists tend to largely ignore this in their readings of the film. The film, and Mackendrick, eschews the community based activities of Ealing's earlier films out of a sense that community action has proved futile. Instead we are left with a senile old woman, a band of criminals and no discernible hero or community group in sight.

The American Connection

This leads us onto the creative team behind the film, director Alexander Mackendrick and screenwriter William Rose. Both men were born in America, Mackendrick's parents were Scottish he moved back to Scotland when he was quite young. They would both return to their birth country later in their careers, which does instantly put into question the legitimacy of *The Ladykillers* fitting purely into British National Cinema. There is an argument for stating that the film can alternatively read as an American's view of little England, both conforming to stereotypes and warping them through a Trans-Atlantic lens. There is weight to this argument, given that William Rose, claims the story came to him in a dream (Barr, 1998: 170) which partially explains the nightmarish vision of Kings-Cross that is depicted in the film. Obviously, this is a reductive reading, but it is intended to set up the concept that *The Ladykillers* both conforms to and simultaneously subverts expectations of British film. It has been suggested that Ealing Comedy, as a loose post-war genre, has specific traits and themes which create audience expectations, and Barr has previously stated that Ealing Studio's film output walked the line between fantasy, farce and social reality (1998:81).

This uneasy balance between reality and fantasy in Ealing's work has been alluded to on a few occasions. In Charles Barr's opinion *Passport to Pimlico* "creates a blend of fantasy and realism, and of wartime and post-war feeling – a blend which will impose itself as quintessentially Ealing" (1998: 81) and this emphasis on mood and feeling is perhaps the best way to define Ealing in terms of a Genre, as semiotics, generic story structures and stock characters are often not consistent enough to fully define it. This can be seen in the variation between the early Ealing melodramas, the later comedies and the multitude of war films that run through the full history of Ealing. Barr's definition does highlight the fantasy/realism trait in Ealing's films while still pointing out they are grounded in reality. While I agree with Barr's statement, *The Ladykillers* version of fantasy leans significantly closer to horror, rather than the whimsy of earlier Ealing films. The duality between reality and fantasy is interesting in that it could, in essence, be divided into the Hollywood and British styles: Hollywood favouring melodrama, fantasy and action; British film conforming to the classical and social realist traditions of presenting film as a close facsimile of the real world. I would argue that the American

contingent of the film may in fact have broadened the film's scope significantly by attempting to fit a Hollywood B-movie noir into the cosy British surroundings of the Ealing comedy.

The Ladykillers has always sat awkwardly within the Ealing Studios canon, often ignored or sidelined due to its lack of easily definable qualities that link it back to the other Ealing films. Charles Barr (1998: 159) described these later films, including *The Ladykillers*, as "...less substantial than their makers' earlier comedies..." which implies his study was aimed more at trying to find theoretical substance in the previous comedies, specifically searching for the overtly political elements which are not the main focus in the later films. Tony Williams's criticism relates more to the generic nature of some of the comedies as "Both *The Lavender Hill Mob* (Charles Crichton, 1951) and *The Ladykillers* are ideological footnotes to the studio's poverty-of-desire philosophy." (Williams, 2000: 169). Here Williams is pointing out the reluctance to include a female love interest in either film, but also the distancing effect of the wry nature of both films, which are rarely earnest in with their feelings. Perhaps, again, this links to the stiff upper lip discussed in relation to *Blimp*. However, what is interesting about Williams' approach is that he is attempting to compare and contrast Ealing films that fit into slightly different cycles. In this instance, *The Ladykillers* appears to be judged, not as a standalone text, but by the standards set out by earlier Ealing films. Trying to read the film in relation to another more overtly politically motivated film, such as *Passport to Pimlico*, causes issues as they clearly do not belong to the same collection of films.

In essence, the dominant approach to British National Cinema which is to rely on elements that fit into the 'realist aesthetic', i.e. moving towards a political reading rather than analysing the film in a more holistic manner, while ignoring all evidence to the contrary. This does question whether many 'realist' British films have been analysed using a restrictive mode of film analysis which may have bypassed the subtle elements that are present within the film text.

The realist aesthetic is so deeply ingrained in British film culture that it not only renders 'deviant' movies either magical or completely invisible...but

also imposes a 'realist' framework of interpretation like a stifling blanket over the entire area of British cinema (Petley, 1986:100)

Petley's argument does not hold up to modern academic works, especially given more expansive readings of Powell & Pressburger for example, but it does appear to be an issue in relation to Ealing. The nostalgic air that surrounds Ealing Studios' films as a uniquely British product does mask areas of their output. This pre-prescribed idea of what Ealing Studios represents makes many discussions regarding Ealing come from a similar perspective. What I am suggesting is that this nostalgic effect forces us to look for these elements when they are not present, or in some cases barely present, within the film text. This is similar to the ideological effect that specific actors bring to a film (Dyer, 1998: 20), the actor masks the fictional character, we become attached to the actor, not the character they are portraying. The veil of Britishness is what we become attached to, which masks the true nature of the film text. There are elements outlined above which relate specifically to genre, star theory and National Cinema, however the overriding factor is audience reception or how a film can be read, mis-read or pre-read i.e. expectations take over before the film begins. The American connection is clearly evident in the creative team, but is rarely analysed or referenced. Our empirical knowledge of what to expect from an Ealing film overrides the production and content of the film.

Defining The Ladykillers

Ealing Films can be defined via several characteristics: Fantasy tales told in a realistic setting; Socially conscious and anti-establishment; British setting and characters; a sense of community and nostalgia that often links to group action (camaraderie) being central to the plot (Barr, 1998: 160). Traditional definitions of genre are almost entirely based on stock characters, plot devices and visual style/semiotics, something that Neale (2000: 10) criticises due to the taxonomic process of simply collating similar components from films to define their genre, rather than querying the wider significance of what binds these collections of movies. Charles Barr (1998) makes reference to the Ealing tradition of fantasy, farce and reality as defining qualities. Fantasy and reality would normally be perceived as competing elements, but this relationship is perhaps key to the Ealing style. I would equally argue that Ealing Comedies can be defined as a genre, but that this definition is partially through a sense

of National Cinema, creating a strange situation where a broad set of thematic overtones are what link Ealing Studios to genre concepts.

The Ladykillers is a film that is both indicative of Ealing's popular style and themes while simultaneously appearing at odds with the cosy nature of their comedies at the time. Charles Barr (1998: 80) discusses the idea of Ealing being an invented genre, but it can still be seen as "an authentic response to certain forces in post-war Britain" and therefore we can surmise that *The Ladykillers* should also be read as a documenting a layer of socio-political depth. However, the loose definition of Ealing as a genre has caused *The Ladykillers* to be read as a generic comedy, rather than a unique piece of filmmaking, an anomaly in the otherwise formulaic output of the mid-1950s Ealing canon. The pigeonholing of Ealing as a generic collection of films with interconnecting thematic traits has, unfortunately, swallowed up the more individualistic films and labelled them wholesale. *The Ladykillers* is perhaps the biggest casualty of this approach.

The Ladykillers fits somewhere between reality and fantasy. The events in the film are too fantastical to be read in a realist sense. Obviously, here we are reminded of *Kind Hearts*. Another singular work that sits outside of the Ealing norm and features a similar thread of dark humour, especially in relation to death. In thematic terms, they define themselves as two individual pieces mainly via the overtly high-brow satirical humour of Louis's narrator, which jars with *The Ladykillers*'s use of much broader slapstick humour. However, they are great companion pieces due to the fact they are both lensed and presented as classically realist, but objectively have a very slight grasp on the real world. Despite being defined as an Ealing comedy, *The Ladykillers* can more easily be identified as either a thriller or a fantasy film, partially due to the fact it does not conform to Ealing's defining characteristics. In fact, it actively skews them. Firstly, it isn't an overtly political film, it does not follow the tried and tested Ealing narrative device of the plucky British community against the government/company, which naturally lends itself to satirical material. Secondly, the criminals are quite likable and sit closer to the concept of an anti-hero archetype that one would associate with film noir. In a similar sense to noir, thematically, it has no moral compass. We are neither on the side of Mrs. Wilberforce, because she is quite rude, or the men that are plotting to kill her, because they are criminals. In this sense, the humour comes from

the audience's dislike of all of the characters and, in essence, the feeling of superiority over them. However, the film remains unmistakably Ealing in its form. Although brief and reductive, this does point to a uniqueness in *The Ladykillers* that deserves further analysis.

A prophetic opening

The opening sequence of *The Ladykillers* forms an interesting microcosm of the overall themes that will be discussed in this chapter. It appears to defy genre, switching between realism and a heightened horror/fantasy, but also hints at a political reading and presents itself as playfully self-reflexive. I will break down the scene into its composite parts (Fig. 72). Mrs Wilberforce travels to the police station and the weather is fine. She smiles at a baby in a pram and it begins to cry. She regales the police officer, Jack Warner, with the UFO story. As she leaves, dark clouds are in the sky, the wind picks up and it begins to rain. A street painters' canvases are ruined, so he hurriedly tries to put them away. A picture of Winston Churchill falls over. She walks into a shop to discuss an advert on the notice board reading "room for rent". A shadow of a man in a hat appears over the notice board. He stalks her back towards her house, we never see his face due to either the camera angle or an object obstructing it. His silhouette is seen through the windows stalking around the house. The silhouette appears at the door, rings the bell, a strange shot of her parrot as it squawks. Mrs Wilberforce opens the door to the man who reveals his face from behind the hat he is holding. The man introduces himself as 'Professor Marcus' (Alec Guinness) and would like to rent the room. Several elements of this scene are clearly foreboding, the dark clouds and shadowy figures, but these are all articulated using heavy handed genre conventions. This element of the gothic horror, akin to the descriptions of England in the work of *Dracula* or *Wuthering Heights*, runs through the film. There is an allusion to Churchill's resignation in 1955, which hints at further political messages within the film. Stereotypical characters are introduced: the vulnerable old women; the friendly police chief; the mysterious stranger.



Figure 72: The opening sequence in *The Ladykillers*

Through the opening scene we can establish several things about the film as a whole. Firstly, Britain as a visual construct has been heightened, but is still recognisable as a cosy little Ealing film, although a slightly stranger version that appears to be lensed as a Horror/Fantasy film. The characters are comically stock, ironically so, to the point where they can only exist in a filmic space, the characters do not belong in the world of 'reality'. This becomes more apparent when we are introduced to the gang of thieves, that similarly fit into stock types. If this is the case then the film must be an ironic, post-modern, take on the Ealing comedy. Finally, if not based in reality, and all illusions to 'reality' are taken away, then we are left with a fantasy film, which by convention, are often read as an allegory for something within society. The allusion to Churchill, although very brief, also hints at this reading.

Daydream / Fantasy

Charles Barr (1998: 173) briefly suggests that the events of *The Ladykillers* can be simply interpreted as being Mrs. Wilberforce's dream. Based on the uncanny storm and the horror imagery in the opening section, this viewpoint holds a lot of credibility. A distorted version of reality, possibly closer a nightmare, with recognisable realist elements distorted through a dreamscape. The idea that Mrs Wilberforce has dreamed the events opens the debate of what the film means when we take it out of the constraints of a realist environment. Barr (1998: 170-173) implies the dream starts after she leaves the police station, then ends when she returns to the police station towards the end of the film to inform the officers that she has the gang's money. Jack Warner appears as the Superintendent in both these scenes which is quite telling, as he forged a career as an actor based mainly around police officer roles, most notably in *The Blue Lamp* (Basil Dearden, 1950) and later spent 20-plus years playing a version of the same character in *Dixon of Dock Green* (BBC, 1955-76). Given his reputation as the quintessential British police officer on screen, and the fact these are that these are appearances almost cameo appearances, it suggests that Warner has been placed within the film as a dreamlike figure, basically the person you would insert into your dream as the upstanding community police officer. Although seemingly farfetched as a concept, the events that take place between his appearances do become increasingly bizarre. Similarly, "The Professor" is an archetypical villain leering and creeping through the film like something from a horror film "...with his mincing, swooping gestures and vampiric teeth..." (Kemp, 2004). Another

exaggerated version of reality (Fig. 73). He literally appears as Mrs. Wilberforce leaves the police station, appearing with the onset of the storm.



Figure 73: *The Professor* (Alec Guinness) with horror lighting and a vampiric pose

This is not exclusive to the characterisation in *The Ladykillers*. The mise-en-scene of film is clearly Britain, but not necessarily the Britain of 1955, but an idea of what Britain should look like. Barr (1998: 170-171) asserts that "...the film is a vision, or fable, of England" and that the setting is "timeless". This statement can be interpreted in several ways: timeless in the sense that it is stuck in time; a fable as in a fairy-tale; a vision of England, in the sense that it is somebody's specific vision/version of Britain. This sense of timelessness is similarly that Barr refers to can equally be linked back to both *Blimp* and *Kind Hearts*, which equally have versions of reality that appear stuck in time. However, all of these point to a lack of authenticity, that the version of Britain on screen has been skewed.

Everything within *The Ladykillers* feels like a distorted version of London, imagined as a dream. Several key scenes take place in stereotypical London environments and feature elements which ground the film in a sense of reality. The 'barrow-boy' fruit market, Kings Cross Station and red phone box all feature in key scenes. Mrs. Wilberforce's house at the Cul-de-sac is perhaps the best example of this hinterland between reality and dream. While it appears to be a fairly normal house, it is also often covered in a strange fog, which appears out-of-place in the inner city setting (Fig. 74).

Again, as if to compound the issue, a red phone box can be seen on the street. The house is also noticeably lopsided, as if distorted. Some of the locations were purpose built sets, based on areas of Kings Cross, but altered for cinematic effect (Dein, 2020), which similarly adds to the surreal nature of the visual elements of the film. In essence the filmmakers are creating an intentionally artificial London. This all links back to Barr's query of whether Mrs. Wilberforce "may have dreamed an adventure or really had it..." (1998: 173).



Figure 74: Mrs Wilberforce's creepy house

Keith M. Johnston discusses the visual style of *The Ladykillers*, particularly the way "...colour continues to aid the film's themes and characterisations." (2012: 201). This can be seen in a very literal sense in the examples below (Fig. 75, 76 & 77) where the softer pastel colours in the downstairs of the house appear to reflect Mrs. Wilberforce's calm and innocent nature, and the upper floor where the gang meet is darker and uses a very jarring colour palette. The backroom (Fig. 77), where the most nefarious criminal plans are hatched, is particularly stark and this again appears to sit outside of the reality of the version of London we are present with. It is as if the backroom it is representing the darker fears of Mrs. Wilberforce, hidden in the darkened backroom of her house and her mind.

The colour scheme suggests something is wrong with the room – and when the film cuts inside the, that slash of red is joined by an unnatural green tone – not only a contrast to Mrs Wilberforce's pastel tone, but a subtle link to the growing avarice and distrust within the gang. (Johnston, 2012: 201)



Figure 75: The pastel pink living room



Figure 76: The green rehearsal room



Figure 77: The eerie red/gold backroom

Therefore, if we take the film as existing within Mrs. Wilberforce's dream, then we need to look at these elements as being a mix between the reassuring idealistic replicas, red phone boxes and Jack Warner in the police station, but also the creeping nightmare elements of the distorted house, the storm and fog. We can read the whole film as Britain trying to hide the darkness within itself, hiding the darkness behind the language of Ealing farce. Williams' reads the baby screaming, when Mrs. Wilberforce approach a pram, in the opening section of the film as the child "recognising the threat" (Williams, 2000: 170), implying a level of portent and horror in the scene. Similarly, Barr (1998:170) hints at a horror/fantasy reading while never fully committing to it, using phrases like "dark shadows of human presence begin to track her...dark shadows materialise", which gives the seemingly everyday events a sinister twist. In both instances, these appear to be darker elements trying to seep through into the film. Barr also makes to specific references to the film in relation to "dreamlike logic" (Barr, 1998: 170) which is imbued in William Rose's screenplay, which permeates throughout every scene. The above statements link to an instability within the film's visual language, a heightened cinematic imagery that is blending, unsuccessfully, with a much more traditional style. Realism and formalism sitting on top of one another.

When tackling the concept of the doubling motifs within this era of British films, *The Ladykillers* is potentially the most complex as it does not contain any literal doubles or

contrasts. The whole film is a distorted facsimile of Britain, a strange mirror image. Obviously, the above discussions only outline the broader elements of the film, the setting, a couple of characters, a summary of the opening sequence and the potential for tackling the film via a dream-logic approach. However, the following sections will expand on these concepts in a more detailed fashion using more specific examples.

Victorian Values

Mrs. Wilberforce is central to the film's narrative, but also to the surreal nature of the whole film, partially due to her outdated values which, like her house, appear to have been frozen in time. Mrs. Wilberforce and her house are visually coded to look out-of-place in the modern surroundings. She and her crumbling surroundings are reminiscent of the Victorian-era Miss Havesham from *Great Expectations*: an eccentric woman left alone in a crumbling building without a husband. The house itself is similarly stuck in time, as is Mrs. Wilberforce (Fig. 78). Mrs. Wilberforce alludes to Queen Victoria early in the film via an anecdote, mentioning her 21st Birthday to the Queen dying on the same day, presumably the Queen in question is Victoria herself who died in 1901. This would make sense given Mrs. Wilberforce's age in the film. Her story links to the sense of nostalgia and, more importantly, a change in values after Queen Victoria's death and her own coming of age on the same day.



Figure 78: Mrs Wilberforce's old fashioned living room

The gang's ruse of being a classical music quintet, using the spare room to rehearse, exploits into Mrs. Wilberforce's traditional ideals of class and respectability as well. As does the, unwarranted, respect owed to Professor Marcus clearly stemming from her sense of deference towards someone from an academic background. Her outdated, and possibly rather naïve, sense of chivalry and decency is shown via her reaction to realizing the gang have stolen money and are in fact just a bunch of criminals. Rather than instantly calling the police, she takes control and reprimands them like small children, explaining that they must turn themselves in to the police immediately after her tea party. In simple terms, keeping up appearances to avoid causing a scene. When her guests appear for afternoon tea, the generation gap is visually compounded by when a collection of old women enter in full pastel shades of dress-up and formal head wear, as if they are attending Ascot. This highlights the gang's common attire and singles them out as the commoners among the party, and they react accordingly by becoming the entertainment for the event (Fig. 79). Playing the piano for singalongs and engaging in polite conversation. The hardened gang are reduced to servants by the generational pressure and sense of duty put upon them. The scene is played for comedy, however there is an underlying message that the lower-classes instantly defer to the upper-classes i.e. they know their place. Given Barr's earlier claim that the film could easily be interpreted as Mrs. Wilberforce's daydream, then these actions could similarly be interpreted as such. She commands them and they follow suit, just like the olden days.



Figure 79: The gang reluctantly attending the party

This contrasts to the opening scene, before we enter the dream. Mrs Wilberforce tells the UFO story to the police, they patronise her and treat her like a senile old woman, which given the preposterous nature of the story is fully justified. As Barr aptly puts it her "...gentility may or may not be a mask for dottiness" (Barr, 1998: 170). The generation gap and gender roles are established early on, as the younger males, seemingly, have power, both physically and mentally, over the old woman. An important theme throughout. However, the scene also points to the concept of old and new, and more specifically to the idea of moving away from and disregarding the older generation. This to-and-fro between old and new, modern and post-modern, old comedy and a new, darker comedy, is in essence what *The Ladykillers* really represents. British cinema and society in a strange state of mid-50s flux, not quite sure whether to let go of the past or strive ahead into the future. In essence the film is a literal representation of duality.

The Gang of Thieves

Given the above discussion regarding the opening sequence of the film, it is clear that *The Ladykillers* has elements which appear quite clear on first viewing but are more opaque on closer inspection. The gang of thieves are a key example this and are used as a way to tackle representation in British culture and the generation gap developing in the post-war years. The gang consists of 5 members (Fig 80): The Professor (Alec Guinness), Louis (Herbert Lom), Claude (Cecil Parker), Harry (Peter Sellers), One-Round (Danny Green). As with every collective of heroes or villains in film, they have very little in common and are clearly selected for their specialisms (the brains, the brawn, etc). In simplistic terms, they are mish-mash of stable stereotypes: "Academic, ex-officer, manual worker, naïve youth and hard-liner" (Barr, 1998: 172). In terms of representation, the gang are a cross section of British society, but unlike the courageous collectives from the war movies from the 1940-50s, instead we are presented with the darker mirror image of British society. This is not a suave collective of lovable anti-heroes performing a heist, in the style of *Rififi* (Jules Dassin, 1955) or *Ocean's Eleven* (Lewis Milestone, 1960), they are painted as a dangerous combination of both ruthless and incompetent. Rather than a good-looking charming leader, we have Alec Guinness's grotesque caricature.



Figure 80: The 5 distinctive characters within the heist gang

The choice of stereotypes within the group are interesting, partially because they are all flawed and negative representations of Britain, but also because they are so exaggerated that seem to stand out from the film space. As discussed earlier, the finally balanced mix of reality and fantasy often makes it difficult fully discern whether the stereotype, itself, is the butt of the joke or simply used as an easy visual/narrative shorthand. Peter Sellers's character, Harry, is particularly interesting in this regard as he conforms to the "spiv" stereotype in that he is a "petty criminal...flashily dressed with cheap ostentation..." (Spicer, 2003: 127). The use of this stock character is not unusual here, but the fact that he does not fit into the film is key. Within a gangster film or a British Noir, Harry would feel like a standard character, but here even his working-class accent appears out-of-place. To say his presence is anachronistic would be slightly inaccurate, as the "Spiv" stock character still appeared throughout the 1950s, however the depiction is so broad that it feels outdated, or at the very least it feels as if it is drawn from a filmic stereotype rather than a true depiction. It could easily be argued that Harry is a composite of Mrs. Wilberforce's ideas regarding the younger generation.

Guinness's appearance and movements also imply a level of fantasy, as again he appears to have been constructed from a stereotype, rather than the real world. The idea of the Professor being a force of nature or entering from a dreamscape is implied

within the opening scene, but the realist look of the film, and our genre expectations in relation to comedies, often diverts our focus from the actual events. An interpretation of the opening sequence can be that the film replaces evil elements that Mrs Wilberforce encounters with a more palatable option. The condescending Police officer is replaced by the kind Jack Warner, an evil criminal is replaced by Alec Guinness. This is particularly true when we factor in the fact that we cannot see the face of the shadowed figure until she opens the door and the criminal has now been turned into a version of a comedic character from previous films. Obviously, Guinness' multi-part role in *Kind Hearts and Coronets* springs to mind, but at this point in his career he was mainly known for his comedy work. Phillip Kemp (2004) also reads this as construct of Mrs Wilberforce's imagination as if the characters have been conjured from a "...never-never London underworld of the Pabst/Brecht The Threepenny Opera...drawing on confused memories of penny-dreadfuls and gaslit melodramas". Obviously, this reading relies heavily on Mackendrick tackling the film from a post-modern perspective, playing with the audience's expectations and understanding the power of Ealing Comedy as a sub-genre in its own right, something that will be picked up later in the chapter.

The interactions between Harry and Mrs. Wilberforce are particularly interesting in relation to doubling and masquerading, especially in relation to class. Harry's class is put into the forefront when interacting with Mrs. Wilberforce, or discussing her. Harry refers to her as a "Screwy old dame" early in the film. When he is asked to help give some medicine to one of her pet parrots, he rather crudely states "You leaves it to me, I'm very good with birds", which innocently Mrs. Wilberforce reads literally. He nearly swears on several occasions when he attempts to capture an escaped parrot. His gentlemanly disguise slips on several occasions, as if the burden of adhering to the upper-class values that Mrs. Wilberforce holds dear is a painful experience. The dual personality of Harry perfectly encompasses the duality of early 50s Britain, being shifted from Labour to Conservative, the working class pretending to be middle class in a vain hope of social mobility. This sequence is a paradigm of Britain's class struggle, the upper classes forcing the working classes to play by their rules. What we encounter within these two characters, like *Kind Hearts'* Louis and Sibella, is an element of roleplay. Harry, as discussed above, is quite clearly playing a part to disguise his class. However, Mrs. Wilberforce is similarly playing the part of Victorian

upper-class lady of leisure. She does not live in a country mansion, in fact her surroundings are literally crumbling around her, but her attitude and demeanour remains stoically set in the belief of an empirical class system. Both characters are masquerading out of pride, in a simplified sense, to raise their class from its current position. Guinness's character calls himself "Professor Marcus" to imply a level of education, social standing and class to ameliorate himself in Mrs. Wilberforce's eyes. However, he, just like the fake quintet, are merely facades constructed to trick her.

From a conceptual point of view, the characters represent everything that has gone wrong in the world in Wilberforce's lifetime. Spectres of a world she does not want to admit exists, common thieves and liars that clash with her Victorian ideals. They form a 'Christmas Carol' style tale of five characters, representing five unsavoury traits that must be exiled from British society. This can be interpreted as Mrs. Wilberforce's perception of the evils of Britain, as seen through the innocent eyes of the cinema screen and theatre. This all points back to this construction being part of a theatrical performance that Mrs. Wilberforce has constructed from memory. The nativity and innocence of Mrs. Wilberforce manifests this simplified version of villainy. Perhaps most tellingly in this concept is Louis, as he clearly represents a foreign element within the film, both visually and through his actions. Furthermore, this could also link to an inherent fears and xenophobia still present in the mid-1950s, especially in the older generations. Herbert Lom's Louis is prominent in this discussion due to his visible 'otherness'. Lom retains a slight lilt of his eastern European accent and dresses in a dark suit, coat and hat (Fig. 81), which contrasts with the attire of every other person within the film. The look and accent is almost ridiculously linking Louis to the KGB, or a similar regime, which given the nature of their deceptive scheme, is most definitely not a good disguise. This is visually reminiscent of Orson Welles' Harry Lime (Fig. 82) in *The Third Man* (Carol Reed, 1949), a character that is iconic within that movie for his physical appearance and how much he stands out within the film's mise-en-scene. In simple terms, the film visually codes Louis as a stereotypical villain.



Figure 82: Louis (Herbert Lom) in *The Ladykillers*



Figure 82: Harry Lime (Orson Welles) in *The Third Man*

However, the main point here is that the film similarly uses Louis as an iconographical tool to depict another post-war fear, especially those of the older generations. As discussed in previous chapters, there was also a growing fear of the Soviet's communist party, especially as the power held by the region resembled the rise of the German threat in the mid-1930s. The film sits in a period of unrest in Russia, as the death of Stalin in 1953 and the subsequent rule of Georgy Malenkov then created the power struggles and fluctuation leading to the revolt within the communist party which led to Nikita Khrushchev becoming leader in 1955. The unrest within the communist party continued throughout the 1950s. As we saw in the *Secret People* chapter, this concern appeared to be slowly creeping into films around this period. Either in a more easily identifiable way, like General Galbern in *Secret People*, or in a more subtle sense with the visual coding of Louis in *The Ladykillers*. In this respect, Louis's role as the "hard-liner" (Barr, 1998: 172) is quite apt, as his goals align with the rest of the gang, but his methods and ideals do not. Mimicking the communist in-fighting. This is particularly poignant within the argument scene, in which they take a vote on whether to include Mrs. Wilberforce as part of the heist. Professor Marcus and Louis stand-off in relation to the ideal execution of the plan and begin to quickly form alliances within the small group. Professor Marcus quickly curries favour with Claude, "Major. Courtney" the ex-British officer, creating an academic, officer-class group. Harry, the youngest member of the group, sides with Louis because he does not think they can rely on a "screwy old dame", linking again to the fear and mistrust between the

generations. The casting vote falls to One-round, who Louis attempts to undermine by referring to him as a “thick eared muscle man”, which actually forces him to side with Professor Marcus, stating “I’ve got a vote too, ain’t I? It’s a democracy ain’t it?”. In effect, we have the traditional ruling classes on one side and the younger generation of socialist values on the other. The fact One-Round, the representation of the tradition working class labourer, is stuck in the middle looking rather confused turns the sequence into a microcosm of the current state of British politics and the wider tensions with the rest of Europe.

Political reading

The Ladykillers can be read as political, but not a force of political dissent, like the earlier films. The sense of a community, or the ‘little man’, fighting against the system is not a present here, instead this is replaced by a more subtle political undertone. Tony Williams focuses on a political reading posited by Barr:

“...aptly analysed by Barr as an allegorical post-war fantasy. The gang represents the Labour government, whose alternative directions are soon quashed by the stifling nature of British conservative Victorian values represented by Mrs. Wilberforce” (Williams, 2000: 169).

Both Barr and Williams edge towards attempting to read the film as a direct metaphor of two opposing political forces, accepting that the film has a political reading via the metaphor of Mrs Wilberforce as the Conservative Party against the common gang representing the Labour Party (Barr, 1998: 171). Barr’s Conservative/Labour reading is, as he himself admits, a whimsical and “fanciful reading” (Barr, 1998: 171), but on the level of creating further understanding of the film it does hold up to closer examination and may not be as flippant a concept as Barr initially states. The historical elements of 1940-50s Britain do appear to echo throughout the many of the Ealing films. Tony Williams (1991) uses *Passport to Pimlico* as a template for a film that should be read as incorporating several competing elements: political, historical and psychoanalytical. He claims the film exhibits “a wish fulfilment structure undeniably historically grounded” (Williams, 1991: 53) which implies a layer of fantasy is incorporated into the to the narrative elements of the film. Using this approach the film’s content becomes clearer, as the film becomes a daydream of the British desire

for freedom from itself. The whole film can then be read as a socialist fantasy, in which the community take back the power from the government and this desire to return to the stability of a pre-war Britain. The uncovered document relating to Pimlico's links to Burgundy is in fact the unconscious desire of the people to break free from the Nation broken after war and a sense of nostalgia for recapturing the past. Ironically, this also sees the British falling into the paradox of using bureaucracy to break bureaucracy. Even within one's dream, bureaucracy and the stiff upper-lip ruin utopia, a self-deprecating satirical spin which in itself can be considered a British trait. By highlighting this example, Williams demonstrates that the Ealing oeuvre is more complex than its reality-based trappings and can easily be analysed using more diverse methods.

The events that occur as Mrs Wilberforce leaves the police station similarly link to this theme and are accompanied by a sudden storm, an example of pathetic fallacy which is the film's early leap into fantasy. There is an oft-referenced political reading of this scene that relates on the painting of Churchill being blown over by the wind (Fig. 83), which is a signifier to the end of the War/post-war community and "...Ealing's recognition of the death of its motivating wartime consensus." (Williams, 2000: 170). Relating back to the Conservative/Labour split in the nation, the generation gap and a sense of political instability. As discussed in the previous section, the film does use Mrs. Wilberforce as an anachronistic relic from the Victorian age to counterpoint the criminal activities of the gang. The fact that the gang are either openly working class, or hiding their roots, further points to the validity and importance of this class divide within the structure of the film.



Figure 83: Churchill painting being blown over during the storm

An interesting perspective on this paradigm comes in the 3rd act of the film. The gang have been caught by Mrs. Wilberforce, but she allows them the opportunity to turn themselves in rather than ring the police. However, the gang plot to kill Mrs. Wilberforce and run away with the money instead, but fail miserably which ultimately leads to in-fighting and the demise of all 5 members of the gang. From a political perspective, neither party can bring themselves to destroy the other and so forms the similar dichotomy of British politics, or arguably any political struggle, in that both sides are co-dependent and one feeds off the attitudes and mistakes of the other. The conservative element of the film likes being in a position of power over the Labour element, and the Labour element cannot quite overthrow the more traditional conservative values of the nation. It is a perfect metaphor for the Churchill-Atlee-Churchill see-saw that happened between 1945-51. Given the socio-political discussions in previous chapters, and putting the film in the context of Britain in 1955, reading the film politically makes a lot of sense. The country is fighting its way out of the poverty of the immediate post-war years and forging a new path, moving away from its colonial past and trying to reinvent itself. The crux of *The Ladykillers* can be seen as this post-war struggle; how do you kill the old Victorian values and forge a new path. Or in other terms, how does the younger generation throw off the shackles of the previous generations? However, this approach constantly implies that the film is not a straightforward comedy, but instead this is a surface level that hides a much darker underbelly.

Imitation of (British) Life

The above statement moves me towards a conclusion regarding the way the film should be read, not as primarily a dark comedy or an Ealing-style comedy, but instead it should be read as a reflexive post-modern version of both of these styles of film. By 1955 Ealing Studios films were waning as a product and hitting the end of its lifespan. *The Ladykillers* should be read as the coda to this era of comedies, a film that is reflexive in its treatment towards its own form, one that is part of the Ealing comedy cycle while simultaneously mocking, or at the very least being playful with, the form that it belongs to. By reading the film from this post-modern perspective it becomes a much more complex text.

We could easily analyse *The Ladykillers* as an inverted, or maybe twisted would be more accurate, version of an earlier Ealing film *The Lavender Hill Mob* (Charles Crichton, 1951). Both films star Alec Guinness and focus on a heist narrative, but the earlier film is much simpler to place within the Ealing canon as it includes the stock group of unlikely plunky underdog heroes. In essence, *The Lavender Hill Mob* is a Hollywood B-movie bank robbery caper through the lens of Ealing's cheery light-hearted view of Britain. However, *The Ladykillers* skews both of these formats further by removing the light-hearted characters and replacing them with a collection of creepy, thoroughly disreputable characters. Alec Guinness's Professor Marcus is perhaps the most obvious comparison, due to his mirrored role as Henry Holland in *The Lavender Hill Mob*. Henry Holland similarly instigates the heist plan, but is coded as meek, mild mannered and likable. Professor Marcus is the dark mirror image of Holland, creepy, murderous and sinister. This is coded within the visuals, but also in every action. There appears to be a purposeful duality between Professor Marcus and the parade of likable Ealing leading men. A post-modern attempt to muddy the waters and leave the post-war optimism of their earlier work behind as Ealing Studios begins to close its doors.

This post-modern theory is backed up by the robbery sequence, in which they trick Mrs Wilberforce into transporting the money in a luggage trunk. Professor Marcus is waiting communicating, via the telephone box, with another member of the gang, Major Courtney, who is keeping lookout at the station. Halfway through the conversation Professor Marcus begins to sing the non-diegetic music which has been

accompanying the scene for a couple of beats, then continues talking as normal. The music is Boccherini's 'Minuet', which is used extensively throughout the film, different variations of the piece are repeated as a leitmotif. The gang's cover for their meetings is that they are a classical five piece that are practicing for a concert, when in fact they just put on a recording of 'Minuet'. The singing could be easily explained through the fact that Professor Marcus has heard the song repeatedly during their secret meetings. However, the music is an integral part of the film's texture and this becomes a strange instance where the character appears to be fully aware that the music is being played on the soundtrack, so naturally joins in. In essence, the character is simply breaking the 4th wall. This is not the same as Woody Allen in *Annie Hall* (Woody Allen, 1977) where he steps up to the camera halfway through the scene and begins directly talking to the camera to address the audience. This is a subtle nod to the fact that Professor Marcus is aware of the construction of the film and is letting the audience in on the secret. He is part of the fiction film, but also sits outside of it. This could easily link back to the British pantomime tradition which is underpinned by cast/audience interaction, a style of theatre that relies on the empirical knowledge of the audience understanding the form of the piece that they are about to watch. This whole discussion once again links back to Phillip Kemp's (2004) evocation of the theatre via "The Threepenny Opera", but broadens it to include the reflexivity of post-modernism.

Charles Barr (1998: 178) references a similar concept to this, but specifically in relation to Mrs. Wilberforce's house in which the film takes place: "all the imagery of age and tradition in Ealing's past films is gathered up and compressed; it overwhelms the gang and their aspirations.". Similar to my above points, Barr similarly points to *The Ladykillers* carrying, and embodying, the weight of the Ealing traditions within the movie, but also implies that this is directly linked to the characters' actions. Again, this links directly to a reading which moves the film away from a realistic, straightforward comedic film. *The Ladykillers* is many things, but realistic is not one of them. A reading of the text in relation to its sense of verisimilitude defeats the purpose of the film, as Barr states the house is an amalgam of Ealing's past, it purposefully undermines its own plot structure and encourages deliberately hammy performances. Placing the film closer to the British pantomime tradition; purposefully tongue-in-cheek and self-aware.

In this respect, the film should be treated in a similar fashion to the work of Douglas Sirk. The bulk of Sirk's Hollywood directing career was spent making romantic comedies and melodramas within the American studio system in the 1950s. At the time, he was merely deemed a director of films aimed at a female audience, wish fulfilment films involving bored 1950s housewives. The films, on the surface, do appear to be earnest and heartfelt. However, after a later critical reappraisal, his work is often linked directly to a more dissident satirical strain of films made under the noses of the Hollywood studio executives. What appears to be earnest is actually an ironic commentary on the lives of the American middle-classes in 1950s, the genre being presented is in fact mocking itself and the genre it belongs to. Sirk's films, when read in this context, become a dark mirror reflection of the American dream. Applying this back to *The Ladykillers* is interesting, as Sirk's aim was clearly to link the modernism of new TVs, Kitchen appliances and Cadillacs with the role of the matriarch of the American nuclear family. A visual expression of the future taking over the values of the past. However, this could easily be applied to the role of lace and doilies in *The Ladykillers*. The microcosm of Mrs. Wilberforce's house is the past trying desperately not to modernize and, unlike Sirk's films, the past wins the battle. The film is anachronistic, but with tiny elements of the present-day seeping in.



Figure 84: The living room from *Imitation of Life* (Douglas Sirk, 1959)



Figure 85: Mrs Wilberforce's living room in *The Ladykillers*

The version of Britain that is presented in the film is also false, a mirror image, then the whole film is itself a double of reality, a cipher of the real London. This is also particularly interesting when we compare this to the attempts to present the 'real' London in both *Pool of London* (Basil Deardon, 1951) and *Secret People* (Thorold Dickinson, 1952). *The Ladykillers* purposefully presents, or creates, a version of London that does not exist in the real world, moving away from modern London and instead presenting a playful twist on reality.

The Murder Plot

The film's final third revolves around the plot to kill Mrs Wilberforce, so they can safely escape with the stolen money, and the film concludes with the death of all five of the criminals as each one is incapable of murdering the old woman. The sense of camaraderie, a key feature of so many Ealing films which is usually linked national pride and community spirit in the post-war years (Roberts, 2012: 47), is instead presented via the group of criminals and, despite their bickering, they do come together to successfully complete the robbery. However, after the successful heist is where a strange twist is where the sense of community comes to the fore. The camaraderie that the gang shared at the start of the film is destroyed by a very Britishness sense of chivalry towards the old woman, which ultimately forces them to turn on each other. Their strength as a group "...turns inexorably to real, paralysed deference" (Barr, 1998: 173), her seniority in both age and class causes them to revert to a pre-1950s state of mind, or more specifically they defer to her role as the colonial

Victorian figurehead (Fig. 86) Mrs Wilberforce's can be seen as a stifling element within the film, a kind of "Gorgon of asexuality and authority" (Harper and Porter, 2003: 67). The 1950s is widely seen as the period of time where the Britain saw the beginnings of a breakdown of class barriers and a deference to a class society (Harper and Porter, 2003: 1), however *The Ladykillers* in an ironic twist points out the fallibility of society to revert to the old rule.



Figure 86: Mrs Wilberforce scolds the gang, as if they are naughty children

Obviously, the film is a comedy and it would be very unlikely, and in particularly poor taste in any era, for the gang to have murdered Mrs. Wilberforce and get away with the money. In effect, the film again moves into a safe happy Ealing-esque scenario of bumbling idiots killing each other or accidentally killing themselves. It can be argued that American heist B-movies of the period would gleefully revel in the anti-hero getting away with the money. However, Mrs. Wilberforce gets to keep the money at the end of the film, due mainly to her constant reporting of ridiculous events to the police, she is seen as delusional. The wealth is not returned but is instead swallowed up by the older generation. This turn of events gives the film a much more conservative outlook than other Ealing films, although this scenario should be read as ironic, the pillar of Victorian values wins out. The rogues and outsiders who often prevail in Ealing films are crushed by the sense of tradition. However, this is actually a similar message to *Passport to Pimlico*, they strive for independence, but ultimately fail and return to

British rule. In both these cases, the more liberal and progressive side of Ealing is tempered and controlled by the end of the film.

The Ladykillers should be read a “meta-film” (Duguid *et al.*, 2012), one that is incredibly simple and funny on the surface, but hides an incredible amount of depth and social commentary under the surface. Mrs. Wilberforce clearly embodies the Victorian values within the film, but clearly a warped, satirical version of this generation. Similar to the warped versions of American 1950s housewives presented by Sirk. The Sirk theory suggests that everything being present on-screen must be questioned and should be deemed as ironic. This explains the anachronistic nature of the film, as if Mrs Wilberforce is living both in the present and in Victorian England, something which Barr also hints at (1998: 171), the film is literally commenting on Britain’s inability to escape its past.

Under the weight of the past the setting of *The Ladykillers* becomes a non-place, a fantasy world governed by dream-logic, created to regress into the past while shielding its protagonist from the present. The Britishness of the film, which I questioned at the beginning of the chapter, is skewed and complicated by the allusions to fantasy which reverts the representations of the lead characters back to safe comedy genre conventions and ridiculous stereotypes. The storm that brews as Mrs Wilberforce leaves the police station is a version of this, as it conforms to pathetic fallacy which would feel out of place in reality, or a film trying to imitate reality, but within the heightened film-space seems entirely appropriate. The fantasy elements can be read as movie clichés, but without these in place, the film’s plot becomes a very dark affair: Bank robbery and a plot to murder an old woman has instead been wrapped in a very nice little Ealing comedy package.

The sense of doubling is not as literal with *The Ladykillers*, the film echoes real-world issues and twists them to produce a dark reflection of the state of British society. The characters appear to have been plucked from much more wholesome films and then morphed into dark cyphers. The characters also represent larger concepts and fears, specifically Louis echoing the cold-war and One-round being the embodiment of the working-class labourer. However, at the centre of the whole film is Mrs. Wilberforce who, figuratively speaking, represents a whole generation of British rule.

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

The overall objective of this study was to explore British cinema in the 1940s-1950s and the existence and prominence of a doubling motif. Specifically linking this motif to societal issues and change in the era. The main recurring themes covered throughout the thesis are the effects of post-war trauma, propaganda, class and gender. Once stable notions of identity, such as class and gender roles, are complicated in this period of history and this thesis successfully links this fractured and unstable state to the manifestation of the doubling motif. One of the key research questions, and a major element of all the chosen films, was how this motif manifests itself specifically in British realist films, incorporating both the classical mode and the later social realist movement. This unique focus on realism forms one of the major contributions to the research, as it broadens the understanding of this motif as a key thematic trait across several genres and styles of filmmaking, not necessarily a motif that should only be examined in relation to fantasy, horror and psychological thrillers. I will be presenting the findings by referring back to the initial research questions I posed at the end of the literature review:

- How was the doubling motif depicted in post-war British cinema and what does this reveal about post-war trauma in Britain?
- How did British filmmakers address this trauma within the constraints of the realist aesthetic?
- How does the doubling motif manifest itself in relation to class issues in this era of British cinema?
- How was gender used by these filmmakers to interrogate these themes, and what does this reveal about the depiction of trauma and the doubling motif?

As discussed in the literature review, the emergence of a mirror image or double in film is often linked to a split or fracture in a character's personality. However, even when the motif is linked to an individual, the fracture predominantly represents wider British society and the impact of WWII. The doubling motif repeatedly links to Britain's struggle with its own past and with the ongoing impact of the trauma of WWII and the struggle to recover in these post-war years. The inclusion of the mirror images is not

commented on directly within these films but, as is explored throughout the thesis, there is clearly a wider thematic trait at work in British cinema during this period that utilises the appearance of this motif to explore the past; literally looking at a reflection of oneself. Rather than tackle the issues of the changing landscape of Britain, during and after the war, the double acts as a device to distance the audience from the trauma and subtlety hint at meaning. Some of films within the thesis feature an element of restraint and poise, which echoes the British character and ideals in the early 20th century. However, the films specifically highlight this as a flaw; an archaic and redundant concept that will slowly die out in the post-war period as the impact of the war starts to chip away at these principles. We see this theme play out in first two chapters.

This theme is very prominent in the first chapter covering *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* which expands on Andrew Moor's work on the film (2012b) by exploring the use of the doubling motif to further the analysis of the film. Moor hints at the idea of rejuvenation and rebirth, but does not expand on this idea, however my thesis explores this in more depth by conceptualising the film as a time travel film rather than a flashback. Reliving the failings of the past and seemingly making the same mistakes again, which is then linked to colonialism and flawed masculinity. Ian Christie (1994a: 48-49) similarly acknowledges Michael Powell's use of time shifts in several films, but again does not attach meaning to this beyond the technical skill that was employed by the director. The thesis specifically links the appearance of doubling in the film to discussions around flawed masculinity in the war time era and changing gender roles in the early 20th century. During Candy's extensive flashback he is accompanied by several different characters played by Deborah Kerr, each one a reminder of his lost love, but also a reminder of a time lost to history. As these characters die, they are replaced by a copy, a double; Candy literally trying to cling on to the memory of the past via these mirror image facsimiles. In both cases the doubling motif is identified as relating to gender, identity and changes in societal roles.

This link to the past and heritage is also prominent in the doubling device in *Kind Hearts and Coronets* via the appearance of the D'Ascoyne family, all in the image of Alec Guinness. This element of the film is discussed in many different texts, notably by Robert Murphy (1992: 213) and Charles Barr (1998: 119-130), but while the film is

linked to satirical class issues the prominence and meaning of the doubling motif is never explored. The repeating image of this character in myriad forms is a reminder of the permanence of and the impenetrable nature of the upper-class system in society. This is especially the case given the variation of the characters portrayed by Guinness and their spread across different societal fields; vicars, military officers, women's liberation protestors, etc. These doubles are destroyed within the film, but in this case they are killed off in an attempt to erase the past, so Louis can replace them and forge a new future. Raymond Durgnat (2011: 53) links the film to "wish-fulfilment" and discusses Louis attempting to become his "ego ideal", but never expands on this concept in relation to doubling or duality.

In both chapter one and two, the appearance of the double is attached to the past, either in a nostalgic sense or as a warning against repeating the past. The recurring theme of doubling can be linked to a sense of permanence across several chapters, specifically linking to memories and values carrying over, or being held on to, from previous generations. Deborah Kerr's multiple roles in *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* represented development and progress, however they also show the image of the same person striving to impact a male-dominated world. The time changes, but her determination does not. In *Kind Hearts and Coronets*, although the D'Ascoynes are technically different characters, they all represent a flawed upper-class and as such all of them are represented as faceless nonentities. Again, class and the manifestation of doubling is proved to be interlinked.

Many of the chapters also highlight an ongoing tension with wider Europe, linking this split in this post-war era to doubling and duality in British film. While the use of this binary opposition, and its broader use in propaganda, is widely discussed in literature by Drazin (2007), Moor (2012b) and Chapman (1998), this is not directly linked to an exploration of a doubling motif. This broad theme is introduced in the opening chapter via the British/German binary created by Candy/Theo in *Blimp*, whom are friends by nature but enemies by allegiance to their country. However, in chapter two the central protagonist of Louis Mazzini in *Kind Hearts* expands on this concept and develops an ongoing thread within the thesis linking doubling and splits to characters with mixed heritage or those who form a part of a diasporic community that has settled in Britain. *Kind Hearts and Coronets* deftly uses Louis's mixed British/Italian heritage to hint at

the wider tensions with Italy in the post-war era, but also creates an interesting internal struggle in which Louis is strangely proud of his British roots but has a deep loathing of his European ancestry. This idea of Louis being xenophobic against himself, is an interesting comment on Britain's growing tensions with its own multiculturalism. I also build on Michael Newton's work (2003) by furthering his concept of Louis playing a role; essentially being an actor. I expand this theory by discussing the root cause of this split personality by specifically linking this to the post-war tension between Britain and Europe, but also the nature of one's persona, and heritage, being split between these two opposing forces.

This tension between Britain and the rest of the world is explored further through the character Johnny in *Pool of London* in chapter three. He symbolises the growth of multiculturalism in Britain, but also embodies a more prescient exploration of issues surrounding the struggles of diasporic community to integrate their own culture into the British way of life. I expand on Paul Gilroy's concept of "doubleness" (1993: 4) by using *Pool of London* as a filmic representation of his concept, discussing issues around cultural diversity that are particularly relevant given the film's position between Windrush and the later Notting Hill riots. The concept of "Doubleness" and trying to hold on to one's culture while simultaneously embracing elements of British culture is also be linked to Maria's experience of becoming a British citizen in *Secret People*. In her case, the multiple personas she adopts throughout the film link not only to a doubling and duality motif but also lay out the struggles of white Europeans settling in a country that is clearly still suspicious after the war. These suspicions and fears, and the spy plotline, also mirror many of the fears in the 1950s regarding the onset of the cold war. While Tony Shaw (2001: 47) discusses many facets of the cold war on film, *Secret People* is largely ignored and dismissed as a case study. This is also the case in Charles Barr's work (1998) and in the *Ealing Revisited* collection (Duguid *et al.*, 2012), so its inclusion in this thesis and its links to doubling are new areas of study.

Secret People is also used to prove that the doubling motif can be linked to the reappearance of the past. Maria encounters several people from her past who disrupt and reshape her present life: The killer of her father General Galbern reappears; then Louis her ex-lover who coerces her into the resistance. In a film that has deception and multiple personas at its centre, it is interesting that, again, these doubling motifs

appear to be used to explore her past. Further to this, especially in relation to Galbern, it also engages in a debate about Europe's past in the years preceding WWII. In this regard the film is particularly interested in using the doubling device as a way to engage with real-life trauma in a retroactive way by exploring and examining this era of history through Maria's own, fictional but very prophetic, traumatic history. This is a sustained theme in *Secret People*, but it can also be seen in sections of *Colonel Blimp*, in particular the use of the three versions of Deborah Kerr which link back to past memories within the film.

Caroline Ruddell (2013) and David Pirie (2008) link doubles, doppelgangers and split personalities to a person's darker half and unfettered desires. This concept is used and refocused within the thesis to highlight the darker themes within many of the case studies, and more importantly, to link this to post-war fears. Using primarily realist films is also departure from these texts and a new avenue of study. Within this thesis's realist parameters, the study of monsters and psychological trauma on screen are replaced by more grounded vessels such as spies, thieves and petty criminals. These character types are naturally linked to the concept of duality, as they are in the business of deceiving people. As the concept of a double is often linked to a darker half, it is unsurprising that moral ambiguities appear to go hand in hand with the doubling motif across several chapters: the murders in *Kind Hearts*; smuggling and bank robberies in *Pool of London*; the double-agent in *Secret People*; Frank's delinquent rehabilitation in *The Sleeping Tiger*; the robbery and killing of an old woman in *The Ladykillers*. The questioning of moral boundaries in all of these examples links to societal issues in the post-war era, specifically the loosening of moral codes and traditions. This, obviously, can also be read in the opposite direction; not a loosening of morals, but actually a move away from traditional values of the past. Within the later films, such as *The Sleeping Tiger* and *The Ladykillers*, seemingly evil characters are forced to revert back to these traditional values through the events with the narrative. The general notion being that returning to these values will give them a sense of redemption, and this in turn creates the sense of duality and tension between the generations within the films. As is highlighted by these examples, it is interesting that moral choices are often guided by a British sense of honour and tradition, rather than a sense of right or wrong. This theme is explored in some depth in chapter five as *The Sleeping Tiger's* Frank acts as a mirror of society in the 1950s as it explores the

contemporary issue regarding juvenile delinquents. Again, the doubling motif is clearly present in narratives regarding unrest and change in society.

Class is discussed throughout all of the chapters, but not always as a crude middle-class versus working-class dichotomy, as clearly certain hierarchies and positions transcend simplistic class boundaries. The main findings in the thesis relate more to the removal of more traditional class boundaries and the impact is often accompanied by the manifestation of the doubling motif. *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* features Clive Candy in the role of a high-ranking officer being undermined by younger officers but also counterpoints this with the demise of other structures as it depicts the final years of colonial British rule. *Kind Hearts and Coronets* is the most class-critical of the chosen films as it depicts Louis claiming his birthright via the removal of the people above him in the chain of inheritance; he literally murders his way up the social hierarchy to become a duke. As already discussed, the complexity of Louis resenting the people above him in this hierarchy of lineage, but also wanting to essentially become one of them, is another example of the duality of the class system in this period. The idea of the working-classes 'daydreaming upwards' in the post-war years and looking towards a future where social mobility is more achievable is something that is, rather cynically, explored via the satirical tone in the film, and Louis's murders represent the frustration at the rigidity and historical lack of movement in the class system in Britain.

Raymond Durnat's assertion that "race is a form of class" (2011: 300) is relevant in *Pool of London*, in a very direct sense due to the racism faced by Johnny, but this can also be applied to *Secret People* as Maria is similarly placed lower on the social ladder due to her place of origin. Frank in *The Sleeping Tiger* is privileged, middle-class and well-educated, but has fallen from grace and into a life of crime. He is often seen abusing these elements of his social capital in an attempt to force a hierarchy despite his criminal behaviours; we see this very specifically in his abuse of the working-class maid. *The Ladykillers* tackles class through the use of the working-class character of One-Round, but also through their disguise of a classical quintet; literally masking themselves behind the class system, so they appear high-class and cultured to avoid suspicion. Among other topics, the doubling motif that is featured in these films relates to Britain's struggles with the class system, especially as these boundaries began to

shift in the 1950s as we moved into the 'age of affluence'. With these changes we start to see a displacement of more rigid class structures which, in turn, starts to impact and complicate the prescribed sense of class roles in this era. This also expands the concept of the 'social problem' cycle of films in the 1950s, as discussed by John Hill (1986), by proving that the doubling motif appears to run alongside some of these films, specifically in the case of *Pool of London* and *The Sleeping Tiger*.

Class interlinks heavily with academic discussions regarding community spirit, consensus and the notion of the 'People's War'. This is particularly key in many discussion regarding Ealing studios, such as Freeman (2012) and Higson (2000: 45). Andrew Spicer (2003: 28) discusses this notion of the 'People's war' in relation to expected ethical frameworks and also directly links this to Ealing's Michael Balcon and his approach to many film productions in this era. A major theme throughout several chapters is the myth of the 'People's war' on-screen alongside the reality of the erosion of community spirit in the real world. This thesis repeatedly examines this space between these two conflicting elements and links this struggle on film to the appearance of doubling. In effect, the doubling motif appears to break through the myth and propaganda of the cosy communities being depicted on-screen. This notion of community spirit is something that wains as we move further away from WWII and into the 1950s. The films I selected and analysed are partially responsible for this move towards a more cynical outlook and can be seen to actively question the sense of camaraderie. In essence these films depict the fractured nature of the country after the war by highlighting the duality of the public consensus which is slowly drifting away from community spirit and creeping towards individualism. The doubling motif is directly linked to the breakdown of this community spirit and manifests itself in films that appear to be torn between the altruistic nature of the past and the more self-serving future.

Gender is discussed in several chapters and while the doubling is not necessarily linked to male/female oppositions in most cases, it does however link doubling to changing gender roles and expectations in the post-war period. Flawed masculinity, a theme that is introduced in chapter one, is a particularly prevalent across many of the male protagonists and can be seen as a major factor in triggering some of the fractured personas seen in the films. Andrew Spicer's book on *Typical Men: The Representation*

of Masculinity in British cinema (2003) is used as a building block to identify some of these masculine traits on film, especially when those that mimic society. The book's aim is to identify these character traits, whereas my thesis massively expands on these readings and delves into the root cause of some of these masculine issues in film and attaches the doubling motif to some of these flawed characteristics. For example, in the opening sequence of *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp*, Clive Candy's humiliation in the Turkish bath creates the split which starts the travel back in time to relive his youth. The split and transformation allowing him to escape reality. Louis in *Kind Hearts* is also split into different personas, but this time due to his inability to accept his social standing. He repeatedly dresses up as different characters to deceive people but also cannot bear to be himself in and around the upper classes. Frank in *The Sleeping Tiger* similarly plays different roles; the criminal, the thug, the lover, and finally we see the final well-rounded version of him at the end of the movie. Rather than seeing Frank split, we actually see him get pieced back together by the end of the film. All three of these characters fail to live up to their own, or society's, traditional expectations of masculinity. They use these different personas as a form of escapism, and this is clearly each film attempting to open up a debate about the fragility of masculinity in the post-war period using duality as a subtle narrative device.

The thesis engages with many of Sue Harper's debates regarding women in British film, especially in instances where women are portrayed as an "...emotional underclass..." (Harper, 2000: 67). Harper engages with several films by Basil Deardon, Thorold Dickinson and Joseph Losey, but does not discuss *Pool of London*, *Secret People* or *The Sleeping Tiger* in her work. These films are covered extensively in this thesis so can be considered a new area of study. The women in a lot of the chosen films directly link to the doubling motif, and this appears to be associated more with resilience during this era, rather than escapism. Maria in *Secret People* is the most obvious example of this trope, as her multiple personalities relate to her adapting to her circumstance to ensure her future. Changing her name to fit into British life; becoming an agent to avenge her father's death; changing her appearance to go undercover and avoid being killed. These persona shifts are forced upon her, rather than the male equivalent where they are running away from their true selves. The multiple women in *Blimp*, in the guise of Edith, Barbara and 'Johnny', track the development of women in the early 20th century and are seen as an example of the

way women developed and adapted in this era. Glenda in *The Sleeping Tiger* hides a lot of her true self behind the façade of a middle-class housewife to fit into society. The implication here being that this is something women have had to endure, playing second to her husband. The appearance of Frank, a metaphor for the change in society, awakens her true self. Linking back to Harper, this does highlight further examples of women being portrayed as an underclass; while the doubling motif is linked to wish fulfilment and escapism for men, gratifying their needs and wants, it relates more to adaptability for women in this era.

A major recurring theme throughout the chapters is that of transformations and escapism. Many of the characters drift into fantasy worlds to escape reality: Clive Candy entering the pool; Louis entering the painting. However, as these are presented as realistic, they can easily be mistaken for simplistic narrative devices, a way to move from A to B, rather than the films leaning into more complex fantastical realms. *Pool of London* and *The Ladykillers* similarly hold on to a claim of reality by using London as their setting. However, both versions of London are slightly twisted and don't resemble real London at all: *Pool of London* mixes traditional London landmarks with a strange air of American film noir; *The Ladykillers* mimics a sinister version of a cosy London borough. The doubling motif is clearly present not just in characters and narratives, but also in larger elements such as geographical spaces. Andrew Moor (2012b), Charles Barr (1998), Tony Williams (2000) and Robert Murphy (2012) all hint at alterative and horrific readings of some of the realist films in this era, however these are not fully explored or developed in these texts.

While there are issues around the categorisation of films that slot into the British realist tradition, as the parameters for defining this are often not entirely tangible, it can be argued that the films selected in this thesis are fairly grounded in a sense of reality. This is referring specifically to the lack of films that include fantastical elements in this thesis (i.e. horror, fantasy, sci-fi). Linking back to Andrew Moor's comments regarding the nature of realist British films in this period, he argues that these understated and restrained elements are "...qualities which echo ideas about national character" (2012b: 5). This is discussed by Robert Murphy (1992), Charles Drazin (2007), James Chapman (1998) and many others. As illustrated throughout the thesis, these realist films do use this façade of the restrained national character to mask the darker

elements with the films. They also feature elements that, looked at more laterally rather literally, can be attached to more complex metaphysical concepts. The use of more realist films is one of the unique contributions to this field of research. Ultimately, through the exploration of a set of films that do not naturally appear relevant to the concepts of doubling and duality, it has unearthed several interesting facets to films that have been widely ignored in this type of film analysis.

In relation to the continuance of this research, my thesis primarily focuses on the period between 1943 to 1955 based on Britain being in a state of flux due to the impact of WWII. With the beginning of 1956 several films and cycles began to emerge which more closely tackle the issues highlighted in my thesis, but in a much more direct fashion. The British New Wave cycle begins to directly portray the disillusionment of the younger generation in the post-war era and directly tackles the class divides I analysed in chapter two and chapter five. Two of the films from this later cycle can be seen as directly linking to the films discussed in my thesis and I believe this to be an area that could be expanded on in a further studies. *Kind Hearts and Coronets* plays out as a satirical precursor *Room at the Top* (Jack Clayton, 1958), with their connecting themes of social mobility and greed. *Look Back in Anger* (Tony Richardson, 1959) similarly tackles the tension between classes but also echoes some of the anger and disillusionment we see in Dirk Bogarde's Frank in *The Sleeping Tiger*. Similar to my chosen films, the British New Wave cycle of films do not appear to be suited to a methodology including conceptual ideas around doubling, but this would be a logical continuation of my research and there is potential for some interesting work in this field, especially if linked back to earlier filmic examples. As this more socially conscious realist filmmaking forms a larger part of a British film in the following years, with Ken Loach and Mike Leigh, there is also scope for this study to also look towards the 1970s and beyond.

The other major filmic cycle that appears at the end of my study's timeframe is Hammer horror. Many of the early films produced by Hammer horror include themes of doubling through either transformation or the creation of different versions of oneself: *The Quatermass Xperiment* (Val Guest, 1955), *The Curse of Frankenstein* (Terence Fisher, 1957) and *Dracula* (Terence Fisher, 1958) are clear examples of these tropes. In essence, the doubling motif explored in many of my chapters shifts

from a subtle metaphor into a much bolder and more graphic depiction of transformations often including horrific body horror or the creation of monsters. These depictions are corporeal in form and therefore are a much more literal reference to changes within people and/or society. Linking Hammer horror directly to some areas of my study would be an advantageous approach as there is a continuation of a theme but across vastly different genres. Sarah Street has made a connection between Ealing and Hammer stating that “The nightmarish undercurrent of repressed fantasies and sexual tensions forms a surprising connection between Ealing and Hammer Horror” (2009: 80). David Pirie (2008: 9-13) also touches upon the links and conflicts between horror and realism, specifically making reference to Michael Powell’s attempt to bring the horror genre into a realistic contemporary setting with *Peeping Tom* (Michael Powell, 1960) which almost led to the end of his directing career due to the public’s inability to comprehend a film utilising a more realistic approach to such a dark subject matter. Pirie’s example points to another potential continuation of research around doubling and psychological horror in films after 1960 and how they begin to embrace realism as a style of production in the horror genre.

The on-running theme of each chapter is that Britain is broken and damaged in the post-war period, and the scars and wounds left by the trauma of the war are starting to burst open under this pressure and this seeps into the films of this era. The trauma of the war is very rarely explicitly mentioned within the films, barring a few little hints within the narrative and some subtle visual references, but the long-lasting impact is embedding into the fabric of each film in a unique way. The doubling motif, similarly, appears in many different guises but again this can be directly linked to these post-war issues and works as a way to highlight the duality and sense of flux in a country attempting to rebuild itself after the war. The main findings from the research are that the doubling motif manifests around these key areas of societal change and instability in British film, mimicking the split in society. Specific areas of instability are very prominent in relation to the doubling motif; the loss of community spirit and traditional values, tensions with Europe, class roles, the widening generational gap and the impact of changing gender roles.

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Fig.1

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Fig. 2

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Fig. 6

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Fig. 12

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Fig. 20

The Third Man (1949) Carol Reed (Bluray). Studiocanal.

Fig. 20

It Always Rains on Sunday (1947) Robert Hamer (Bluray). Studiocanal.

Daniel Bell

Fig. 57

Spellbound (1945) Alfred Hitchcock (DVD). Prism Leisure Corporation

Fig. 59

The Damned (1962) Joseph Losey (Bluray). Powerhouse Films

Fig. 82

The Third Man (1949) Carol Reed (Bluray). Studiocanal.

Fig. 84

Imitation of Life (1959) Douglas Sirk (DVD). Universal Pictures Video