

## **HUMANITIES INSTITUTE**

*Burak Sevingen, MA*

# **LITERARY CHARACTERS IN JOSEF VON STERNBERG'S FILMS**

## **OUTLINE of CHARACTERS** (Experience – Social –Work – Psychology)

### **Experience**

#### **1. OPEN**

- Imaginative (1) The Boy
- Lively (1) Bill
- Adventurous (1) Lily
- Sensitive (1) Thunderbolt
- Social (1) Catherine
- Visible (1) Bull
- Talkative (1) Trumble
- Transparent (1) Bob

#### **2. CLOSED**

- Lifeless (4) Alexander, Mae, Peter, Doc
- Nontraditional (1) Conchita
- Asocial (4) Boy, Rath, Peter, Keiko
- Secretive (6) Clyde, Catherine, Gin, X-27, Omar, Guy
- Quiet (2) Nick, Lily

### **Social**

#### **3. AGREEABLE**

- Friendly (2) Porfiry, Bull Weed
- Loving (5) Raskalnikov, Bill, X-27, Amy J., La Bessier
- Helpful (5) Sonja, Natalie, Don Pasquale, Keiko, La Bessier
- Engaged (1) Mae
- Trusting (1) Roberta
- Loyal (1) X-27

#### **4. DISAGREEABLE**

- Vanity (3) Raskolnikov, Bill, Amanuma
- Disloyal (1) Lola
- Dishonest (4) Clyde, H. Chang, Major L., Kranau
- Cruel (1) Ned
- Unfriendly (1) Kusakabe

### **Work**

#### **5. CONSCIENTIOUS**

- Determined (3) Natalia, Bill, Helen
- Controlled (1) La Bessier
- Successful (1) Catherine
- Responsible (1) Tom
- Planner (1) Rath, Gin

#### **6. UNCONSCIENTIOUS**

- Failure (1) Peter

### **Psychology**

#### **7. EMOTIONAL**

- Unstable (2) Raskalnikov, Poppy
- Insecure (2) Clyde, Doc
- Scornful (1) Alexander
- Coward (1) Boy

- Unhappy (1) Mae
- Dissatisfied (1) Clyde
- Anxious (2) Roberta, Lily
- Obsessed (2) Kusakabe, Don Pasquale
- Moody (1) Judie

## 8. RATIONAL

- Calm (2) Poppy, Nick
- Brave (1) Antonio
- Satisfied (1) Don Pasquale
- Confident (1) Lola

## Experience

### 1. OPEN

#### Imaginative

**Boy** (*The Salvation Hunters*) Even when there is no hope that their situation would improve, The Boy keeps daydreaming about the grand times to come—his fantasy features a footman (resembling a live tin soldier) who leads a trio of majestically uniformed servants that escort the couple to their mansion.

#### Lively

**Bill Roberts** (*The Docks of New York*) The physically imposing Bill is a force to be reckoned with; at the same time, he is a likeable simpleton. The burly stoker substitutes “mannerism for emotion”<sup>i</sup>; he surprisingly moves delicately, almost like a ballet dancer—notice how he saves Mae at the wharf; he does not jump from the pier with a splash, but only after tossing his cigarette and taking off his jacket, he quietly and slowly lets himself into the water.

The Sandbar doesn’t exactly welcome Bill; instead, he is greeted there with testosterone rivalry. It takes him to decisively and quickly overpower an array of aggressive types to establish his machismo—then it is finally time to show off muscles in front of the mirror and let Mae appreciate his many tattoos from exotic lands. Actor George Bancroft (*Stagecoach*, *Angels with Dirty Faces*, *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town*) played tough guys many times; he made four films with von Sternberg (*Underworld*, *Thunderbolt*—Bancroft nominated for an Oscar, *The Drag Net*—a lost film).

Bill works hard and parties hard. The tramp ship’s boiler room is his home, except for the occasional respite when the cargo reaches the destination port. The raunchy seaman has girlfriends at several ports—he has their names etched on his arm, which is full of tattoos. Bill is cheerful and always ready for a good brawl. His arrival to the Sandbar is marked by jostling and tussling with about half a dozen individuals; ultimately, the foreman Andy earns a punch from Bill for bothering Mae. She likes this boisterous, amusing, and larger-than-life character.

Bill and fellow stokers at the boiler room of the steamer stand in front of graffiti scribbled on the wall—a collage of chalked female names and associated nude figures. The men are covered in coal dust and sweat; there is steam all around. Deep shadows contrast sharply with bright light coming from the opening to the deck, as well as flames occasionally bursting out from the furnaces. The heavily stylized representation of men’s bodies contrasts with the chalked and simplistic outlines on the wall. This machismo aesthetics is cinematographically not unlike von Sternberg’s glamorous portrayal of female leads Evelyn Brent, Marlene Dietrich, Gene Tierney, and others. In *The Docks of New York*, Betty Compson as Mae is as beautiful and alluring as any of von Sternberg’s other female leads, but the focus on hyper-masculinity is exclusive to this 1928 film.

#### Adventurous

**Shanghai Lily** (*Shanghai Express*) The moment she arrives at the Peking station, Lily causes a stir on board the train. Someone mentions that she is a “coaster”—and explains that the word means a “woman who lives by her wits.” She has lived in China for the last eight years. The adventuress on board the oneiric Chinese train has made significant contribution to the persona of Marlene Dietrich and the character has had an enduring legacy on popular culture—designer Tom Ford’s luxury fashion house has paid homage to the notorious courtesan with a fragrance, its *Shanghai Lily eau de parfum*—dubbed “tantalizing, opulent, elegant.”<sup>iii</sup>

### Sensitive

**Thunderbolt** (*Thunderbolt*) When Bob’s mother pleads with Thunderbolt to acknowledge her son’s innocence, Ritzie also begs him, acknowledging that he is “fair,” in spite of his violence and criminality. Bob’s affectionate side is underscored by his fondness for the stray dog, which remains in his cell until the end. Similar to Marlene Dietrich’s black cat in *Dishonored*, the interaction with the dog provides some insight to the character; it shows that Thunderbolt is capable of compassion.

### Social

**Catherine II** (*The Scarlet Empress*) Princess Sophia Frederica becomes Catherine; she is cut off from her family, her religious and national identities are replaced by new ones. Initially, the innocent young woman has trouble adapting to the new setting, but learns quickly and eventually thrives in the intrigue-laden and corrupt environment.

Little Sophia has a strong-willed and ambitious mother who doesn’t want her to play with toys—“she is seven!” she admonishes her nanny. Her mother would like her to grow up quickly and make a successful marriage. In Russia, she will be subjugated by another powerful mother figure, Empress Elizabeth. When she first arrives in Moscow, Catherine is innocent, polite, and sweet-natured. She is expected to be a submissive and obedient wife; the question is, will she play along?

Catherine’s adaptation entails her transformation from ingénue to a debauchee. This transformation parallels her struggle to survive and attain power in the palace. Is Catherine a seductress? The process of her sexual empowerment leads to political power in a network of relations, where promiscuity is more or less the norm.

### Visible

**“Bull” Weed** (*Underworld*) The flamboyant Bull is full of hyperbole. He is an extrovert who likes displays of power and craves the attention. However, when he is convicted and read his sentence at the court, he appears tamed and clueless—as the judge reprimands him about his criminal lifestyle. Super strong and defiant on the surface, Bull is a child at the core.

### Talkative

**Trumble** (*Macao*) Dealer of coconut oil, pearly buttons, fertilizers and nylon stockings is in fact a New York detective sent to lure Macao’s gambling kingpin out of the three-mile zone, where he can be arrested by the international police. The happy-go-lucky and good-natured character is able to deceive Halloran and everyone else about his real identity. William Bendix plays the voluble and cheerful salesman. Bendix had been in Hitchcock’s *Lifeboat*; he was also well-known as the star of the radio show *The Life of Riley*, in which he voiced the gullible and clumsy factory worker. In *Macao*, the one person who looks as if he has nothing to hide turns out to be the deceiver. The friendly and jovial salesman is the New York detective who is after Halloran.

## Transparent

**Bob Moran** (*Thunderbolt*) After getting fired, Bob tries to keep up his spirits at home and his mother does her best to console him. There is a lengthy scene when the two jovially joke and laugh in the bathroom as she attends to his hand wound (Bob has just punched Thunderbolt's associate and the mobster's arrival is imminent.) Mother and son try to appear optimistic to Ritzie, but can hardly conceal how disheartened they are. At the end, Bob's innocence is established and he is saved from the death penalty, but he will soon be joining the ranks of scores of unemployed. Bob Moran and his mother anticipate Clyde and Mrs. Griffiths in von Sternberg's *An American Tragedy*; which similarly culminates in a death sentence and the mother pleading for the life of her son.

## **2. CLOSED**

### Lifeless

**Alexander** (*The Last Command*). In 1917, Alexander was watchful and domineering; nothing of that remains a decade later, as he is humble, weary, and insecure. He walks around with a head tremor and bleary eyes. This second character is the polar opposite of his previous self. The fascinating aspect of *The Last Command* is that, the bleary-eyed Alexander gets to portray the eagle-eyed version of himself.

**Mae** (*The Docks of New York*) Mae is presumably a prostitute who has lost her desire to live. She is introduced as a silhouette reflected on the dark and still water of the harbor. If Bill did not happen to be passing that spot on the pier, her suicide attempt would have been a success. It is only later, when he takes her to the shack and after she is resuscitated, that we get to see her face. The happy-go-lucky stoker is baffled that she would want to quit life. Bill's zest for living and his various antics uplift her mood and she decides to try once again.

Mae is disillusioned and suicidal; even after she recovers from her near drowning at the wharf, she is sullen. When she recuperates and laments her failure to die, Bill's immediate and uncalculated reply is "all right. Make believe you died—make believe you're starting all over again." This line proves to be effective. Bill's buffoonery and optimism counterbalances her lassitude. He boastfully claims that if she would only give him a chance and accompany him for the night, she would change her mind about suicide. He raises her spirits and she gradually comes to think of a new life with him as a way out of her despondency.

**Peter the Great** (*The Scarlet Empress*) Peter's eyes are constantly shiny, as if he has just cried or laughed really hard, but his blank stare reveals no emotions. People refer to him as a halfwit and imbecile; Empress Elizabeth obviously thinks similarly of her nephew. Years of being looked down has turned Peter into an introvert, who is content with his own peculiarities. Peter is either busy with his toy soldiers or the real ones—his Hessian guard—a modern infantry unit (as opposed to the traditional Cossack cavalry). He likes to march them around when the weather permits and inside the palace when it is rainy—the indoor parade scene is introduced by a humorous intertitle to underscore his eccentricity.

**Doc Harvey** (*Shanghai Express*) The passengers speak somewhat monotonously; when von Sternberg was asked about this, he explained that it was intentional that their speech and conversations were slow, in order to mimic the rhythm of train.<sup>iii</sup> This is particularly true of Harvey, who is laconic and stiff. As the leading man, he may be less than charming, but he helps to direct the spotlight on Marlene Dietrich.

### Asocial

**Boy** (*The Salvation Hunters*) The Boy is a good-natured introvert; he is an optimist who lives a better life in his dreams. His self-contentment and lack of ambition frustrates The Girl.

**Professor Rath** (*The Blue Angel*) Rath's antisocial ways and clumsiness amuses Lola Lola. He spends his time alone in his lodging and is totally out of his habitat in the back streets of the town and The

Blue Angel. The tension in the story builds upon Rath's infatuation with Lola Lola, for whom he steps out of his secure existence. He gives up his position at the high school, which meant for him not only a job, but an opportunity to be masterful. His infatuation leads to total loss of power. Rath is coerced (by Kiepert) and coaxed (by Lola Lola) to accept the ultimate humiliation and appear on stage in his home town as a clown—specifically an Auguste clown. At the end, Emil Jannings comes up with an unsettling and memorable portrayal of insanity, perhaps one of the greatest in the history of film. Can you think of comparable examples?

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**Keiko** (*Anatahan*) Keiko and Kusakabe are accustomed to living in Anatahan in total seclusion—their established way of life gets disturbed by the sudden arrival of a dozen castaways. Kusakabe is unfriendly and Keiko is cautiously distant to the strangers, who immediately take note of her beauty. Keiko remains reserved for a long time; the small island offers little opportunity for privacy and encounters between her and the sailors are frequent. It appears that she intimately savors the attention.

### Secretive

**Clyde Griffiths** (*An American Tragedy*) Clyde is Stony-faced. Newspaper coverage of *People v. Gillette* was extensive in 1906 and the defendant's actions, as well as demeanor were reported in detail. "Unruffled" was the word used in one front-page article to describe Chester Gillette.<sup>iv</sup> Most of the time, it is difficult to understand what Clyde is thinking and what his pouted lips signify. Clyde is stolid during the initial phase of the trial when his life is at stake and at its conclusion—when all is lost; but that was pretty much how he had always been. When his rich relatives had invited him to their home, he was basically polite and appreciative, but more interestingly, he was unresponsive to their derogatory remarks. His "opacity"<sup>v</sup> contrasts with Roberta's transparency. It is possible that he is just as clueless about his own character—as he puts it himself during the trial: "You see, I never had any real plans to do anything."

When he didn't immediately get what he wanted from Roberta, Clyde was able to confuse her with his cold and expressionless face; when she finally relented, there was an indication of triumph and a half-smile on his still impassive face. Later, he smiles once again, at a most unlikely moment, in the denouement, when his death sentence is announced. Fascinating scene and great acting by Phillips Holmes—Clyde is an unsympathetic yet complex character.

**Catherine II** (*The Scarlet Empress*) Long and masterful shot of Catherine during the religious ceremony shows her behind a veil. In this scene, the archimandrite is baptizing her as a Russian Orthodox. The sequence is captivating because of her ambivalence. Her husband Peter is also there, malevolently grinning as usual; Catherine is obviously concerned and seems to be taking thoughtful glances in his direction. There is also Count Alexei; at this stage, the two are enamored with each other. In a conventional melodrama, this scene could have pointed out to love and her bonding with Alexei as a solution to her entrapment in the palace. Despite lack of dialogue, lengthy shots of her veiled face imply that she is on her own and is not looking for a savior. Alexei is standing in the hall somewhere, just as Peter is. She will soon recognize the Count as the womanizer that he is and teach him a humiliating lesson. Von Sternberg's use of light and shadows highlight Catherine's ambivalence and independence.

**Gin Sling** (*The Shanghai Gesture*) "Mother" Gin Sling is a self-made and very well-connected businesswoman who—to put it mildly—operates in the grey areas of the law. Her background is only partially revealed. There are very few known facts about her: the older woman that appears by her side as

a silent confidant, “The Amah,” is the mother figure in her life and Gin Sling was at one time briefly married to Charteris.

“Who are you? What’s behind this mask of yours?” cries Guy Charteris, feeling cornered as Gin Sling drops a hint of his secretive past. Actress Ona Munson not only impersonates an Asian, she seems to carry a mask that reveals little about her real emotions. Her mood shifts, voice, and mannerism indicate contempt, fear, and cunning; however, her facial features remain more or less the same.

**X-27 (*Dishonored*)** Her real name—Marie Kolverer—is uttered only once in the film. Not much is known about her background, except that she is a Great War-widow and works as a streetwalker. These reveal little about her personality; more insight is provided by the dangling and bouncing sewn dolls in her room, her piano playing, cutouts from magazines on her walls, and above all, her black cat that follows her everywhere.

X-27 hardly reveals her emotions. She is stoic in the face of danger and reserved during moments of emotional intensity. Even her voice sounds more or less similar in diverse contexts; e.g. “what appeals to me is the chance to serve my country” has a similar intonation to “will you take off my gloves?” Her apathy and sphinx-like demeanor pose a difficulty for the men who interact with her, not just her admirers, but also someone like the Chief of the Secret Service. She seems to enjoy flirting with Kranau, but the next moment she doesn’t hesitate to kill him by pulling the trigger of her pistol (previously—wisely—unloaded by him). It appears that this particular mannerism and ambivalence is a key aspect of the iconic Marlene Dietrich image, just as important as her allure and the Travis Banton costumes.

**Omar (*The Shanghai Gesture*)** Omar the charming gigolo operates as a semi-autonomous contractor in the casino and is instrumental in Gin Sling’s manipulation of individuals. Nothing is known about his past, except for his claim that he was born in Damascus and his father was an Armenian tobacco dealer. Omar defines his role at the casino as being an errand boy for the omnipotent “Mother” Gin Sling. “A trifle shady,” one character calls Omar, mainly because he “carries water on both shoulders without spilling any ... a go-between,” whose loyalty can be bought. When he seems to be passionately flirting with Poppy, Omar makes sure to make extra cash by reaching out to her father in order to sell the necklace she lost in a game of roulette.

**Guy Charteris (*The Shanghai Gesture*)** The entrepreneur is in Shanghai to launch a large scale development project. Thanks to the vast funds he controls, Charteris is able to buy a chunk of land in the downtown district. Initially not much is known about Charteris and his past, except for his wealth and that he has a daughter who has just graduated from a Swiss school. One hint about this character comes from Dixie Pomeroy, who implies that he is a womanizer—mentioning his “orderly/flunkey,” who takes care of his dirty work. Suave looking gentleman comes to Shanghai with the backing of a huge corporation and exceptional personal wealth. The “Sir” prefix also identifies him as an aristocrat, apt for someone who is not hiding his colonizing ambitions. However, it turns out that like Gin Sling, Charteris has a checkered past. Gin Sling reveals that he is just as blemished as she is. His claim to aristocracy and refined manners serve to mask his shadowy past. The finale reveals that “Sir” Charteris’ real name was Victor Dawson. He belongs to the same league of fake and shady characters, together with Gin Sling and Omar.

**Amy Jolly (*Morocco*)** Amy Jolly is alluring and pleasant, but hardly transparent; she reveals very little about her past (the long gone sable coat is a hint to a more prosperous lifestyle) and her emotions (she waits to be fully sure that Tom Brown loves her, before she admits her feelings about him).

## Quiet

**Nick Cochran (*Macao*)** At the time, Robert Mitchum was an established star, famous mostly for *Out of the Past* and his other films noir (his darker characterizations in *The Night of the Hunter* and *Cape Fear* were yet to come). Mitchum’s low-key performance here almost suggests lassitude, yet it is quite apt for the portrayal of a war veteran who has been perpetually drifting. To Judie Benton, Cochran reveals his

vulnerable side; how he felt alone on the New Year's Eve in the Times Square and why he later refused a job offer to manage a plantation on a Melanesian island—because of his fear of loneliness.

**Shanghai Lily** (*Shanghai Express*) With *Shanghai Express*, “Dietrich’s screen persona of disillusioned world weariness was clinched.”<sup>vi</sup> The characters, particularly Shanghai Lily (and Harvey), languorously mimic the pace of the train.<sup>vii</sup> She doesn’t speak much and when she does, it is not so much her words that matter, but movement and mannerism, engulfed in chiaroscuro. Von Sternberg demonstrates his “ability to suggest the inner emotional experience, merely with a control of light and shadow.”<sup>viii</sup>

## Social

### 3. AGREEABLE

#### Friendly

**Inspector Porfiry** (*Crime and Punishment*) Like Raskolnikov, Porfiry has a dual nature: he is kind and cordial towards the eccentric criminologist, but his underlings and the detainees fear him. Porfiry meets Raskolnikov after having read his article. He is an admirer and treats him like an esteemed colleague. He amiably puts up with Raskolnikov’s antics and sarcasm. Ultimately, the inspector’s friendly attitude confuses Raskolnikov and his arrogance results in self-incriminating moments. The eagle-eyed inspector is often cheerful and friendly, but he is always watchful and does not fail to notice Raskolnikov’s culpability. Not before long, Porfiry is certain of his guilt, even though substantial evidence is lacking.

Raskolnikov may act way too relaxed in the presence of Porfiry, but make no mistake, the cordial figure is a senior police official in Imperial Russia and people obviously fear him. He acknowledges that inspiring fear (“of law or the god”) is his main instrument for securing confessions. The scenes that take place at the police station do not show violence, but the detainee (the drunken painter who was wrongfully apprehended for the murder of the pawnbroker) appears terrified—he was evidently interrogated under torture. As a consequence, the man soon confesses, which temporarily relaxes Raskolnikov.

**“Bull” Weed** (*Underworld*) Bull is strong enough to bend a coin and strikes fear in rival mobsters—but von Sternberg is less interested in recounting his daring crimes than exploring his displays of emotion and interactions with other characters. Bull generously helps Rolls Royce get “on his feet”; he finds him an honest job, gives him cash, and settles him comfortably at his old hideout. In return, he wants nothing—“I help people, people don’t help me”, Bull laughingly says. The Robin Hood of gangsters is not only presented sympathetically, he is at the center of the plot—this is the quality that leads to *Underworld* being called the first modern gangster film.

#### Loving

**Raskolnikov** (*Crime and Punishment*) Raskolnikov is both loving and hateful. A title card introduces the central theme of *Crime and Punishment* as human hearts’ response “to love and hate; pity and terror”. An aspect of Raskolnikov’s dualism is his capacity for love and hate. He is compassionate towards his sister and mother, as well as his friend Dmitri. His love for Sonya brings an end to his suffering by confessing his crime and feeling relieved. On the other hand, the encounter with the pawnbroker demonstrates his capacity for hate. He also has a tendency to demonstrate contempt when faced with official figures such as the clerk at the police station and Antonya’s obnoxious fiancé who has two government positions.

**Bill Roberts** (*The Docks of New York*) Bill may be vulgar, but he eventually reveals his sensitive side. The sewing scene is climactic because of the tension—is Bill going to leave Mae for good or is there a chance that he might choose to end his seafaring and settle down? When she fails to thread the needle

because of her watery eyes, Bill does it for her; he can no longer pretend to ignore her sorrow and his mannerism shows how affectionate and confused he is. If it was not for the corrosive influence of Steve pulling him, perhaps Bill's decision to unite with Mae would not have to wait for the denouement at the night court.

**X-27 (*Dishonored*)** "You are a cheat and a liar" says Kranau, realizing that X-27 is asking him to stay longer so that she can get him captured. It is a little unclear at what point her love for him prevails; ultimately, she sacrifices herself to let him live. Up until that climactic moment, her feelings are possibly ambiguous; she is infatuated with him and yet also focused on getting the better of him as an adversary. Kranau is confused by the danger she poses and says he detests it—"you bring something into war that doesn't belong in it; you trick men into death with your body." Yet, he also adds that her dangerous side makes her "even more exciting." The lethal quality of X-27 prefigures the femme fatales of film noir in the following decade.

In the casino scene, X-27 is greeted warmly by all the women at the bar. As she moves towards Kranau, she affectionately embraces an unidentified woman sitting on a stool. A less subtle signifier of her sensuality is her black cat, which is seen in many scenes. Her interaction with the cat contributes to the story by hinting at her feelings and mood. The feline theme goes even further; in a later scene, she plays a game of cat and mouse with a randy Russian adjutant in Borislav. When the man is thoroughly intoxicated and excited, she impersonates a cat and meows—just before she steals the precious secret document from him.

X-27 may be a patriotic and tough operative prepared to shoot rivals and willing to send traitors to death, but she is also compassionate. She makes the ultimate sacrifice to save the man she loves.

**Amy Jolly (*Morocco*)** Amy Jolly is afraid of falling in love with Tom Brown mainly because she is not sure of his feelings, especially after he changes his mind and decides not to go to Europe with her—choosing instead to leave the town for another mission with his unit. She confronts him at a shabby tavern in Amalfa; a terse exchange leads to nothing and it seems that they are both willing to break up—then she notices the carving of her name on the table; close-up shows her relief and satisfaction, now fully assured that her love is reciprocal.

**La Bessier (*Morocco*)** La Bessier finally gets what he wants: Amy Jolly has to accept his offer to help and consequently, his proposal—which he hopes, would eventually lead to reciprocal love. However, her affection comes at a price—she wants to save Tom Brown and La Bessier is in a position to help the man she really loves. From the beginning, it is clear that La Bessier is able to be close to Amy Jolly only because of his role as an accessory for her real romantic relationship. Fascinatingly, not only does he accept the situation, he does his best to help her overcome obstacles in her relationship with Tom Brown. La Bessier explains that he does so because he truly loves Amy Jolly and hence wants her to be happy.

### Helpful

**Sonja (*Crime and Punishment*)** Raskolnikov first pities Sonya; he then admires her goodness. Gradually, she becomes a more important influence on him, in a way replacing his idols Napoleon and Beethoven. Sonya's piety counterbalances Raskolnikov's lack of faith. "Don't take away my faith, I need it" she responds to his skepticism and "unbelief". Actresses in von Sternberg's previous films—Marlene Dietrich, Evelyn Brent, Betty Compson—were portrayed glamorously; this time Sonya's social class does not call for glamour, nonetheless, she radiates an aura of goodness. Sonya gently persuades Raskolnikov to confess. She succeeds where Inspector Porfiry fails. Through confession, Raskolnikov's suffering ends and he is redeemed.

**Natalie Dabrova (*The Last Command*)** Once she realizes that Sergius Alexander is truly patriotic, Dabrova not only falls in love with him, but goes above and beyond to save him from certain death at the hands of the Bolsheviks.



**Don Pasqual** (*The Devil is a Woman*) In the first flashback scene at the derailed train, Pasqual emerges out of nowhere to offer Concha his support in a somewhat difficult situation. He looks imposing and self-confident in his full dress uniform that displays his military medals and signifies his social status. She is gratified with the attention and finds it useful; the mere opportunity to act as a powerful protector makes Pasqual smug and puffed up.

**Keiko** (*Anatahan*) Two attempts to make the castaways surrender fail; it is only when Keiko makes it to Japan that she goes out of her way to contact the relatives of her fellow cohabitants of Anatahan. The letters convincingly inform the men about the situation back home and they realize that resistance is futile. When they jubilantly show up at the airport, amid fanfare, the narrator believes he also sees Keiko. Evidently, she is lamenting about the four dead castaways and Kusakabe.

**La Bessier** (*Morocco*) La Bessier first offers to help Amy Jolly in Mogador as they meet on board the ferry, later, he buys one of her apples at a high price, and ultimately, he is sincerely supportive of Amy Jolly's attempts to unite with Tom Brown. La Bessier is resourceful and is keen to share what he has in order to facilitate a relationship.

### Engaged

**Mae** (*The Docks of New York*) Mae is sensual and shrewd. The Sandbar scenes, just before the wedding ceremony, are visually pleasing and full of details, with the lively crowd providing a dynamic background to Bill and Mae's chat. At the edge of the frame, Andy, who is jealous of Bill, is lecherously staring at Mae the whole time. When he finally feels confident enough, he attempts to intimidate Bill; reminding him that he is the foreman to snatch Mae from him. A one-sided fist fight ensues and the other customers scramble to stop Bill from battering the third engineer. A tracking shot shows Mae watching the altercation, initially indifferently, then deciding to intervene and calmly walking towards Bill. She holds his arm affectionately and quite effortlessly drags him back to his seat. Lou is very satisfied with the pounding her obnoxious husband Andy receives; Mae is equally pleased with her influence on the brute that a roomful of people can't control.

The wedding is a high-point in *The Docks of New York*—chairs are rearranged, space is made for a make-shift lectern for Hymn-Book Harry, and finally the unruly crowd of the Sandbar suddenly behave themselves. What starts as a joke, turns quite serious and Mae gradually warms to the idea. Throughout the ceremony, she is contemplating and unsure, but is serious when Pastor Harry asks her for her wedding vow.

### Trusting

**Roberta Alden** (*An American Tragedy*) Roberta was raised in a farm and has moved to New York to work in the textile plant. Her affair with Clyde hits a dead end once the latter hooks up with the wealthy Sondra. Roberta is pregnant and demands that Clyde marry her. She is meek and naïve, but her persistent calls for action increasingly annoy Clyde. Roberta remains sympathetic and unsuspecting.

Shelley Winters (the gullible widow in *The Night of the Hunter* [1955] and the pathetically lovesick Charlotte Haze in *Lolita* [1962]) portrayed Alice in the other *An American Tragedy* adaptation, *A Place in the Sun*, as an annoying and pestering character. There is hardly anything negative about Roberta, she is exquisite and delicate. She resists Clyde's attempts to spend the night at her place, but caves in after he tactically ignores her for a while and pretends to be determined to end their relationship. She finally sends him a note to signal her capitulation; then, his reaction is a controlled smirk. At this moment, her heartfelt and happy smile sharply contrasts with his cold and triumphant stare.

### Loyal

**X-27** (*Dishonored*) "You are a clever woman and a very loyal one," the stiff Chief of Secret Service remarks, displaying restraint as a man who gives the impression that he rarely extends praise to

underlings—judging by his attitude, even less so to women. She repeatedly proves that she is indeed a very competent spy and devoted to her country. X-27 comes up with an ingenious way to copy the Russian battle plans which directly leads to a major battlefield victory; also, she isn't fooled for a moment when the Chief tests her by pretending to recruit her for an enemy intelligence service.

#### 4. DISAGREEABLE

##### Vanity

**Raskolnikov** (*Crime and Punishment*) Raskolnikov is Napoleonic. Despite all the hardship, he keeps fighting and is inspired by his two idols, Napoleon and Beethoven. After all, he achieved exceptional academic distinction in the same circumstances thanks to his belief in his powers. The film does not go into the character's ideology or the notion of the Nietzschean superhuman that is important in the novel. There is not much dialogue concerning this concept and first person narration by Raskolnikov is never employed. Instead, glimpses of the portraits of these two figures effectively provide a visual cue about Raskolnikov's mindset. He achieves success and recognition, parallel to becoming more assertive.

The dual nature of Raskolnikov's character means that he oscillates between meekness (e.g. his submissiveness when bullied by the patrolling officer and the drunken painter) and moments of reckless arrogance (mocking Inspector Porfiry by calling him professor—"because you profess to know things").

**Bill Roberts** (*The Docks of New York*) Bill likes partying, but he is self-centered. When he is with Mae at the Sandbar, he takes a moment to spend time in front of the mirror. Mae has put on the nice evening dress he stole from the pawn shop and her beauty makes her the center of attention at the Sandbar—where hell is breaking loose anytime—but Bill is mainly concerned about his own appearance; checking out his hair; flexing biceps and showing off his tattoos.

**Amanuma** (*Anatahan*) Von Sternberg views Anatahan as a microcosm of human society and explores universal characteristics. The Japanese colony on the island may be tiny, but there is a great deal of power struggle going on. From the beginning, Amanuma is assertive about his claim to leadership: "our leader, the boss of the island—that is, boss for a while—was not opposed to a display of his authority". The narrator also suggests that Amanuma savors his position as the leader as "some men are drunk on wine. Some are drunk on power."

##### Disloyal

**Lola Lola** (*The Blue Angel*) The lyrics of the German songs sang by Lola Lola stress her sensuality: "I am, head to toe, ready for love". The English version changes the tone with "falling in love again, can't help it." The latter downplays the overt sexuality of the German lyrics, but still, Lola Lola has a sexually charged presence. Lola Lola's songs hint at her inclination for infidelity. Still, it is a devastating blow for Rath when he sees her openly having an affair. She simply fancies Mazeppa the Strongman and decides to flirt with him.

**Concha Perez** (*The Devil is a Woman*) In *Devil is a Woman*, Marlene Dietrich sings only once, in the penultimate flashback; apparently she is no longer employed at the factory and works as a chanteuse at a lowly establishment. Pasqual happens to be present when she sings the hilarious "Three Sweethearts Have I" song:

But believe me, please believe me.  
When I tell you that I haven't got a sweetheart.  
Chorus: Do you mean to say that you have none?  
Did you hear me say that I had none?  
No, I only said I haven't one.

Pasqual has to endure the song and when she comes by, he desperately begs for her affection. A little later, she will allow him to be near her, only to leave for a country outing with her lover Morenito.

## Dishonest

**Clyde Griffiths** (*An American Tragedy*) Clyde is “[Hamlet-like](#)” and Untruthful. He is often hesitant and indecisive; then, at times he acts impulsively (e.g. the murder plan, courting Sondra, protesting his innocence during the trial). He is also a liar—the first instance of him lying is during the job interview for his hotel bellhop application. At the court, his lawyers decide to build their case on his flaws, mainly his tendency to lie. This leads to the argument of the defense that Clyde was actually untruthful in occasions when his statements incriminated him. As Susan Herman points out in her comparative analysis of the novel and the actual court case, this trial took place decades before the Miranda warning would be given to suspects in order to protect them from self-incrimination. Scared of authority and irresolute, Clyde incriminates himself by speaking.

**Henry Chang** (*Shanghai Express*) Even after the Chinese government accepts Chang’s terms of the hostage exchange, he attempts to take his revenge from Harvey by maiming his eyes. Lily tries to stop him by bribing; Chang dismisses her offer, saying that “all the money in the world cannot wipe out his insult to me.” Her protests for not honoring the hostage agreement (at that stage, the government of China has fulfilled its part of the deal and delivered his lieutenant safely to him) is also futile—“I am not concerned about your ideas about justice,” Chang mutters, “I live by my own code.”

**Major Lennard and Eric Baum** (*Shanghai Express*) Minor characters—the Frenchman is polite and pleasant; the German is irritable and uncommunicative. They have a common trait: both are liars. Lenard pretends to be an active duty officer, whereas he has been—presumably not honorably—discharged from service. Baum claims that he owns a coal mine in China, but Chang doesn’t buy that for a second. They are both impostors; Lenard wishes to continue making his sister proud and Baum is dealing opium. Lenard’s lie saves him because Chang categorizes him as someone who has no worth as a hostage; Baum’s lie—together with his previous “insolence”—gets him tortured.

**Kranau** (*Dishonored*) In their first encounter at the masquerade ball, Kranau’s walking sticks are part of his disguise as he pretends to be a handicapped clown. X-27 feels bad for cautioning him to stand up when the national anthem is played. Colonel von Hindau is there to conduct spy business with Kranau, but he is also ecstatic at the prospect of spending the evening with X-27. Von Hindau obviously wants to get rid of Kranau quickly; he also feels obliged to offer the handicapped man a ride home. The tension naturally continues in the car with the trio’s (still wearing masks) wacky interaction; Kranau attempting to assert his virility, slightly bothering von Hindau and only amusing X-27. Later in the film, Kranau and X-27 spend the evening together at the Borislav garrison; he is obviously gratified and feels that he has finally achieved the ‘conquest’. It is at this moment, when he has dropped his guard that X-27 turns the tables; she drugs him and easily gets away after he helplessly falls asleep.

## Cruel

**Ned Faraday** (*Blonde Venus*) Ned calls Helen “rotten” and wants the sole custody of Johnny; when she takes the boy and runs away, Ned unleashes detectives to trail her and pursues them relentlessly. He recalls some of the prim and haughty passengers of von Sternberg’s *Shanghai Express*, such as Mrs. Haggerty and Mr. Carmichael (the latter calls the two modern courtesans in the train “rotten”). When Ned comes to the Galveston train station to pick up Johnny, he is untouched by how devastated Helen is.

In 1932’s *Screenland* magazine’s story version of *Blonde Venus* (written by Mortimer Franklin), Ned is considerably different and so is the ending: Nick approaches Ned to let Helen be free; when he refuses, Nick blackmails him by his dubious relationship with a young maid—Ned instantly yields and is out of the picture. This story was possibly based on the earlier version of the screenplay, which reminds us of the various possibilities the plot could have evolved into.

## Unfriendly

**Kusakabe** (*Anatahan*) From the get-go, Kusakabe is annoyed by the sailors and apparently views them as intruders. “An unfriendly man ... unfriendly to us and unfriendly to himself,” explains the narrator. Keiko is the only person he likes to have around. He tries to keep his interactions with the castaways to a minimum. The narrator suggests that jealousy and his possessiveness of Keiko might not be the only reasons for Kusakabe’s hostility: “Kusakabe objected to anyone paying attention to Keiko—that was easy to diagnose. More difficult to understand was why he was so antagonistic to us, and to himself.” Kusakabe seems content being isolated from the world. The photo of his wife and child in the shack suggest that the loss of his family is a cause of Kusakabe’s desolation.

## **Work**

### **5. CONSCIENTIOUS**

## Determined

**Natalie Dabrova** (*The Last Command*) Member of the Kief Imperial Theatre is a revolutionary. Initially, she plans to assassinate Grand Duke Alexander but eventually falls in love with him. Ultimately, she selflessly saves his life. Dabrova’s first scene is with Andreyev, they are looking at Alexander—at the height of his glory—inspecting the troops. “His days are numbered”, Andreyev remarks with contempt and Dabrova affirms, “same as everyone dragging Russia down”. She also tells him that they don’t have the “luxury to be impatient” for revolution. They appear to hold equivalent positions as revolutionaries, but she is the more intelligent and level-headed one.

**Bill Roberts** (*The Docks of New York*) Bill is ductile and resilient. In his 1934 assessment, Rudolf Arnheim called Bill “Herculean” and a “sinewy Parcival.”<sup>ix</sup> Arnheim thought that the unyielding character of Bill reflected Joseph von Sternberg’s own standing in Hollywood and his resilience. Bill can adapt, but his core remains unchanged. Although physically unlike the formidable George Bancroft, like Bill, von Sternberg was “ductile and as strong as a bar of steel.”

**Helen Faraday** (*Blonde Venus*) Helen’s dressing room in her Paris show has the following two lines of a Rudyard Kipling poem—“The Winners” (1922)—handwritten on her mirror: “Down to Gehenna, or up to the throne, he travels fastest who travels alone.” Helen returns from Europe to the USA triumphantly; she has achieved success without the support of men—both Ned and Nick are basically “superfluous, Helen can exist without them.”<sup>x</sup>

How she bounced back after total defeat in Texas is not shared with the spectator. Yet, we may assume that solidarity with other women would have made a positive contribution to her struggle. This can be inferred from some of her previous interactions with women: the Norfolk woman manager (whose appearance and mannerism hints at queerness) had tipped her about Ned aggressively searching for her—she had empathetically advised her to stay away from cabarets not to get caught (“I’ve a kid of my own”); Helen’s African-American maid Cora, in the final part of her adventure, was a sweet friend who took care of her—she had carefully sized up Detective Wilson to help Helen thwart the threat; the desperate woman in the flophouse who considered suicide—Helen had defiantly handed her all the money Ned gave her, in order to start from scratch. In *Blonde Venus*, female bonding “subverts the system.”<sup>xi</sup>

## Controlled

**La Bessier** (*Morocco*) La Bessier is quite firmly rejected by Amy Jolly twice (on board the ferry and later at Lo Tinto’s tavern). Yet he maintains his composure and is unruffled even after Amy Jolly turns him down in front of his own social circle. He is restrained and yet intrigued by her aloofness.

## Successful

**Catherine II** (*The Scarlet Empress*) The denouement shows Catherine (now Catherine II, the Empress of Russia) jubilantly standing by the throne, after she and her loyal Cossacks gallop up the stairs of the palace. The state's capacity for oppression—previously hinted at—is now in her control and she is exalted at her own omnipotence. The smile is so much different from the bizarre grin of Peter; whereas the latter was pointless and malevolent; her grimace signifies her delight in attaining absolute power.

## Responsible

**Tom Brown** (*Morocco*) He is an impetuous adventurer; the ultimate question is, will he change and commit to a life with Amy Jolly? Brown's first scene shows him flirting with a local Mogador woman as soon as the legion returns to its barracks; his second appearance is at the cabaret, where he is openly flirting with Madame Ceasar, his former inamorata and the wife of his commanding officer. At this point, he catches the eye of Amy Jolly and their mutual attraction develops into a tension charged relationship. During their first meeting, Amy Jolly tells legionnaire Brown that "I never found a man good enough for that," indicating marriage—to which he responds, "that's just the way I feel." Gradually, they both realize their own willingness to commit. Initially Tom Brown is wry and frivolous; eventually, the carefree character becomes serious and thoughtful.

## Planner

**Professor Rath** (*The Blue Angel*) "Prof. Dr. Immanuel Rath" (as per his door sign) is a bachelor who teaches English literature. Prior to his fateful encounter with Lola Lola, Rath seems to have little life outside the school. He is a man of routine; Rath's idle life is secure and offers no chance of a surprise. His room is a bit messy but he is prompt and predictable—signified by him regularly waking up with the chimes of the town's clock tower. It all changes from the moment he sees Lola Lola's suggestive photos.

**Gin Sling** (*The Shanghai Gesture*) "You are plotting your revenge like an engineer," comprador Howe observes, as Gin Sling is going over her plans for the New Year party using a specially made chess set with figures representing the guests. Feminist theory has underscored the traditional assumption that women are somehow closer to nature—more emotional and less rational compared to men. Cinematic representations of gender tend to adhere to this distinction, with unusual examples like Gin Sling in *The Shanghai Gesture*, who emerges as a cold and systematic thinker—while the main male character Omar is primarily a seducer.

Powerful, intelligent, and deceitful, Gin Sling personifies the dragon lady, a stereotype reserved for Asian women. "Warlord of the Chinese underworld" is domineering and demands absolute loyalty from her underlings. Outside the casino, her notorious reputation generates a blend of respect and fear. Her power rests on her lucrative business, but it is her methods that guarantee that it remains unchallenged. It is revealed that "Mother" Gin Sling is adept at blackmail and extortion—elites of Shanghai are intimidated by her because of her knowledge of their secrets. Behind the façade of a legitimate business, the Dragon Lady is prone to instrumental violence and is somewhat of a mobster. Coolie (film noir actor with imposing physique, Mike Mazurki) is her enforcer. When Charteris ignores Gin Sling's approaches, Coolie coaxes him. Like the appraiser and the croupier in the casino, the tough guy is simply one of her agents.

## 6. UNCONSCIENTIOUS

### Failure

**Peter the Great** (*The Scarlet Empress*) Peter is the heir to the Russian throne, unless a more suitable candidate emerges—this is what his aunt strives to achieve by bringing Catherine from Germany

as a bride. The “halfwit” that no one really takes seriously, plays with tin soldiers and proudly drills his private Hessian guard detachment—hinting to the fact that he is extremely frustrated with his powerful aunt’s domination. Peter may actually have ambitions of his own and Countess Lizzy has already placed her bet on him. His brief shot at imperial power is a series of proclamations that announce his irrational measures and unleash a wave of political terror; we get the feeling that the indiscriminate violence and uninhibited abandon are outcomes of a lifetime of personal subjugation.

Peter’s cruelty reaches its peak when he gets to hold the reins of the empire; his proclamations unleash a wave of terror. It is hinted that the irrational violence is a consequence of his subjugation by an authoritative aunt. In spite of Peter’s comedic madness, the later banquet scene has a touching moment when he, as the emperor, demands a toast for his “friend” Countess Lizzy. Catherine isn’t pleased and spoils the occasion before walking out, but it is interesting that no one really cares about Peter’s choices; the Grand Countess replaces the Empress and Peter continues to be subjugated.

## Psychology

### 7. EMOTIONAL

#### Unstable

**Raskolnikov** (*Crime and Punishment*) Raskolnikov is hesitant and Unbalanced. He is confused about what to do, panics easily, and does unpredictable things—such as his second visit to the crime scene, which only makes his situation worse by alerting Porfiry. According to Frederic Will, the novel’s Raskolnikov is characterized by his tendency to be “unsure”. That involves doubting his sanity and mental powers. The film’s Raskolnikov does not appear to go that far.

**Poppy Charteris** (*The Shanghai Gesture*) starts out self-confident and controlled; gradually she becomes obsessed with Omar—at one point she even calls him “master”. She makes a scene at his apartment’s door and begs him to let her in. The sado-masochist relationship is reminiscent of von Sternberg’s *The Blue Angel* (in reverse, with Poppy paralleling Professor Rath’s demise and Omar facilitating the degradation, like that film’s Lola Lola). The composed Poppy eventually becomes a neurotic slave.

#### Insecure

**Clyde Griffiths** (*An American Tragedy*) The peculiar smile at the denouement raises the question—is Clyde defiant? When confronted with authority (or even the likelihood of such encounters), he is known to choose to flee. He escapes from the car crash even though he was innocent and does the same when the police raid the pool saloon. When things get more serious, Clyde is dumbfied by the social forces closing in on him. The sheriff’s posse so easily locates and apprehends him, without even the need for the anticipated manhunt; subsequently, he is swiftly convicted by the jurors in the trial. The farcical trial—with its physical altercation between the lawmen, display of the canoe, and, not least, a dozen grim-looking male jurors, all older than him—is obviously too much for him. Clyde seems to say anything that would make the prosecutors give him a break. He is disconcerted and his statements are inconsistent. Clyde is overwhelmed.

**Doc Harvey** (*Shanghai Express*) Harvey is still struggling with Madeline’s “a woman’s trick” from five years ago. Although she explains to him that she had simply wanted to make him a little jealous and test his love, Harvey had left her then and is still not sure whether she had cheated him. This is the event that led to her becoming Shanghai Lily. Before the rebel attack and Chang’s harassment, Harvey appeared to be willing to trust her again; in spite of not really accepting her version of what took place five years ago. Lily remarks that “when I needed your faith, you withheld it; and now, when I don’t need it, and don’t deserve it, you give it to me.” Soon, he is going to withhold it again. Harvey continues to display insecurity; he suspects that Lily might have willingly consented when Chang propositioned her. Even when the

fundamentalist Carmichael realizes that her motive was to save Harvey from torture, he keeps grumbling about the incident (an insubstantial allegation, as Hui Fei got rid of Chang before anything could even happen). In that respect, Harvey sounds a lot like the prim Mrs. Haggerty. Towards the end, he goes even further and stupidly commends Carmichael for his earlier misogyny and contempt of Madeline—his “amazingly correct diagnosis of Shanghai Lily.” Interestingly, the previously self-righteous reverend has moved on; now, he insists that there is a solid reason to change that perspective, but Harvey is adamant and says that defending her action amounts to “rubbish.” Carmichael observes that Harvey’s problem is his lack of faith—“love without faith, like religion without faith, doesn’t amount to much.”

### Scornful

**Alexander** (*The Last Command*) Former Imperial Russian army general is an aristocrat (a grand duke and the cousin of the Czar). Momentous events transform him from eagle-eyed to bleary-eyed. Alexander is imperious of necessity; after all, Alexander is the commander of Russian armies. In a scene, his orderly puts on the general’s great coat and smokes his cigars; the domineering Alexander personally scolds and disciplines the envious private. As a general, Alexander’s penetrating eyes terrify his inferiors. Obviously nothing escapes him and his inspections are a nightmare for the troops. This is one facet of the dual nature of the character Emil Jennings plays.

**Professor Rath** (*The Blue Angel*) The self-important petit-tyrant enjoys power games in the classroom. He is domineering and strikes fear in the hearts of the students with his tiny black book, in which he carefully evaluates their conduct and class performance.

### Cowardly

**The Boy** (*The Salvation Hunters*) The soft-spoken Boy has a mild demeanor and shows no interest in quarrelling, let alone fighting. At the sight of The Brute abusing the little kid, The Boy wants to intervene, but is unconfident. He continues to remain timid and unassertive in The City, even after The Man’s scheme becomes obvious.

### Unhappy

**Mae** (*The Docks of New York*) Mae is remorseful and bitter. “Georgette, Tava, Chiquita...” etched on Bill’s forearm as tattoos, are some of the names of Bill’s past girlfriends from exotic lands. When he jokingly says that he is not bragging about his long list of paramours, Mae regretfully says that she does not brag about hers either. What makes Bill proud is shameful for her. She is troubled by the society labeling her as indecent. Another remorseful character, the more experienced Lou, compassionately supports her as a younger version of herself. Andy’s estranged wife Lou doesn’t believe marriage is the way out—“I was decent until I married”—but she hopes that Mae would have a better experience.

### Dissatisfied

**Clyde Griffiths** (*An American Tragedy*) Clyde doesn’t want to live as a poor and selfless missionary like his parents; he wants to climb the social ladder. To what extent is the society going to let him fulfill his ambitions? Also, to what extremes is he prepared to go, when his options for social mobility turn out to be extremely limited? During the trial, his defense team characterizes Clyde as “spineless” and a “coward”, but the character is more complicated.

Clyde is ambitious and hankering; he is not happy with his parents helping strangers in their street missionary work and is not interested in their selfless way of life. Leaving his family and jobs at luxury hotels brings him closer to the social circles he admires; but he wants to be with them, not serve them. An early scene shows him trying to ditch a chambermaid for a weekend outing; this comes right after he is teased

by a flirtatious hotel guest. That weekend, he unenthusiastically goes to a party with his co-workers; a night of drinking ends with the fateful car crash. When his mother reproaches him for his choice of friends, his reply is appalling but sincere—he says that he needed to befriend them because he had no other alternatives. When he meets Sondra, he feels that the tide has turned. She represents access to the upper class; boating and horse riding with her exalts him—“how I love this life, this music, this kind of life”.

### Anxious

**Roberta Alden** (*An American Tragedy*) Roberta's pregnancy could not have been so openly stated in a post-1934 film. Abortion is also implicitly referred to, but its more explicit discussion would (and did) bother the MPPDA. Once it is clear that Roberta has no option left but to give birth to the baby, she becomes more resolute. It is clear that Roberta's anxiety is turning to desperation and she is firmly demanding a response from Clyde. At this moment, Clyde is seeing Sondra, so her attempts at communication are mostly via phone calls and letters. During the trial, Brown's letters were read out aloud as evidence.<sup>xii</sup> Accordingly, in the novel, Dreiser uses Brown's original letters. This impactful device conveys her sense of urgency; as if she “almost shrieked or screamed,” comments the novel's narrator at one point.<sup>xiii</sup> Following several lengthy letters, the narrator reveals Clyde's calculating mindset: “He must not write her any long and self-incriminating letters. That would be foolish in the face of his determination to marry her.”<sup>xiv</sup> In the film, title cards and the Roberta's handwritten notes frequently appear, to persuasively convey her sincere desperation.

**Shanghai Lily** (*Shanghai Express*) Another visually powerful scene spotlights Shanghai Lily's hands after she has conversed with Harvey. He is still accusatory and skeptical about her actions; “you appear to be nervous,” he observes, noticing that her hands are trembling. She responds that it is because he has touched her as he lighted her cigarette. Not much comes out of the dialogue and she returns to her compartment; in the dark, while she smokes, her hands are visibly shaking.

### Obsessed

**Kusakabe** (*Anatahan*) The bond between Kusakabe and Keiko has developed over the years in isolation from other humans and it has elements of a master-slave relationship, with roles frequently changing. Kusakabe is obsessed with Keiko; he is watchful when she interacts with any of the sailors. After she defies his authority and freely flirts with Senba, Kusakabe gets violent. When he realizes that he can no longer physically control her, he gets subservient and begs Keiko to stay with him.

**Don Pasquale** (*The Devil is a Woman*) In a matter of a few flashbacks, Pasqual moves from being jealously protective to pathetically jealous. He interrupts Concha and Antonio's tryst at the ballroom and yells that he is ready to fight not to lose her—then she shows him his place, fiercely responding with the question, “how can you lose what you never possessed?” During the confrontation, Pasqual is standing in front of a large painting depicting a seemingly epic bull fighting scene. He then demonstrates his marksmanship skills to impress Concha and intimidate Antonio prior to the duel. Despite his bravado, it only takes a moment before he gets humiliated once again by Concha's admonishing question. Now, the painting is seen more clearly and from a better angle; the scene depicted in fact has a cartoon quality that mirrors his situation.

### Moody

**Judie Benton** (*Macao*) When conversing with Judie Benton, Cochran and Halloran both refer to the chip on her shoulder. She explains that belligerence is a quality necessary for her to survive. She has a temper and acts on a whim. She likes to answer only “small questions” and tries not to reveal too much about herself.



The other prominent female part in *Macao* is Gloria Grahame's Margie. She is reserved and chooses her words carefully; Margie is as laconic as Cochran, who likens her to a sphinx. Judie Benton is more or less the opposite, she is spontaneous and impulsive. With the help of the blind panhandler, Benton finds where Cochran is held captive; here she gets the wrong impression that Margie and Cochran are romantically involved. Later, in one of the visually interesting scenes of *Macao*, in a fit of jealousy, she attacks him with an electric fan.

## 8. RATIONAL

### Calm

**Poppy Charteris** (*The Shanghai Gesture*) The wealthy tycoon's daughter is prim, spoilt, and petulant. The story follows her demise from being glamorous and self-confident to a neurotic addict and wreck. The finale reveals that she is also Gin Sling's daughter. Poppy is initially a reserved observer. When Omar and Gin Sling take turns to approach her at the casino, she is languid and prim. Everything is fine as long as she is winning at the roulette table; even when she runs out of luck and her funds evaporate, she is careful to maintain her dignity and self-respect by tipping the croupier. Yet, as she keeps playing, her spoilt nature makes it difficult to digest the losses. Parallel to her addiction to gambling and alcohol, her infatuation with Omar grows and Poppy becomes obnoxious and nasty.

Gin Sling may be the harridan eager to boss and manipulate Poppy, yet the latter is initially calm and controlled; she stands her ground when the two women interact, even wittily teases her about choosing the particular liquor as her obviously made-up first name—the answer is one of the rare moments that Gin Sling ends up revealing a little about her secretive past: “there was a girl called Whisky Soda, too ... and another one called Miss Martini. One called Scotch Highball and another Bénédictine. In other places I might have been called Rose, or Violet, or Lily... or even Poppy!” This is as close to anyone gets in getting a glimpse of the domineering person behind the mask. Similarly, the manipulative Omar finds that Poppy has a high degree of self-confidence. When he tries to cajole her into spending more time at the roulette table, she mildly reproaches him for failing to appreciate the strength of her character—“there's something you don't know about me. I can stop whenever I want to.” These dynamics change for the worse for Poppy as her addiction to gambling and alcohol grows stronger; she becomes subservient to both Omar and Gin Sling.

**Nick Townsend** (*Blonde Venus*) Nick is a notorious playboy and tolerates no competition when he first approaches Helen; yet he is surprisingly detached—so much so that at critical moments he asks her questions about her love for Ned and reminds her of the necessity to reunite with her son. When her husband returns from Europe and she decides to break up with Nick, he reacts with moderation and simply declares his intention to leave for Europe.

### Brave

**Antonio Galvan** (*The Devil is a Woman*) Antonio Galvan is a sympathetic character and a Republican; which would have most likely factored in to the aversion of the Spanish government to *The Devil is a Woman*. As opposed to Pasqual, Antonio is young and virile; he is able to catch the attention of Concha from a distance during the tumultuous carnival. With his mask, trying to blend in with the crowd and evade the Civil Guard, the dashing character recalls the *Mark of Zorro* (1920) which featured the first film appearance of the masked hero. When they meet, Concha would like to see him without a mask (anticipating the governor's order to unmask the carnival crowd to exert control and dominate).

### Satisfied

**Don Pasquale** (*The Devil is a Woman*) In the first flashback scene at the derailed train, Pasqual emerges out of nowhere to offer Concha his support in a somewhat difficult situation. He looks imposing and self-

confident in his full dress uniform that displays his military medals and signifies his social status. She is gratified with the attention and finds it useful; the mere opportunity to act as a powerful protector makes Pasqual smug and puffed up.

### Confident

**Lola Lola** (*The Blue Angel*)      Lola Lola performs confidently with a disinterested look; she doesn't care about her audience and she makes no effort to hide the fact that they mean little to her. She is experienced and is used to the attention. Her world-weary demeanor contrasts with Rath's boyish excitement—not unlike that of his pupils. Lola Lola's performance as well as her gestures are self-confident and assertive, almost contemptuous. This is most striking at the end; when Rath walks away ruined, Lola Lola sings indifferently—almost cruelly.

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<sup>i</sup> Baxter, John. *The Cinema of Josef von Sternberg*. London: A. Zwemmer. 1971, 54.

<sup>ii</sup> "Tom Ford goes to China for his Smellies; Inspired by Flowers and, errr, Whores." *China Rhyming*. A *Gallimaufry of Random China History and Research Interests*.  
<http://www.chinarhyming.com/2013/06/27/tom-ford-goes-to-china-for-his-smellies-inspired-by-flowers-and-eerr-whores/>. 2013. Accessed May 2022.

<sup>iii</sup> Brownlow, 222.

<sup>iv</sup> Herman.

<sup>v</sup> Merck, 100.

<sup>vi</sup> Baxter, 1993: 32.

<sup>vii</sup> Brownlow, 222.

<sup>viii</sup> Harrington, 13.

<sup>ix</sup> Arnheim, Rudolf. Josef von Sternberg (1934) in Baxter, John (ed.). *Sternberg*. London: BFI. 1980, 37.

<sup>x</sup> Jacobowitz, 44.

<sup>xi</sup> Kaplan, E. Ann. *Women & Film: Both Sides of the Camera*. New York: Methuen. 1992, 59.

<sup>xii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xiii</sup> Dreiser, Theodore. *An American Tragedy*. NY: Random House. 1953, 490

<sup>xiv</sup> Ibid, 491.