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ANGEL FACE (RKO, 1953) 90 min.

Director: Otto Preminger. **Screenplay:** Frank Nugent and Oscar Millard; based on a story by Chester Erskine. **Cinematography** Harry Stradling. **Cast:** Jean Simmons, Robert Mitchum, Herbert Marshall, Leon Ames, Barbara O'Neil, Mona Freeman, Kenneth Tobey.

Jean-Luc Godard once picked Angel Face as one of the ten best American sound films.²⁴ While this is quite typical of the hyperbolic writing of the French film critics of the Cahiers du Cinéma school in the fifties, Angel Face is, nevertheless, a fascinating film. It is a perfect example of Preminger's films noirs, all of which 'are moodily fluid studies in perverse psychology rather than crackling suspense movies.'²⁵ In this case it is a story of obsession: Simmons's psychological obsession for her father, and to a slightly lesser extent, Mitchum's obsession for Simmons.

Simmons is young and wealthy Diane Tremayne, who wants to do away with her step-mother so she can have her father (Marshall) all to herself. Mitchum is Frank Jessup, a rather naïve ambulance driver who gets involved with Simmons and becomes the family chauffeur. Simmons rigs up an auto accident for her step-mother, but at the last minute her father goes along, and they are both killed. Both Simmons and Mitchum are tried for murder, but are acquitted by a slick lawyer (Ames). At the end she sets up her own suicide in a car and takes Mitchum over the hill with her.

Simmons is an exception to the male psychopaths that are usually to be found in the films noirs of the early fifties. Her characterization of Diane, with her cold, expressionless stare, is a mixture of Freudian complexes and self-destructiveness. "If she is entirely venal and bent on destruction . . . she is also exciting in the obsessiveness and implacability Preminger gives her." 26 How Mitchum lets himself get destroyed by her is difficult to understand. He even talks to his former girlfriend (Freeman) about quitting his job with the Tremayne family ("A weird outfit--not for me."), but he cannot extricate himself--just as he is unable to do in Out of the Past and Where Danger Lives. This is one of Preminger's most interesting films noirs, certainly better than Fallen Angel or Whirlpool. Here he was able to get an actress who could act (instead of Gene Tierney), and in Mitchum we have "one of the most amusingly sustained screen images outside of Bogey in the forties." 27