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The MacGuffin

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EDITORIAL

'Woman', wrote Baudelaire, 'is the opposite of the dandy. Therefore she must inspire horror. ... Woman is **natural**, that is to say abominable.'

This 'MacGuffin' explores both aspects of Baudelaire's dictum. On woman as inspiring horror, we have a review of Dr Barbara Creed's analysis of the modern horror movie, 'The Monstrous-Feminine'. One of Creed's findings concerns how woman is often seen as threatening, due to male fears about loss of virility. Drawing on psychoanalysis, Creed discusses such concepts as the 'devouring' mother and the 'castrating' femme fatale, the latter armed with her deadly **vagina dentata**.

But further, woman is often seen as particularly monstrous, or 'abominable', because of her procreative associations, i.e. her links to what Camille Paglia calls a 'realm of fluids where objects dissolve'. Paglia adds that all art is 'a flight from liquidity', but Dr Creed manages to suggest that horror films may be a special case: they positively delight in piling on the gore or the bile or the menstrual flow (as in **Psycho** or **The Exorcist** or **Carrie**). Yet in each instance, Creed believes, woman is the loser for being shown in such a light.

Certainly, a characteristic of the dandy is his **contempt** for all that's natural, including Mother Nature herself. Professor Thomas Elsaesser, writing herein on 'The Dandy in Hitchcock', quotes Oscar Wilde about that: 'Nature has good intentions, of course, but ... she cannot carry them out. When I look at a landscape I cannot help seeing all its defects.'

Now, someone else who may have felt that way was Hitchcock - one of the most **artful** of filmmakers. Elsaesser convincingly shows that Hitchcock's studied persona contained many traits of the dandy: for instance, his special brand of wit, his capacity to be outrageous. For my part, I would perhaps question just one of Elsaesser's points: his suggestion that **some** of Hitchcock's (nominal) heroes are themselves dandies. Aren't the latter confined in Hitchcock to his (nominal) villains, such as Uncle Charlie in **Shadow of a Doubt** and the, admittedly charming, Hon. Charles Adare in **Under Capricorn**? Mind you, perhaps those characters are the films' true heroes, after all ...

'The MacGuffin' is honoured to have Professor Elsaesser as a contributor this time. I shan't begin to list his publications, which are no doubt familiar to many of our readers. Professor Elsaesser teaches in the Film and Television Department at the University of Amsterdam.

To everyone, good viewing.

P.S. Librarians and others please note. This issue contains a contents-index for issues 9-12.

LETTERS

Derek Holmes, Swinburne University of Technology, Hawthorn, Victoria, Australia

Much has been made of the 'doubles' motif in **Strangers on a Train** (1951) - I don't know if it's been noted before but there are **two** ice cubes in each of the **two** doubles that Bruno Anthony orders in the opening of the film! But what of the 'triples' motif?

When Guy Haines finally becomes pro-active rather than reactive and seeks to vanquish his double, a series of triples enters the film. In order to confront Bruno at the fairground he must try and win his tennis match in three sets. He carries three rackets onto the court whereas in the opening of the film he carried two rackets. His blazer pocket also contains a 'triple' motif: a plume dividing two crossed rackets. The crossed rackets of the lighter ('From A to G') are now under threat as Guy endeavours to break his double's hold on him. Finally, in order to make his escape Guy needs the help of both Ann **and** Barbara Morton. Three people now know the truth and between them they elude the two detectives so Guy can catch his cab to happier horizons.

(Editor's note. Coincidentally, the 'doubles' aspect of **Strangers on a Train** has been neatly summarised by Thomas Elsaesser in his article called 'The Dandy in Hitchcock', printed in this issue. But what of the 'triples' motif, indeed?

Here are some thoughts. In 'MacGuffin' 10, we noted that some other Hitchcock climaxes - of **The Lady Vanishes** (1938) and **The Man Who Knew Too Much** (1956 version) - demonstrate that identical lesson that two heads may be better than one, and three better still. In other words, concerted action is usually better than divided action or inaction! Further, the typical Hitchcock climax refers to a wider-world that hitherto has been excluded. So it's fitting that Guy's tennis match at the climax of **Strangers on a Train** by no means goes according to (his) plan: instead of having a customary easy victory in three straight sets, he's actually extended to **five** sets (or two **extra** sets).

I'm not sure what to make of the plume dividing two crossed rackets on Guy's blazer. Perhaps it sounds a note of chivalry: you think of the climax Hitchcock wanted for **Topaz** (1969), involving an old-fashioned duel. It also seems to refer to Kipling's 'Triumph and Disaster', those opposing aspects of fickle fortune cited elsewhere in the Forest Hills scene ...

In a way, of course, the very net in a game of tennis introduces an additional **third** element beyond the two players in their respective courts. Here you may think of the memorable scene quite early in the film where Bruno watches only Guy, while everyone else watches both Guy **and** his on-court opponent. (Hitchcock clearly developed this scene from one in the 1948 British film, **Quartet**.) In turn, perhaps we should recall what Hitchcock said about taking the camera outside Jeff's apartment in **Bear Window** (1954): 'You can't afford to be too rigorous about following these so-called "rules".'

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Michael Campi, Dingley, Victoria, Australia

Nothing had really prepared me for the thrill of seeing Hitchcock's **Dial M for Murder** (1954) in 3D. In the flat version, certain effects are obviously prepared for a greater depth of visual field, but when you see the film in 3D nearly every shot takes on another significance. I hadn't previously been so aware of how much the characters are **entwining** themselves, particularly around Margot (Grace Kelly). The choreography of the actors is a joy to watch.

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Jay Giswein, Highland Park, California, USA

I enjoyed reading 'MacGuffin' 13 and was particularly interested in the reference by one of your Australian readers to his 'Top Ten Hitchcocks'. Here's mine: 1. **Strangers on a Train**. 2. **North by**

Northwest. 3. **Notorious**. 4. **Psycho**. 5. **Vertigo**. 6. **Rope**. 7. **Lifeboat**. 8. **Dial M for Murder**. 9. **Rebecca**. 10. **The Birds**.

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Bill Routt, Balwyn, Victoria, Australia

Recently I read a very interesting book by Nick Land on the French thinker Georges Bataille ('The Thirst for Annihilation', 1992, published by Routledge). In it, Land deals effectively with old Artie Schopenhauer and points out how neglected his work has been. Of course, I thought of you.

(Editor's note. For new readers, I should explain that every issue of 'The MacGuffin' so far has pointed to some similarity or other between Schopenhauer's thought and an aspect of Hitchcock's films. And a point of trivia: a photograph of the German thinker in his old age provided the model for the appearance of the title-character, played by Werner Krauss, in **The Cabinet of Dr Caligari**, 1919!)

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Ed Buscombe, BFI Publishing, London, England

The British Film Institute monographs are among our best sellers and several of them have been reprinted. BFI books are now distributed in Australia by Peribo of Sydney. We hope this will greatly increase availability.

I don't know quite how arcane you like your Hitchcockiana to be, but there is a brief discussion of Hitch's direction of an episode of **Elstree Calling** (1930) in our recent publication 'Walking Shadows: Shakespeare in the National Film and Television Archive'.

(Editor's note. Ed Buscombe is referring to Hitch's short burlesque of 'The Taming of the Shrew'. Elsewhere in his letter, replying to one of mine, Ed mentions that he still hopes that Tim Hunter will write the BFI monograph on **Vertigo**. 'But he is taking his time.')

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NEWS

(Readers are urged to send in reports and cuttings for this feature. Both general interest and Hitchcock-specific items are sought.)

Thanks, Liz

Elizabeth Taylor has unsuccessfully sued a publisher and a producer of an intended TV mini-series over the release next May of a Taylor biography. Several years ago, the actress registered her name as a trademark and service mark in the US and 'most of the industrial nations of the world'. But now Judge Diane Wayne of the Los Angeles Superior Court has given official permission for the book and mini-series to proceed. Taylor's lawsuit, the judge said, was 'an unconstitutional prior restraint against expression protected by the First Amendment'.

Meanwhile, the attorneys representing the estate of Alfred Hitchcock, who say the estate owns 'all rights to publicity regarding Mr Hitchcock, as well as having trademark rights ...', have quietly dropped an action of their own. It looks as if they found out that the 'Hitchcock Annual', now in its third year, really is a respectable academic-type publication, along the lines of the 'Dickens Studies Annual', and that it isn't in the business of selling Hitchcock T-shirts ...

New publications

The 1994 'Hitchcock Annual' includes articles on **Psycho**, **Vertigo**, **Rear Window** and **Bon Voyage** and **Aventure Malgache**; Hitchcock himself talks about the music heard in **Waltzes from Vienna**; there's a complete shot-list with dialogue of **Number Seventeen** (now you can check what is said in the inaudible parts of many currently-available prints); and there are reviews of several new film books, only one of which is actually on Hitchcock. We'll review the 'Annual' in our next issue. Meanwhile, write for a subscription to P.O. Box 540, Gambier, Ohio 43022. Subscription rates in US dollars are: Individuals \$7 one year; \$12 two years. Institutions \$10 one year; \$17 two years. Outside the US: \$9 individuals; \$12 institutions.

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Back in print is the classic little book of photographs by Philippe Halsman, 'Dali's Moustache' (128 pp.). Dali co-operated on the book with Halsman, his good friend, and posed for dozens of shots which have a typically surreal flavour. All of them show Dali's famous lovingly waxed handlebar moustache - for instance, pierced with flowers to celebrate Mother's Day.

Alfred Hitchcock probably enjoyed this book, first published in 1954. He shared some of Dali's impish sense of humour - as Halsman found when he first met the director on assignment in 1962 to do shots of **The Birds**. Thereafter, Hitchcock and Halsman kept up a friendly personal and professional relationship. In some photo sessions, particularly those of a humorous kind, Hitchcock would direct the shots himself, delighting in coming up with ideas to at least equal Halsman's. However, the idea of photographing Hitch taking a bubble bath was definitely Halsman's own - he saw it as 'a marvellous satire on Hollywood'. Regrettably, it was never shot because, at the last minute, Universal Studios vetoed it. Or that was Hitchcock's story. Halsman suspects that the director may have suddenly had cold feet.

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The script of Salvador Dali and Luis Bunuel's famous 1928 short, **Un Chien Andalou/ The Andalusian Dog**, whose influence you may detect in Hitchcock's **Spellbound** (1945), is available in English (38 pp.) from the Electric Shadows Bookshop, Canberra City, ACT 2601. Also on the latest Electric Shadows list is 'The Woody Allen Companion' (427 pp.), compiled by Stephen Spignesi. We haven't yet seen it, but would bet that the section on 'philosophers who have influenced him' includes reference to Arthur Schopenhauer! (We've heard that there's an academic in Oregon who has done considerable work on the Schopenhauer-Allen connection.) By the way, our thanks to Electric Shadows for carrying stock of 'The MacGuffin' this issue.

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Here's something different. In 1945, Alfred Hitchcock was hired by ABC Radio in the US to produce a new mystery series. For some reason, only the pilot show, a half-hour dramatisation of Francis Iles's 1931 novel, 'Malice Aforethought', was made. Hitchcock both directed and narrated it, in a rather facetious tone. (The story is about a philandering doctor who poisons his wife.) Later, he told Truffaut that he'd often wanted to film the novel, but that he'd had to be content with making just **Suspicion** (1941), adapted from Iles's 1932 'Before the Fact'.

Well, Hitchcock fans will be happy to hear that the radio programme has now been unearthed, and is available on audio-cassette. It costs \$5.50 US, and is available from Milestone Film and Video, 275 West 96th Street, Suite 28C, New York, NY 10025. Overseas customers should no doubt add a suitable amount for postage.

Film tribute to Dorothy Parker (1863-1967)

Appropriately, a film of Dorothy Parker's life has one of this year's wittiest titles: **Miss Parker and the Vicious Circle**. It stars Jennifer Jason Leigh as the American poet, short-story writer and drama critic whose sometimes caustic reviews could close shows on Broadway in the first week.

In the same year, 1942, that Parker's 'Collected Stories' was published, Alfred Hitchcock employed her to provide business and additional dialogue for **Saboteur**. But as Hitchcock later pointed out, some of her touches in the film went almost literally over people's heads - as when a midget answers the circus-caravan door and at first Barry (Robert Cummings) and Patricia (Priscilla Lane) fail to see anyone. The nickname given the midget by his fellow circus-freaks is another Parkerism - 'the Major' - and his quarrel with the thin man has a faintly surreal absurdity, worthy of Jean Vigo's 1933 **Zéro de Conduite**.

Australian Film Awards, 1994

Two offbeat comedies - **Muriel's Wedding** and **Bad Boy Bobby** - shared top honours in this year's Australian Film Institute awards. Best film was voted to be **Muriel's Wedding** (d. Paul Hogan), whose main character is a fat girl desperate for a husband. But **Bad Boy Bobby**, about a man who spends his first 35 years kept locked in his room by his mother, won both Best Direction and Best Original Screenplay awards for Rolf de Heer. Largely ignored by the judges was the popular 'drag comedy', Stephan Elliott's **The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert**.

Departures

We regret to record the recent deaths of such notable Hitchcock-collaborators as writer-director Sidney Gilliat, writer-producer Joan Harrison (Mrs Eric Ambler), actress Jessica Tandy (Mrs Hume Cronyn) and writer Robert Bloch.

A special word here about Sidney Gilliat. He was, of course, a long-time partner in writing, and later producing/directing, with Frank Launder. Their first joint film script was for Albert de Courville's **Seven Sinners** (1936), but it was their script for Hitchcock's **The Lady Vanishes** (1938) that gained them an enduring reputation for comedy-thriller writing.

In 1943, Gilliat and Launder made their directorial debut with the excellent wartime propaganda feature, **Millions Like Us**, a warm-hearted study of women factory workers. On this they shared a directing credit but subsequently they took turns to direct while continuing to work together on screenplays. A 'Hitchcockian' touch informed many of their films, including **Green for Danger** (1946) and **State Secret** (1950). Gilliat's solo masterpiece is often said to be **Only Two Can Play** (1962), starring Peter Sellers.

It's also clear that Hitchcock continued to watch and be influenced by Gilliat and Launder's work into the '40s and beyond. For instance, there are traces of **Seven Sinners** in **Foreign Correspondent** (1940) and **Saboteur** (1942), and the titles-sequence of Hitchcock's **Frenzy** (1972) pays homage to Gilliat's **London Belongs to Me** (1948).

British Film SIG Moves Ahead

Under the new editorship of Wilson Fraser, the newsletter of the British Mensa Film SIG has changed its name from 'Zoetrope' to 'Moving Pictures'.

Wilson's own film interests, ranging from film comedy to the work of sexploitation director Russ Meyer (particularly Meyer's earlier films), are reflected in the magazine, much of which is written by Wilson himself. (Does that last sound familiar?)

Wilson has sent us a letter in which he agrees that novelist Leslie Charteris was a bit of a hack, though he finds this surprising since Charteris was a member of Mensa!

No doubt, our respective SIGs will keep exchanging information, as in the past. May 'Moving Pictures' be a big success, Wilson.

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BOOK REVIEW

Creed, Barbara: 'The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis' (Routledge: London and New York, 1993; 182pp, pb)

[I]t is to the unconscious that the horror film speaks, revealing - perhaps more than any other genre - the unconscious fears and desires of both the human subject (pain, bodily attack, disintegration, death) and the gendered subject (male fears of woman's reproductive role and of castration and woman's fears of phallic aggressivity and rape).

- Barbara Creed, 'The Monstrous-Feminine', p. 156

Woman's body is a labyrinth in which man is lost. It is a walled garden, the mediaeval **hortus conclusus**, in which nature works its daemonic sorcery. Woman is the primeval fabricator, the real First Mover. She turns a gob of refuse into a spreading web of sentient being, floating on the snaky umbilical by which she leashes every man.

- Camille Paglia, 'Sexual Personae' (1991), p. 12

You can't help noticing how mechanical and frigid even the best academic criticism looks alongside the most talented impressionistic prose.

- Peter Matthews, in 'Sight and Sound', August 1993, p. 36

If you see an obviously demented person approaching you with a raised knife or switched-on chainsaw, do you stay around? Typically, the modern 'slasher' movie asks that you do just that - and suffer the consequences. Thus it manipulates both your fear of being hurt - or of being otherwise indisposed - and your flight instinct, two things so basic that you share them with other sentient beings. That seems clear enough. But now, what if your fear, and your sense of intrepid purpose, combine to induce in you their respective forms of **paralysis**, of staying put? I suggest that it's here that **horror**, a relatively cerebral thing, as opposed to **terror**, starts to occur.

But before we get into psychoanalysis, let's note how 'aesthetic' matters may also affect our response to horror films. Take the rule that tells filmmakers - even genre filmmakers - to 'avoid the cliché'. Here, I find it significant that my own two most delicious moments of film-horror came during a first viewing of, respectively, Hitchcock's **Psycho** (1960) and Nicholas Roeg's **Don't Look Now** (1973). In the case of the latter, set mainly in a wintry Venice, I still feel shock when a weeping 'child' in a red mackintosh, who has drawn the architect John (Donald Sutherland) into a blind alley or courtyard, turns around and shows herself to be a hideous dwarf, armed with a knife. Note that after John, transfixed, has met his end, the film cuts to his coffin being borne along a canal - whereupon the viewer has time to ponder the full horror of these events, a horror which would be less if the killer had been just your average thug.

Also, Roeg, inspired no doubt by Daphne du Maurier's artful novella (1970), has prepared us for the horror by literally, as well as figuratively, leading us up the garden path. I'll describe the scene's figurative aspects shortly. By the literal aspects, I mean the more visceral ploys with which the scene helps us share John's mad hope that this scurrying Little-Red-Riding-Hood figure may restore his young daughter, who had drowned while wearing a similar red outfit. Of course, we know that he's asking the impossible, whatever the scene's evocative images and sounds, which in turn echo earlier moments. And so, what for an instant had seemed like John's second chance of happiness, does in fact come to its horrifying end - a **dénouement** all the more cruel for the rising and then plummeting dramatic curve.

As for the scene's figurative aspects, these notably include reference to John's Catholicism. The novella ends with his words, 'God, what a bloody silly way to die.' The film doesn't have that multiple pun, but the punning **spirit** is everywhere. And the force of the word 'silly' can be felt in the film's emphasis on John's failure to heed his gifts of second-sight and telepathy. Also, he fails to heed the warning given him by an old blind lady, one of two sisters, who urge him and his wife Laura (Julie Christie) to leave Venice. That's a reason why his death at the end of a **blind** alley is ironic. But

there are related reasons. Venice, the film tells us, was a city beloved by the poet John Milton - before **he** became blind. And, in fact, there does seem to be a contrast implied in the film between the deaths of the two Johns, respectively inglorious and fulfilled. It's pertinent to recall that after Milton became blind, he turned to writing both 'Paradise Lost' and 'Paradise Regained'.

I've spelt all this out for a couple of reasons. As I'll describe later, a similar set of ironies informs **Psycho**. Also, I needed to show that the satisfactions offered by **Don't Look Now** - not to speak of **Psycho** - are far from being just 'psychoanalytic' ones. Now I can come to what I've found in 'The Monstrous-Feminine'.

* * *

Venice is your quintessential Lost Paradise city, as noted in 'MacGuffin' 12. Hence, when I said above that Roeg leads us up the garden path, I was implying what is perhaps his film's most central irony of all. It's been an incidental pleasure of reading Dr Creed's book, as well as Professor Paglia's 'Sexual Personae', that both authors discuss the sort of link between traditional images of Paradise and notions of a woman's body that Hitchcock sometimes implied (**vide**: the theme of the Fatal Woman in **The Paradine Case**, 1947).¹ Creed reports, for instance, that the Cretans 'thought of the garden of paradise as the Goddess's womb in which a serpent dwelt' (p. 64, citing H.R. Hays). And certainly, as John traverses the byways of watery Venice in **Don't Look Now**, you can imagine him reliving memories or phantasies of the interior of his mother's body, especially the womb. In his misguided way, he's looking for the Paradise he feels was denied him after his daughter died.²

Misguided - but what of 'silly'? Here, I take my cue from another of Creed's passing allusions, this time to the Little Red Riding Hood story (p. 108), where she tells us that the red riding hood stands for a woman's clitoris, and the wolf's devouring jaws (hidden under the hood) stand for the terrible **vagina dentata**, feared by men in art, myth and legend. Suddenly, John's relation to his dead daughter may be seen as having been potentially incestuous - much as, according to Creed, in **The Exorcist** (William Friedkin, 1973) there's a latent **mother-daughter** incest (see, in particular, p. 35). And the dwarf with her knife, like some other women in 'slasher' movies cited by Creed (e.g. **Play Misty for Me**, Clint Eastwood, 1971 - see p. 126), isn't at all your Freudian 'castrated' woman but rather the castrator. John's search has been both misguided **and** 'silly', indeed.

Further, I dare say that this female killer-dwarf may represent what celebrated theorist Julia Kristeva calls 'the abject', i.e. that which society rejects because it 'disturbs identity, system, order' (quoted in Creed, p. 8). As a feminist, Creed is particularly concerned in her book to show that, if women have traditionally been assigned an 'abject' place in patriarchal society - because, for example, their bodies menstruate - they nevertheless shouldn't be underestimated. That's also the 'message' of a film like Brian De Palma's **Carrie** (1976) - although I do think it says something about **Don't Look Now** that **it** manages to take an altogether broader, and richer, position than just a 'polemical' one.

Having said that, I'll state here my main dissatisfaction with Creed's own polemics, which I'll discuss in detail later. But here's what I think in a nutshell. With her psychoanalytic method, Creed may well seem to have penetrated to the hearts of her chosen films - rather like the stake that kills Count Dracula, who provides one of her choicest topics. But, in fact, I think she only occasionally brings the films alive - as all those post-menarche young women in female-vampire movies, also analysed by Creed, come alive. Films as artefacts, often ironic and ambiguous, hardly engage her. Which explains why it's only a **seeming** paradox that her chapter on 'the castrating mother' in **Psycho** is so disappointing. For Hitchcock, psychoanalysis was never more than one of many ingredients in his story-telling, and often one to be mocked, not revered.³

Also, consider the Creed and Paglia quotations that head this review. The first comes from the very end of Creed's book: I think it's the first and only acknowledgment the book makes that horror films are about anything **except** gender-based fears and concepts. By contrast, the second quotation comes at the start of Paglia's history of sexuality and decadence in the arts, and it summarises in a few lines what Creed spends chapters spelling out in relation to films like **Alien** (Ridley Scott, 1979), **The Exorcist**, **The Brood** (David Cronenberg, 1979), **The Hunger** (Tony Scott, 1983), **Carrie** and **Psycho**. What's significant about that for us is that Paglia thereby frees herself to range across and analyse many individual works,

as well as whole aesthetic trends, with a suggestiveness about how they might be fully experienced that is patently beyond the scope of 'The Monstrous-Feminine'.

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'Woman's body', Paglia tells us, 'is a labyrinth in which man is lost.' As Creed shows, in her book's best chapter (Chapter 2), that's the very idea we're given by the design of the spaceship called 'Nostromo' in **Alien**. In fact, reminders of what Paglia calls woman as 'the primal fabricator', and Creed calls 'the archaic mother', are everywhere in **Alien**. Hereabouts, Creed doesn't miss a trick:

She [the archaic mother] is there in the images of birth, the representations of the primal scene,⁴ the womb-like imagery, the long winding tunnels leading to inner chambers, the rows of hatching eggs, the body of the mother-ship [with its vagina-like entrances], the voice of the life-support system [called 'Mother' by the crew], and the birth of the alien. (pp. 19-20)

The archaic mother, says Creed, taking her cue from Kristeva, represents 'the notion of the fecund mother-as-abys that is central to **Alien**; it is the abyss, the cannibalizing black hole from which all life comes and to which all life returns that is represented in the film as a source of deepest terror' (p. 25). (Analysing **Psycho** in 'MacGuffin' 4, I noted how Norman Bates is finally swallowed up by his mother as if by 'a black hole'. I also noted how that film contrasts Marion Crane's lack of 'patience' to the poet John Milton's readiness to 'wait' - a theme similar to the one in **Don't Look Now**. More on these matters below.)

Creed further refers to the archaic mother as 'pre-phallic' (p. 20), which is not the same as 'pre-Oedipal' (p. 20) nor yet, I think, 'pre-symbolic' (p. 26). (Mind you, the difference for the film viewer is mostly 'academic', as they say.) For simplicity, I'll concentrate on the pre-phallic mother. This is 'the being who exists prior to knowledge of the phallus' (p. 20), i.e. the mother seen as omnipresent and all-powerful before the child's world, psychologically speaking, becomes gender-divided. Importantly, she is, in the words of Roger Dadoun, 'nothing but a fantasy' (quoted by Creed, p. 20) because she is conceived retrospectively - if I may so put it - and 'is only ever established as an omnipresent and all-powerful totality ... by the very intuition - she has no phallus - that deposes her ...' (quoted by Creed, p. 20). To see more exactly what this means, let's return to **Alien**.

As I've indicated, Creed is sometimes very theory-bound. Well, many critics have commented on how the alien in Ridley Scott's film resembles a penis. But when this creature emerges from the chest of its unfortunate 'host', the rather boyish John Hurt character called Kane, Creed sees only the 'birthing' aspect of the moment. In passing, then, let's note how that moment might equally be interpreted as depicting an 'unwanted' erection - a reading which certainly gains some weight from the director's comments about having mixed crews on long space missions: you'd then have a situation which would involve either 'neutralizing everyone and forbidding sex entirely, or ... having free "open sex" for whoever wants it'. (Quoted in Danny Peary, ed., 'Screen Flights/ Screen Fantasies', 1984, p. 295.)

But back to Creed. She implies that the omni-presence on the space voyage of the archaic mother gives rise (so to speak) to this 'fetishised' phallus: i.e. the alien can be read as the sign of a woman's 'lack', an understanding patriarchy is secretly happy to endorse. Ripley (Sigourney Weaver) does not, at the end of the film, destroy the alien, but at least she banishes it from the spacecraft and heads back home with her cat, a substitute fetish. Creed compares this 'acceptable' fetish to the love birds at the end of Hitchcock's 1963 **The Birds** (p. 24), a film loosely adapted from another Daphne du Maurier story.⁵

As a feminist, though, Creed is concerned to tell us that fetishism of whichever kind is still phallogocentric. Even the cat is 'compensatory' or 'consoling' to Ripley, because it corresponds to a child, which in turn substitutes for the 'lost' penis. Such is the fairly orthodox Freudian reading of how a woman responds to her imagined lack.

But Creed wants to add a further angle. She writes that in her view 'the mother's [attributed?] phallus-fetish covers over, not her lack - as Freud argued - but rather, her castrating **vagina dentata**. ... Mother Alien is primarily a terrifying figure not because she is castrated but because she castrates.' (p. 22)

Creed rather loses me here. She's making an important point - and one for which I see some corroborating evidence (see below) - yet, firstly, I don't think she sufficiently explains how this new fetish comes about. Who is doing the fetishising? Which brings me to my second question. Creed ~~seems~~ to attribute the fetish to the archaic mother herself - but how could that be, since we've been told that the archaic mother is 'nothing but a fantasy' (Roger Dadoun)?

Later, on p. 72, Creed repeats the idea. Quoting Dadoun again, on how in Dracula films the archaic mother is present in such things as the 'uterine' space of the crypt, she says:

In the conventional scenario, Dracula, with his erect body and penetrating look, becomes 'the phallus-fetish' of [attributed to?] the omnipresent mother ...

Whereupon, Creed reasserts her own claim: 'if the male vampire is a fetish figure of the mother, it seems clear that he does not represent the imaginary phallus of the mother, as Dadoun argues, but rather her terrifying [and fanged] imaginary **vagina dentata**.' Clarity, of course, is in the eye of the beholder. As I say, who **is** doing the fetishising? Not a developing child, surely? How many children know the interior of the vagina, and attribute teeth to it?

I'll leave it to the reader to decide the precise status of Creed's claim. I **guess** she's saying that the film viewer is doing the fetishising, or has lately done so, or has 'inherited' such a fetish via the culture. But she's certainly less than clear about this.

Also, it's typical of Creed that she should pass over in silence the film's reference to Joseph Conrad's 'Nostromo'. Such a reference can specify both Conrad's eponymous character ('our man' or 'boatswain', whose secret greed for silver corrupts him) and the novel itself (in which the humane, 'incorruptible' Emilia concludes that the silver is better lost). However, Creed does note how the real villain in **Alien** is the (presumably male-run) Company back home which has programmed the spaceship's computer to sacrifice the lives of the crew in the Company's interests (p. 23).

I'll also mention here how Creed's reference to **The Birds** (a film presided over, one way or another, by women characters), and her allusion to the **vagina dentata**, reminded me of Theodore Price's interpretation of that film's originally-intended ending. The film's characters were going to attempt an escape across the Golden Gate Bridge, which was to be lined on both sides by thousands of pecking birds - like teeth! According to Price, bridges, in the dreams or fantasies of some men, may represent the vagina. ('Hitchcock and Homosexuality', 1992, p. 195; cf. pp. 198-200.)

* * *

Before I discuss what Creed says about **Psycho**, I should mention the book's mid-section which leaves aside film-matters entirely and deals with Freud's famous case-study of Little Hans, a 5-year-old boy with a fear of being bitten by a horse. Freud considered that the boy's phobia was caused by his 'repressed erotic longing' for his mother (p. 92). Creed, though, in order to contest the conventional Freudian notions of the Oedipus complex and the castration complex, in which the mother is thought to be castrated (p. 94), offers a different interpretation. Creed sees Hans's anxiety as probably caused by his 'fear that his mother would carry out her earlier threat to have [him] castrated by the doctor or even by herself **because** of his erotic longings' (p. 92) - Hans, it seems, had been touching his penis (p. 89).

Well, maybe so, but that 'even by herself' is very vague. Creed, following Erich Fromm, notes that 'Freud does not discuss the significance of the fact that the threat is uttered by the mother' (p. 89). Yet is that so surprising? Hans was specifically told that **the doctor** would be the person who might cut his 'widdler' off: if **you** were told that, wouldn't you be most wary of the doctor? And, besides, isn't a boy's castration-fear supposed to stem from the time he sees that his mother has no penis? The person to whom the boy attributes his own threatened castration is, in a way, of secondary importance - there can be no forgetting the impression, once gained, that **woman** is 'castrated' (and not, presumably, by herself or by some other woman, but by a male).

Creed also notes that Hans's phobia worsens after he has his tonsils out: her unhelpful comment (she

really does seem preoccupied with spotting possible birth-symbols) is that 'Taking tonsils from the throat through the mouth is ... like a form of birth **and** of castration' (p. 94 - my emphasis). Not for the only time, Creed here seems to lose touch with her larger topic, i.e. the horror-film. In failing markedly, in my view, to enter into young Hans's world of anxiety and pain, and not even properly noting the reinforcement that going into hospital must have given to his fear of doctors, Creed misses an opportunity to 'humanise' her theorising. Moreover, I think it's very possible that, contrary to her assertion, the majority of horror films invoke less the shadowy world of uterine and post-uterine psychological states, up to, say, the time of the Oedipus crisis,⁶ than they do just such 'traumatic' experiences as a child's painful and/or humiliating experiences in the real world: e.g. when it has to go into hospital. After all, every child that has its tonsils out is, in a sense, 'raped' - its body has been invaded and hurt without its understanding or consent. When, in **The Texas Chainsaw Massacre** (Tobe Hooper, 1974), the **masked** figure of Leatherface approaches his intended young victims with a whirring blade raised for action, everyone's most extreme fantasies centred on 'mad doctors' (or even 'mad dentists') and operations-that-go-wrong may seem about to be realised.⁷ The dark house seems in such a context less a symbol of the womb and of the mother than of the **absence** of such things, the equivalent of the strange, half-remembered surroundings of a hospital or some such place, the home that isn't a home at all ...

By the way, Leatherface provides another instance of the avoided cliché - he's no more your average sparring partner, with gloves on, than is the Little-Red-Riding-Hood lady in **Don't Look Now**. Also, he's another 'object' figure, although **not** thereby of much use to Dr Creed, who wants as a feminist to show that woman is especially prone to be cast in the abject role in horror movies.

In any event, the whole Little Hans case must surely strike the dispassionate reader (whether of Freud or Creed) as of dubious value as evidence, and of no value as proof. Dubious as evidence, because you repeatedly notice that the boy is being 'led' in what he says by his father (who kept a journal of Hans's remarks and then presented it to Freud). No value as proof, because any interpretation of the case must amount to what at school we were taught to call a 'rash generalisation', i.e. one based on statistically insufficient evidence. Clearly, the case figures in Creed's book only so it can be critiqued: Creed, the revisionist, needs to be seen to have read her Freud in order to 'go beyond' him.

* * *

The chapter on **Psycho** in 'The Monstrous-Feminine' is, as I've said, disappointing. It contains little new information, and even some of that is questionable - such as the motives attributed to Norman Bates (Anthony Perkins) for killing his mother. (His motives for also killing her lover, and later several young women, then Marion Crane and Milton Arbogast, are scarcely considered.) The film's own explanation, as provided by the psychiatrist, is ignored by Creed - including what is said about Norman's transvestism. Instead, Creed argues that basically Norman has always wanted 'to become the mother in order to prevent his own castration - to castrate rather than be castrated' (p. 140). Particularly questionable, though, is a statement like this:

Throughout **Psycho** women are associated with eyes that stare and appraise. It is the maternal gaze that Norman most fears ... (p. 141)

When Norman speaks of the inside of madhouses, and especially 'the cruel eyes studying you' (cf the dream-sequence of Hitchcock's **Spellbound**, 1945), there's no particular suggestion that the eyes are either male **or** female. As for the stuffed birds in Norman's 'parlour', let's not forget that it was Norman who put them there. He thereby indulges his masochism, and several of the murders seem to have been intended by him to help indulge it further: like the transvestite called Buffalo Bill in Jonathan Demme's 1991 **The Silence of the Lambs** (another figure based on the real-life Ed Gein),⁸ Norman wanted his female victims' skins in order to 'become' a woman himself, i.e. his mother. And I hardly think that this was his symbolic way of getting his (in fact, already dead) mother off his back, so to speak ...

Actually, Creed attributes **several** aspects of the monstrous-feminine to poor Mrs Bates: not only is she the castrating mother (on p. 144, the birds' **beaks** are invoked), but she's 'the oral mother, the incorporating, devouring mother who threatens her son' (p. 144 again - here Creed cites Norman's knowing reference to how birds 'really eat a tremendous lot'). Yet if we come back to how it was **Norman** who put

the stuffed birds in his parlour, and how he allegedly associated them with his mother who had been forever hovering over him, then surely at some level they **also** represent the fetishised 'phallic' [i.e. uncastrated] mother, a male construct, designed to **preserve** the all's-right-with-the-world male point of view. Creed herself cites Raymond Bellour on how 'the menacing shadow of the crow is projected onto the wall, **penetrating** the picture like a knifeblade or a **penis**' (quoted on p. 144 - my emphases).

For my part, I further associate Norman's mother with the archaic mother in her 'black-hole' aspect, whether that black hole is seen as referring to the womb or the vagina or something else. (Speaking generally, Creed retains nearly all her options about that - cf. pp. 27-28. Also, note the reference to 'the oral mother' in the previous paragraph. Strictly, the archaic mother is a still more 'primitive' construct, 'present in all horror films as the blackness of extinction - death', as Creed herself points out on p. 28.) Although Creed doesn't specifically note it, black holes are rife in **Psycho**.

One piece of information about the film I am indeed grateful for: how the classical painting that conceals Norman's peephole (through which **his** cruel eyes study Marion) is actually 'Susanna and the Elders', thus invoking the legend of two Jewish patriarchs who spy on the bathing Susanna before attempting to force themselves on her. But Creed elides the patriarchal connotation - just as, more crucially, she omits all direct reference to the nearby painting (the one the crow's shadow penetrates), which depicts an angel bringing two female figures into Heaven. As I suggested in 'MacGuffin' 4, this painting, with the crow's knife-like beak projecting onto it, is proleptic: it reinforces the imagery to be found elsewhere in the film associating Marion and her sister with angels, i.e. superior bird-like creatures,⁹ and suggests that Marion's death at the hands of a knife-wielding 'Mrs Bates', under a halo-like shower-nozzle, may not be without its accompanying state of grace.

(On the other hand, that state of grace may be entirely Marion's self-delusion or fantasy. As also noted in 'MacGuffin' 4, Marion, despite her unconscious quoting of Milton's sonnet called 'On His Blindness', is no immortal genius ... Here, it looks like Hitchcock has simply adapted a key scene from the novel of **Spellbound**, i.e. the 1927 'The House of Dr Edwardes', by Francis Beeding. In Chapter Ten, as the insane Miss Archer is led by some of her fellow inmates, equally insane, 'towards the Radiance', and her death on a white sacrificial altar, she imagines herself being escorted by St Theresa and flights of angels towards Heaven.)¹⁰

* * *

My dissatisfaction with the **Psycho** part of Creed's book rather mirrors my feeling about the book overall. It simply doesn't address either the **whole** reader or the films themselves in **their** fullness. (I trust I've begun to show that.) Symptomatic of Creed's approach to the reader is how on several occasions she mentions a character or a concept pages before she explains who or what is meant.¹¹ For instance, there's the clumsy way (p. 9) she gives her first example of 'the abject': suddenly we find ourselves reading about Julia Kristeva (at what age?) having a glass of milk offered her (in what circumstances?) by her father and mother (why both parents?), and how the milk has a skin on top (not deliberately, surely?).

Actually, this phenomenon of how sometimes we're all repelled by elementary, or alimentary, substances is a staple of Psychology classes. I remember years ago a lecturer pointing out that none of us heeds our own saliva **until** we collect some of it in a glass and are challenged to re-imbibe it. Well, Creed, following Kristeva, spends pages on this sort of topic - she sees it as basic to the depiction of women (e.g. menstruating women) in the horror film. Only, she's content with making polemic points, such as (on p. 41) how women since ancient Judaic times have been kept 'abject' by association. (So, too, have animals, such as pigs - something not irrelevant to **Carrie**, of course. Yet once again Creed fails to regard the wider context.¹² Below, I'll mention an instance of how she herself commits a slur on animals that parallels what she condemns when it's done to women.) And though she stops well short of suggesting, for example, that ugly female dwarfs should picket re-run cinemas showing **Don't Look Now**, the over-intensity of some of her writing does have its faint absurdity.

Of course, everything's relative. By **some** academic film-writing standards, Creed is most lucid and sensible. But I still think it's foolish of her to generalise (p. 11) that when a woman is slashed in a horror-film the resulting mark on her body is 'a sign of her "difference", her impurity (**Dressed to Kill**,

Psycho)'. As I recall, that alleged phenomenon didn't help Milton Arbogast. What does **his** mark represent?

And, rather simplistically, Creed offers this comment on the Siamese twins in **Sisters** (Brian De Palma, 1973): 'the Danielle figure is castrated, as suggested by the scar on her side; the Dominique figure castrates - literally' (p. 132). What's unnerving about that reading isn't so much that it elides the fact of **Dominique's** scar as that it assigns the meaning of 'castration' to an operation which in this case was clearly a merciful one, to separate the twins. (Mind you, I suppose it's just possible that Creed is here following some arbitrary symbolism on De Palma's part. But if that's so, she should point it out.)

At times, Creed cheats outrageously - or commits 'MacGuffin'-style 'bloopers'! She claims (p.145) that Norman Bates gives his mother 'rat poison', and calls this 'an appropriate punishment for a mother who is privately indulging in the very behaviour which she publicly condemns in her son.' Trying to explain further, she adds: 'He feeds her "ugly appetite" with poison.' Well, for a start, the film never calls it 'rat poison', only 'strychnine'. And, to transfer **Marion's** 'ugly appetite' back to the real Mrs Bates, and then to attribute such an 'abject' trait, i.e. one to be indulged in secret, to rats, whom no-one has mentioned, is pushing things a bit, especially in this author - so keen to expose unfair practices!¹³ What's more, in all of this, Creed fails to pin-point the fairly **definite** connection made in the script between death-by-strychnine, called by Sheriff Chambers 'an ugly way to die', and the film's 'ugly appetite' allusion. Rats don't enter the picture, but Norman's slander - uglifying - of the act of love is there, all right.

Here are just two more instances of Creed 'at work'. Like Camille Paglia, she's concerned to note the several variants of snake-imagery that have been applied to women. Still, it's hardly valid to claim (p. 33) that Regan in **The Exorcist** is snake-like because her namesake in 'King Lear' is (said to be) called 'sharper than a serpent's tooth'. In fact, Lear is addressing his famous remarks on filial ingratitude (I, iv) to Regan's sister, Goneril, and (Shakespeare's) Regan hasn't yet begun to show her own teeth.

Likewise, to state blandly that the name of the Sphinx (of riddling fame) is 'derived from "sphincter", [which] suggests she is the mother of sphincteral training ...' (p. 26) is to severely distort matters. Instead of 'derived from', I suggest 'cognate with' is more accurate. (Chambers English Dictionary gives the root-meaning of 'Sphinx' as the Greek **sphingein**, to draw tight.) Of course, that allows a quite different meaning, one referring to how the Sphinx's riddles were difficult to solve. And, in fact, that's closer to the interpretation given by Paglia, who comments helpfully: 'Her [i.e. the Sphinx's] name means "the Throttler" (from the Greek **sphiggo**, "strangle"). The riddle by which she defeats all men but Oedipus is the ungraspable mystery of nature, which will defeat Oedipus anyway.' (Paglia, p. 50)

Now, I don't doubt that many academics will relish this book. It gives them sundry places to jigsaw-in theories of their own. (Theory, always theory! That's to say, **concepts** everywhere, hardly any direct **percepts** - the terms are Schopenhauer's.)¹⁴ Nevertheless, Hitchcock's remark to Truffaut about **Psycho** - 'I can't get a real appreciation of the picture in the terms we're using now' - still largely applies, I think.

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Notes

1. See 'The Lost Paradise: Hitchcock's **The Paradine Case** (1947)' in 'MacGuffin' 12, esp. pp. 12-13.
2. In a sense, he's following in the footsteps of Aschenbach in Thomas Mann's novella 'Death in Venice' (1913) and Luchino Visconti's 1971 film version. In Hitchcock's **Vertigo**, Scottie pursues a not dissimilar quest - though there the hills of San Francisco are clearly representative of the mother's breast. Cf 'The Fragments of the Mirror: **Vertigo** (1958) and its Sources' in 'MacGuffin' 11, p. 9 and passim.
3. Please don't tell me that authors/'auteurs' are dead! Paglia is devastating about that. 'The

English language', she writes, 'was created by poets, a five-hundred-year enterprise of emotion and metaphor, the richest internal dialogue in world literature. French rhetorical models are too narrow for the English tradition. Most pernicious of French imports is the notion that there is no person behind a text. Is there anything **more** affected, aggressive, and relentlessly concrete than a Parisian intellectual behind his/her turgid text? The Parisian is a provincial when he pretends to speak for the universe.' (Paglia, 1991, p. 34) I'll have to think **some more** about that 'relentlessly concrete' reference, but certainly Paglia carries truth before her in this passage.

4. On p. 55, Creed speaks of not one but 'three primal scenes - conception, sexual difference, desire'.

5. The similarities of **Alien** and **The Birds** - such as the essential isolation of their respective settings - are obviously underlined by the presence of Veronica Cartwright in both. (She plays young Cathy Brenner in Hitchcock's film.)

6. Anyone who has watched footage of babies **happily** swimming underwater must surely entertain doubts about just how scary uterine or natal states, and the like, really are!

7. There's a good entry (by Douglas Winter) on 'Mad Doctors' in Jack Sullivan (ed.), 'The Penguin Encyclopedia of Horror and the Supernatural' (1986), pp. 279-80. It notes that such a theme has roots extending at least to Mary Shelley's 'Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus' (1818). I would suggest that both **Psycho** and **The Texas Chainsaw Massacre** simply provide **variants** on the 'home that isn't a home at all' as seen in a film like Robert Wiene's classic **The Cabinet of Dr Caligari** (1919) ...

8. Ed Gein (see 'MacGuffin' 4) also provided the 'inspiration' for Norman in **Psycho** and Leatherface in **The Texas Chainsaw Massacre**.

9. In **Spellbound** (1945), there are references to both angels and harpies. At one point, Dr Brulov (Michael Chekhov) thinks that such a winged figure in J.B.'s dream may represent himself, a male. Dr Creed, please note.

10. As several 'MacGuffins' have shown, it was common for Hitchcock to transport a key scene, not previously used by him, from a literary source that he **had** already filmed, to one of his later movies. See, for example, the discussion in 'MacGuffin' 12 of how a 'love-death' from W. Somerset Maugham's 'The Hairless Mexican' (filmed by Hitchcock as **The Secret Agent**, 1936) ended up in **Topaz** (1969).

Another example: a 'harlequin-like' red, green and white flashing neon sign outside a window in Helen Simpson and Clemence Dane's novel/play 'Enter Sir John' (filmed by Hitchcock as **Murder!**, 1930) transposed, with its 'theatrical' connotation, to **Rope** (1948).

11. If at all. Thus a reference to Kali on p. 126 assumes an earlier, non-existent discussion of that goddess's special significance as 'female monster'.

12. For a **truly** horrendous account of the effect of Judaic ('kosher') rules concerning non-defilement, during the killing of animals, see Professor Peter Singer's 'Animal Liberation' (2nd edition, 1990), pp. 153-56. Cf next note.

13. I once wrote to Dr Creed, a Melbourne academic, noting her 'feminist' interest in teaching a course on 'Hitchcock'; **inter alia**, I referred to how Professor Peter Singer, another Melbourne academic, had developed his notion of 'speciesism' - analogous to 'sexism' - and pointed out that many of the creatures we cut up and eat have at least as high a degree of sentience and IQ **as human babies** (cf the swimming babies mentioned in note 6, above). Dr Creed did not reply - perhaps she thought me a **ratbag!** Or was it just that one '-ism' at a time is all that Dr Creed can handle? (By contrast, anyone who has read Schopenhauer would know that the issues are related, and interconnected, and that **all** academic over-specialisation is false to the larger reality - the **theme** of this book review.)

14. An example of a relatively concrete, and therefore relatively demonstrable and trustworthy, **percept** is given by the play on the word 'ugly' in Joseph Stefano's script of **Psycho**, mentioned in the text. Naturally, interpretation is still involved - but it can be tested, rather than merely asserted by appeal to authority (or theory).

BLOOPERS

Here's more on John Buchan, author of 'The Thirty-Nine Steps' (1915), whose work I continue to read with pleasure - though the later novels do almost maunder at times. First, 'The MacGuffin' was **right** to say that Buchan wrote travel books ('MacGuffin' 10, but retracted in the 'Bloopers' section of 'MacGuffin' 11!). I was scanning our family bookshelves recently and rediscovered a copy of Buchan's 'The Last Secrets: The Final Mysteries of Exploration' (1923), which contains essays ranging across most of the Continents.

On the other hand, I was rash to claim ('MacGuffin' 10) that the formidable mother of Medina in 'The Three Hostages' (1924) is the prototype of Mrs Sebastian, the mother of Alex Sebastian, in Hitchcock's **Notorious** (1946). There's a similarity, certainly, but in fact the basis of the film is 'The Song of the Dragon' (1921) by American author John Taintor Foote - a story which has a formidable mother (and father, too) of its own!

Nevertheless, Hitchcock, a Buchan-admirer, surely noticed how the central idea in Foote's story - its young heroine is prepared to sleep with one of her country's enemies in order to get vital information - resembles a key plot-point in Buchan's 'Mr Standfast' (1919). See, in particular, the last line of that book's Chapter 11 ('The Valley of Humiliation').

Again, reviewing James Naremore's **North by Northwest** book, in 'MacGuffin' 13, I suggested that in some ways Vandamm (James Mason) resembles the villainous Carl Peterson in 'Bulldog Drummond' (1920) by Buchan's contemporary, 'Sapper'. Well, maybe so, but in fairness to Professor Naremore I should have noted that Buchan did get in first, notably with **his** German villain, the Graf von Schwabing, aka Moxon Ivery, in 'Mr Standfast'.

Also, I might have noted how the elegant, even dandified, Vandamm resembles Medina in 'The Three Hostages'. In Chapter Four of Buchan's novel, there's a remarkably frank hero-villain confrontation. Medina's world-weariness, and brilliance, soon become apparent. (I was reminded of such literary figures as Lord Byron and Dickens's James Steerforth.) Pertinent to Vandamm's evident bisexuality is this only half-grudging comment by Buchan's Hannay about Medina: 'He is the only fellow I ever heard of who was adored by women and also liked by men.'

* * *

Speaking of Dickens ... I was wrong to say of Holloway Prison (article on Hitchcock's **The Paradine Case** in 'MacGuffin' 12) that it 'was an old building even in Dickens's time'. In fact, Holloway Prison in London opened on February 6th, 1852, the day before Dickens's 40th birthday. (It originated, however, from the old Giltspur Street Compter, a debtors' prison and house of correction, in Holborn. The Compter, no longer needed, was pulled down in 1855.)

Holloway wasn't always just a women's prison. Its gateway tower resembles the approach to a grand mediaeval castle - see Hitchcock's film. It was modelled on the main front of Warwick Castle.

On the right of the entrance is the wing originally devoted to women prisoners only. On the other side of the doorway is a lofty hall. This was used as a reception room for prisoners.

A 1930s book notes: 'The appearance of the women prisoners in Holloway differs little from that of the inmates of Poor Law institutions, except that they are always neater. All the women wear the same kind of clothes - white caps with frills, and blue or grey cotton dresses.'

Most of this, except for the detail of the frilly caps, is shown in Hitchcock's film. Perhaps Alida Valli wasn't given a cap because she was playing a remand-prisoner.

* * *

Ladies and gentlemen. In 'MacGuffin' 11, on p. 18, we reported (re an allusion in Hitchcock's **Vertigo**) that 'aircraft magnate and movie tycoon Howard Hughes once attempted to design a strapless bra for Jane

Russell.' We now understand that it wasn't a **strapless** bra that Hughes designed, but a **seamless** one. Sorry.

* * *

Did anyone notice this slip when I was discussing Josephine Tey's novel, 'A Shilling for Candles' (1936), in the article last time on Hitchcock's **Young and Innocent**? On p. 20, I referred to 'Chapter 19, ten from the end'. Yet on p. 23, I (correctly) called Chapter 27 'the final chapter'! Okay, I own up to my lack of mathematics. Chapter 19 is actually **eight** from the end. (Isn't it?)

* * *

Twice now I've failed to nail an important parallel in the thinking of the philosophers Gilbert Ryle (1900-1976) and Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860). When I mentioned last time (note 30, on p. 25), re **Young and Innocent**, that some 'moderns' like Ryle 'believe that mind and body are indistinguishable, that the mind is part of the body's activity and not a separate, independent entity', I noted that I had made the same point about an aspect of **Stage Fright** (1950) back in 'MacGuffin' 2. Yet on neither occasion did I point out, as I had meant to, that Schopenhauer's notion of 'the Will' fully anticipates Ryle on this. Cf Bryan Magee, 'The Philosophy of Schopenhauer' (1983), p. 124 and passim.

* * *

Finally, I've only lately discovered that the name of Professor S.S. Praver, whose book, 'Caligari's Children: The Film as Tale of Terror' (1980), was reviewed in 'MacGuffin' 2, refers to a woman and not a man. Apologies for the review's misleading reference.

.....

The Dandy in Hitchcock

(Editor's note. Thomas Elsaesser's article represents the text, slightly revised, of a paper he delivered to the Rome Hitchcock Conference in May, 1980. The papers from the Conference were published in Italian as 'Per Alfred Hitchcock', edited by Edoardo Bruno, Editori del Grifo, 1981. However, this is the first publication in English of Professor Elsaesser's paper.)

No doubt, every critic prefers to fashion his or her own 'Alfred Hitchcock' in the mirror of the pleasures the films provide. In contrast, most scholars have arrived at **their** Hitchcock by paying scrupulous attention to the work, the individual films, as is quite proper - the more so, since Hitchcock the man was an exceptionally private person. And yet, I think we are all aware of the paradox that this private person also cultivated an exceptionally public persona quite apart, or so it seems, from his work. He was a star, he knew he was a star, and he dramatised himself as a star.¹

The question I am pursuing in this paper is whether in this most self-reflexive of cinematic oeuvres we do not find a 'portrait of the artist'. Not, of course, of the historical individual - that can be left to the biographers - but of the type of creative being who bridges and even reconciles the rift that in the past often appeared in Hitchcock criticism: between the entertainer and the 'serious artist'. Rather than polarise the two terms, I want to make my tentative answer hinge upon what I consider to be the enigma of Hitchcock's Englishness.

In the critical literature, there is no shortage of coherent images of Hitchcock. No need for me to represent them in detail: the Catholic and Jansenist, the artist of the occult forces of light and darkness, the master-technician, the supreme showman, and so on. In Britain, two Hitchcocks dominated the crucial period of revaluation in the '60s. One was found in the pages of 'Sight and Sound', characterised by either disdainful or regretful dismissal of the American Hitchcock. The foil for it was a preference, nostalgically tinged, for Hitchcock the craftsman-stylist with his eye for typically English realism or social satire. Polemically opposed to this view was Robin Wood's Hitchcock, held up not only as a very serious artist, but one who in his American films had a consistent theme, almost a

humanist concern: the therapeutic formation of the couple and the family.² Such a notion of Hitchcock the moralist was already anticipated and rejected by Lindsay Anderson when he wrote in 1949: 'Hitchcock has never been a **serious** director. His films are interesting neither for their ideas nor for their characters. None of his early melodramas can be said to carry a message, and when one does appear, as in **Foreign Correspondent** (1940), it is banal in the extreme. ... In the same way, Hitchcock's characterisation has never achieved - or aimed at - anything more than surface verisimilitude.'³

Peter Wollen might be said to have developed **his** Hitchcock in opposition to both of these English constructs, apparently leaning more towards seeing Hitchcock as a director who **subverts** the morality, the politics and the realism of his sources, in order to exhibit their narrative and structural mechanisms. 'For Hitchcock it is not the problem of loyalty or allegiance which is uppermost, but the mechanisms of spying and pursuit in themselves'⁴ But these mechanisms, as Wollen wisely adds, 'have their own psychological significance. In the end we discover that to be a master-technician in the cinema is to speak a rhetoric which is none other than the rhetoric of the unconscious.'⁵ Since then, almost all the major readings of Hitchcock have followed and explored this path - often with spectacular success. The very force and cogency of this success, notably through Raymond Bellour's work, while strongly persuading us to see the American cinema and classical narrative as remade in the image of Hitchcock, makes me, perversely, want to look for a more limited, historical, more English and more 'ideological' Hitchcock.

I take my cue from a few casual remarks by Raymond Durnat, who has commented on Hitchcock's affinities with Symbolism and Decadence. Durnat writes: 'Since the cinema is traditionally associated with the lower social grades, a man who delights in perfectly wrought film form is likely to find himself referred to as a master craftsman, and the full sense of his involvement with aesthetics is missed. ... Hitchcock is as lordly as any Symbolist of **l'art pour l'art**. ... A craftsman whose craft is aesthetics and who takes a deep pleasure in practising it as meticulously as Hitchcock does, is an aesthete.' And Durnat points to a spiritual affinity with Oscar Wilde, calling Hitchcock 'an epicure of suspense and terror' whose films bring to mind 'titles of the Decadence: *Le Jardin des Supplices*. *Les Fleurs du Mal*.'⁶ It is this cultural sensibility and aesthetic temperament that I want to investigate a little further.

Is Hitchcock an aesthete in his work, and was he, as Durnat implies, a dandy in his life? Let me cite some typical attitudes that are supposed to make a Dandy. A Dandy is preoccupied, above all, with style. A Dandy makes a cult of clothes and manners. A Dandy has an infinite capacity to astound and surprise. A Dandy is given to a form of wit which seems to his contemporaries mere cynicism. A Dandy must be negative: neither believing in the world of men - virility, sports - nor in the world of women - the earthy, the life-giving, the intuitive, the natural and flowing. A Dandy prefers fantasy and beauty over maturity and responsibility, he pursues perfection to the point of perversity. He is, to quote an authoritative study: 'A man dedicated solely to his own perfection through a ritual of taste ... , free of all human commitments that conflict with taste: passion, moralities, ambitions, politics or occupations.'⁷ And he despises everything that is vulgar, common, associated with commerce and a mass-public.

Now, I grant you, it is difficult to recognise in this description the familiar and portly figure, dressed in sober business suits; a Catholic, a devoted husband and father, the son of a grocer; the quiet, private upholder of domestic virtues par excellence. It is difficult, if not incongruous, to discern in the familiar silhouette the traits of a Baudelaire, or an Oscar Wilde, or a Proust, or a Diaghilev. Neither does there seem to be any connection, either directly or indirectly, with the British Pre-Raphaelites, or the Bloomsbury Group. None of the gregariousness, none of the in-group rituals, but also little of the élitism or the anti-democratic exclusivity of the European aesthetic coteries in literature or the performing arts.

But let us look a little further. First, sartorial dandyism, the cult of clothes. True, Hitchcock wore sober business suits, but he **always** wore them, in every climate, in his office, on the set, in the Californian summer, in the Swiss Alps or in Marrakesh. As John Russell Taylor remarks: 'When he was filming he would turn up punctiliously at the Studio every day disguised as an English businessman in the invariable dark suit, white shirt and restrained dark tie. In the 1930s the fact of wearing a suit and tie, even in the suffocating heat of a Los Angeles summer, was not so bizarre as it has since become, but in a world where many of the film-makers affected fancy-dress - De Mille's riding breeches, Sternberg's

tropical tea-planter outfit - Hitch's was the fanciest of them all by being the least suitable and probable.⁸ Quite plainly, Hitchcock was applying a most rigorous public gesture: the dandyism of sobriety.

Next, the ritual of manners. It already annoyed Lindsay Anderson that Hitchcock, when he came to London, stayed at a luxury hotel. It smacked to him of Bel Air snobbery, contempt, and a vulgar display of ~~money~~. The point, however, was that Hitchcock **always** stayed at the ~~same~~ hotel, in the same suite at Claridge's, just as, at home, he always had dinner at Chasens'. Affecting a superstitious nature, a fear of crossing the street or driving a car, was part of the same public gesture: to make out of the contingencies of existence an absolute and demanding ritual, and thereby to exercise perfect and total control, almost as if to make life his own creation. It is a choice not so different from, say, that made by Ronald Firbank, a notable dandy of the '20s, who, on moving to another part of London, decided to retain his gardener, but who insisted that the fellow should walk, in a green baize apron and carrying a watering can, from his lodgings along Picadilly and Regent Street to Firbank's new home in Chelsea.

Hitchcock's daily rituals, which he made known to everyone, are not only a rich man's indulgence of his own convenience, for they touch one of the Dandy's main philosophical tenets: to make no concessions to Nature, at whatever price. Hitchcock's life, which has been seen as that of 'a straightforward middle-class Englishman who happens to be an artistic genius',⁹ seems, in its particular accentuation, its imperviousness to both change and time, more problematic, more enigmatic, than merely the attempt to cling to the values of his native country out of season, as it were. Nor is it simply the mask of a man whose painful shyness makes him adopt a role that everyone recognises and therefore doesn't question: his work is too much obsessed with domination - of who controls whom by the power of the gaze, by a play of fascination - to be so easily explained. More pertinent, then, is the suggestion that Hitchcock's lifestyle was a determined protest, the triumph of artifice over accident, a kind of daily victory over chance, in the name of a spirituality dedicating itself to making life imitate art. The revolt against Nature, of course, is one of the strongest traditions of European aestheticism and dandyism - from Baudelaire's 'Paradis Artificiels', via Huysman's 'A Rebours', to Oscar Wilde's 'The Truth of Masks' and 'The Decay of Lying'. From the latter comes the most well-known defence of Hitchcock's use of back-projection, process-shots and studio-sets: 'The more we study art, the less we care for nature. What art really reveals to us is nature's lack of design, her curious crudities, her extraordinary monotony, her absolutely unfinished condition. Nature has good intentions, of course, but as Aristotle once said, she cannot carry them out. When I look at a landscape I cannot help seeing all its defects. It is fortunate for us, however, that nature is so imperfect, as otherwise we should have no art at all. Art is our spirited protest, our gallant attempt to teach nature her proper place.'¹⁰ Hitchcock fully responded to Wilde's challenge when, famously, he said: 'My films are not slices of life. They're slices of cake.'¹¹

As in his work, so in his life, Hitchcock excelled in turning a cliché inside out. Everyone is agreed that Hitchcock was a professional, an addict to work. Yet part of the image of a dandy is that he disdains work. Hitchcock was able to cultivate both images simultaneously: that of perfection, and that of effortless ease. For him, a film is finished before it is begun: creation takes place elsewhere, in another scene, not in the process of filming. No commentator leaves out the description of Hitchcock on the set, sitting in his director's chair, appearing languid, his mind on something else, or simply looking bored. He made a point of never looking through the camera lens. 'It would be as though I distrusted the cameraman and he was a liar. ... I don't rush the same evening to see "Has it come out?" That would be like going to the local camera shop to see the snaps and make sure that nobody has moved.'¹²

This immobility of Hitchcock's is another important clue: the true work of the Dandy is to expend all his effort on creating about his person the impression of utter stasis. One recalls the Sphinx-like profile he presented as his trademark; and how, in later life, his public appearance was designed to accentuate the statuesqueness of his massive body. Disarmingly, he turned himself into his own monument, aware of his own immortality. Of course, he carried it lightly, like the wax effigy with which he let himself be photographed and which, deep-frozen, appeared amongst his wife's groceries in the refrigerator. In a typical inversion of a Romantic motif - that of the Double - Hitchcock rehearsed his own death and lent it the semblance of life.

If his working methods show a disdain for improvisation, his films stand and fall by the degree to which they exhibit the intricacies of their design. While one can interpret this as a need for order, for control (and the domination of recalcitrant material is clearly part of the filmmaker's ambition to possess the world and fix it through the gaze), it is equally the case that in the quality and patterning of the scripts, Hitchcock manifested a most exuberant freedom and playfulness, a love of ornament, of which the much-vaunted realistic touches seem only the most obvious manifestations. Artifice, in Hitchcock, controls the shape of the films' dramatic structure, based as it is on always seeking out contrasts, counterpoints, ironies and reversals, thereby also appealing to a powerfully **intellectual** sense of abstract form.

In this regard, Hitchcock is a filmmakers' director, and one wonders whether the persuasiveness of a Proppian or Levi-Straussian analysis of Hitchcock's plots stems in no small measure from the 'musical' or contrapuntal temperament typical of an aesthete's sensibility, at least as much as from the archetypal, mythological nature of the communication set in motion by the cinema generally, considered as mass-art narrative. Paradoxically, this draws attention to a certain modernism in Hitchcock, which has to do with forcing as sharply as possible the line where the sensuous, the concrete quality of film, appears as a disguise for the mechanical, the abstract, and **its** sensuality. Gavin Lambert has remarked that 'many scenes and details from [Hitchcock's] movies could be titled like surrealist paintings: Human Being Caged by Bird, Cigarette Extinguished in Fried Egg, and ... Young Man Dressed as his Dead Mother ...'.¹³ Rather than relating this aspect of Hitchcock to an approximation of dream-like states, an argument can be made that sees him as a filmmaker of ideas, in much the same way as Duchamp was a painter of ideas, and who followed a similar cult of the sterile, of the degradation inherent in matter, considered as the essence of male desire and its manifestations in art.

If this seems rather fanciful, something like it has nonetheless been implicitly recognised before. Hitchcock's critics, for instance, have often been offended by what appeared to be his obsession with 'effects', his purely external manipulation of fear, suspense and the audience's emotions - which he played, according to the well-known dictum, like other people play the piano. What, negatively, have been described as 'gimmicks', tricks, are at the same time signs of a will towards abstraction, and a part of a modernist's conceptualisation of the artist's material. One of the 'gimmicks' that Hitchcock's realist critics objected to, for instance, was the scene in **The 39 Steps** (1935), when the woman's scream, on discovering the body, was in effect substituted by the whistle of a train entering a tunnel. Or, in a similar register, there's the electronic simulation of bird-cries and wing-beating in **The Birds** (1963), the use of a violin at an abnormally high pitch in **Psycho** (1960), the look of surprise on the face of the real Mr Townsend in **North by Northwest** (1959) which turns out to be due not to the photo Cary Grant is holding out to him but to the knife in his back. Hitchcock's imagination seizes on occasions, emotions, at that point where within the human element the mechanical becomes visible, undoing thereby the anthropomorphism that the cinema so deceptively simulates.¹⁴ One remembers the scene, as described to Truffaut, that was to have gone into **North by Northwest**: a discussion between the hero and a foreman as they walk along a Detroit car assembly line. We see a brand-new car being put together, and when it's finally completed and rolls off the end of the line, a man's body pops out. Not only does the mechanical here produce the human, it produces it **ex nihilo**, so to speak, and what it produces is a corpse. The scene has a special status in never having been filmed and yet many times told: it's a parable about cinema, the making of a Hitchcock film.

The principle at work here is that of negativity, where the human is bounded everywhere and contained by the mechanical, by death and by absence: all metaphors of the cinema at work in defying Nature. It can perhaps be best exemplified by repeating Hitchcock's own version of the **MacGuffin**: 'The word MacGuffin comes from a story about two men in an English train, and one says to the other: "What's that package on the baggage rack over your head?" "Oh," he says, "that's a MacGuffin." The first one says, "Well, what's a MacGuffin?" "It's an apparatus for trapping lions in the Scottish Highlands." So the other one says, "But there are no lions in the Scottish Highlands!" And he answers, "Then that's no MacGuffin."¹⁵

We know that the MacGuffin is the red herring, the thing the characters make much of, but which for the story is irrelevant, and for the audience no more than a bait. But looked at from another aspect, Hitchcock's story of the MacGuffin is the very epitome of a narrative process, the process of negation, of cancelling something out, what in the language of Derrida one might call an 'erasure'. Phrased by

Hitchcock as a kind of pseudo-definition, the anecdote confirms, in a most theoretical way, Hitchcock's profound grasp of what he usually puts in rather simpler terms, like 'I'm interested not so much in the stories I tell as in the means of telling them.'¹⁶ The MacGuffin, considered as a structure, turns on a contradiction: 'That's a MacGuffin'/'That's not a MacGuffin'. And it does so by operating a switch of identity and transferring the terms' denotation. The MacGuffin is, in Hitchcock's pure cinema, the 'pure signifier', to which no signified corresponds. Without stretching the point, one might speak here of the logic of transference itself, of the dynamic of substitution and erasure. In a film like **Strangers on a Train** (1951), this logic can be observed in its most abstract form at the same time as it is firmly embedded in the narrative itself. As critics have remarked, the 'theme' of transference of guilt, the exchange of crime, the doppelgänger-motif, is actually realised in terms of a series of verbal and visual puns, centred on the notions of crossing, crossing over, double-crossing, criss-crossing: visually, the film opens with feet crossing the frame diagonally, then the shape of a double cross formed by the railway tracks, and finally, the crossing of legs, where the two protagonists accidentally meet. On the verbal level, you have the play on the moral implication of crossing someone, running across someone, being cross with someone and double-crossing someone: all in all, a remarkable case of 'inner speech' as it was defined by the Russian Formalists in the 1920s. Not to mention the crossed tennis rackets on Guy's cigarette lighter, or the spectators going cross-eyed during an exchange of volley-shots. This is presumably why the film doesn't end with Bruno's death on the merry-go-round: by repeating the opening scene in the train, and the opening line, 'Say, aren't you Guy Haines?', the film seems to cancel itself by establishing the diagrammatic abstraction in a kind of double mirror, where the mathematical figures of the double (parallel) and the diagonal cross emerge as the true obsession of the film. As Hitchcock says to Truffaut, 'Isn't it a fascinating design? One could study it forever.'¹⁷ Similarly, an early film like **Number Seventeen** (1932), much underrated by critics looking for realist touches, is entirely constructed around transfer, switch and substitution in an abstract cancellation of the signified, reminiscent of that other master of pure cinema, Fritz Lang.

This 'conceptual' quality of Hitchcock's imagination, which one might with perhaps too slight an emphasis on its many implications, describe as a love of paradox, is worth noting because the issue of Hitchcock's **morality** has so often been debated. If for Rohmer and Chabrol the master-theme is the transference of guilt, if Robin Wood found his therapeutic theme in the moral ambiguities of choices opening up at every turn, if we can find Levi-Straussian antinomies and binary oppositions generating and traversing every text, if the secret of Hitchcock's enunciative process is a principle of alternation, we are clearly dealing with something which in its structural dimension considerably undercuts a specific moral impulse that is supposed to inform the work. Rather, it is the insistence on form itself that constitutes an essential part of Hitchcock's morality.¹⁸

One evident implication, surely, is that Hitchcock's art is the art of surface, intimately connected with the notion of effect on the one hand, and with the sensibility of the dandy on the other. One might see it as itself a paradox: Hitchcock cultivates surface as the true profundity of the cinema, and it would be shallow indeed to call him the moralist of appearance. There is in his films a complete devotion to surface, which should not be mistaken for a mere interest in technique, and it might be more appropriate to say that technique is only the very inadequate name applied to a cinema dedicated to the rule of contiguity and metonymy. Whether in the accidental brush of feet in **Strangers on a Train**, the crossed trajectories in a hotel lobby of **North by Northwest** ('Paging Mr Kaplan') or the converging paths when Karen Black suddenly appears out of nowhere and forces Bruce Dern to stop in **Family Plot** (1976) - in every instance, the narrative is generated out of a veritable 'splicing together': the fortuitous encounter of the unlikely with the improbable. The somewhat facile generalisation that in Hitchcock evil does not lurk **behind** a door but is there in broad daylight, and comes out of a blue sky, might be rephrased by saying that montage, in Hitchcock as in Eisenstein, is the very sign of a categorical refusal to give the cinematic image any kind of transcendental value. And it seems entirely appropriate that film scholars, digging deeper in his films, should discover structures that reveal an ever greater simplicity, where the elements become more mathematical, more musical, more schematic. It is therefore one of the incidental virtues of Raymond Bellour's work that it emphatically brings us back to the surface in Hitchcock, where what we need to know can be grasped by an attention to segmentation, the interplay that arises from the precision with which the filmmaker controls, for instance, the size of the shot, the direction of the gaze and the motility of the camera.¹⁹

By outlining some of Hitchcock's particular characteristics as a filmmaker of surface and contiguity, I

am suggesting that the chance encounter, the collision of apparently unrelated destinies, as in **North by Northwest**, or **Psycho**, or **Strangers on a Train**, leads us not necessarily into the realm of moral and metaphysical essences, but may also constitute a denial of essence, an aesthetic delight in what, from a different vantage-point, is always a catastrophe: identity as merely the violent suppression of random gestures and exchanges. In Hitchcock, action always takes precedence over character, which is why his narratives offer themselves for structural or morphological analysis.²⁰

Such partiality for the contiguous is an important clue to Hitchcock's humour and, more specifically, his irrepressible penchant for playing the practical joker, the perpetrator of hoaxes: numerous stories, anecdotes and legends, kept in circulation not least by Hitchcock himself, invariably testify to his wish to confound a certain naive literalness with lessons in 'lateral thinking'. For instance, there's the story of Hitchcock serving blue food at dinner because one of his guests had, on a previous occasion, made a crack about the master's devotion to 'cordon bleu' cooking. It would be worthwhile to study in detail the principles underlying Hitchcock's wit, his verbal playfulness, his epigrams: these things relate closely to the predominance of paradox and dramatic irony in his plots, and to the principle of erasure through double transfer which I briefly analysed as the structure of the MacGuffin. To give an example of Hitchcock's verbal dandyism, let me cite an anecdote that James Stewart liked to tell about work on the set: 'Hitchcock actually has very little regard for the spoken word ... He pays no attention to the actual words - he's done all that, finalised all that months before. He's an absolute villain to script girls and people that have to follow the lines. So when the script girl says to him, "Mr Hitchcock, Mr Stewart didn't say anything like what's in the script", he'll say, "It sounded all right; **grammatically** it was all right."²¹

The need to startle and to baffle an audience is of course part of any showman's artistic make-up. But the practical joker displays a particularly violent ambiguity: he attracts and holds an audience in order to distance himself the more definitely from any community with it. He recalls, in this guise, Baudelaire's **saltimbanque** - the mountebank, the circus artist, the jester of modernist literature and painting - often a figure of pathos, as he stands apart from the crowd yet bears the burden of their amusement. To the unconscious disloyalty of the audience corresponds the practical joker's betrayal of his victim's trust. We find, especially in Hitchcock's British films, a number of references to this ambiguous figure: for instance, the portrait of the jester which plays such an important role in **Blackmail** (1929), or the murderers in the 1930 **Murder!** (playing a circus acrobat) and the 1937 **Young and Innocent** (disguised as a black minstrel), both of whom one hesitates to call villains, precisely because the pathos of their costume underlines their separateness and isolation from people enjoying each other's company. Separateness, distance, is the hallmark of the public persona which Hitchcock also created for himself with his television appearances. Not only did he stand apart, there was the manner in which he 'presented' the TV shows, quite different from the personal appearances in the films: the host's presentations of the 'Alfred Hitchcock Hour' displayed the more grotesque, clownish, aesthetically aggressive sides of his showmanship, letting these find expression and form in grand-guignol images of himself with a bloody hatchet buried in his bald pate, or carrying his own head under his arm.

The saltimbanque, on the face of it, seems to have little in common with the dandy, especially since we do find quite a number of dandies among the villains in Hitchcock's films. From Ivor Novello in **The Lodger** (1926), Peter Lorre in **The Man Who Knew Too Much** (1934), Robert Walker in **Strangers on a Train**, down to James Mason in **North by Northwest**, Hitchcock's villains are often either sharp dressers or aristocratic aesthetes. Yet many of Hitchcock's **heroes** are practical jokers and aristocratic rogues: Robert Donat in **The 39 Steps**, Cary Grant in the 1941 **Suspicion** (and the 1955 **To Catch a Thief**), not to mention Tippi Hedren who in **The Birds** is introduced as a practical joker.

The sensibility I am trying to outline for understanding the Hitchcock persona, then, is clearly a composite one: a combination of the aesthete, the rogue and the mountebank. At the same time,, it's precisely this somewhat unlikely combination that makes Hitchcock's dandyism specifically English and historically definable. For these attitudes can be seen to occupy, in the literary and artistic culture of the 1920s and 1930s, one side of a dialectic which opposes the values of Victorian and Edwardian public life - social responsibility, maturity, moral and artistic seriousness - with the values of a generation who was in rebellion against identifying art exclusively with seriousness, an attitude they considered philistine, suffocating and inartistic. Instead, they affected and cultivated, out of an equally serious commitment to art, a mode of irresponsibility, playfulness, unseriousness and sexual

ambiguity that combined the stance of the Oscar Wilde dandy with a more aggressive brand of schoolboy humour and a wilful immaturity. Reacting to the 'consensus humanism' of Edwardian England, because they saw in the cultural forms of seriousness and responsibility an ideology of power and social hierarchy digging itself in, after the debacle of the First World War, the dandies of the '20s and '30s, according to a recent study of the period, 'shared a sense of humour, a humour developed to abnormal intensity, so that it takes over the psychic and social functions usually performed by the erotic or idealistic aspects of personality'.²²

This seems to me a pertinent observation in relation to Hitchcock: if, however remotely, he belongs to this side of the cultural divide, then it may be possible to see his irony, his verbal wit, the apparent unseriousness and showmanship both in his persona and as it manifests itself in the structure and material of his films, as itself part of a more coherent project - that of a refusal, a rejection, a protest against a specifically English concept of maturity, dominant in the culture in which he grew up. We could then say, without merely stating a paradox, that Hitchcock's cultivated unseriousness has behind it the force of a moral stance. In any direct sense, Hitchcock is not a social critic: his morality resides in the complexity of his dandyism and what it entails ideologically. That it is a morality mediated by a culturally specific gesture of refusal makes the reading of his films in the manner of Robin Wood so problematic, because the values that Wood asserts in Hitchcock (maturity, moral growth, the therapeutic theme) are precisely the values upheld by the inheritors of the Grand Tradition against which the dandy in Hitchcock is in revolt. On the other hand, a purely formal or structural reading of Hitchcock tends to ignore the extent to which Hitchcock's anti-humanism, his cult of artifice and surface, are the result of a moral and historical *parti pris*. That Hitchcock chose the dandy side of the British cultural character - a choice greatly facilitated by his move to Hollywood - shows another irony; for, in Hollywood, the dandy turned into the saltimbanque. There, Hitchcock chose a disguise that looked remarkably like it belonged to the other party - that of philistine Victorianism.

It doesn't seem entirely by chance, then, that one finds most of the English dandies from the '30s, but also after, choosing to live a kind of double life: both inside and outside the British Establishment. Many of the writers and artists among them moved into voluntary exile - California, France, Italy. Some of them deliberately betrayed their social class: W.H. Auden, Isherwood, Spender siding with the cause of the international proletariat, Oswald Mosley founding the British Fascist Party. Others, in apparently secure and even higher places, chose to betray their country. For among the dandies of the '30s are Guy Burgess, George Blake, Donald Maclean and Anthony Blunt: all at various times spies and agents for the Soviet Union.

This peculiar complexion of the British dandy may well induce us to look once more at the preponderance of the spy, the traitor, the agent and the double-agent in Hitchcock's work. In the image of the saboteur, the secret agent, the man who knows too much, the foreign correspondent, there is always in Hitchcock an emphasis on disguise and *mise-en-scène*. Now, a popular entertainer knows that spy stories will always find their public: but few filmmakers have given the thrill of playing double-agent quite as consummate an embodiment in film after film as Hitchcock. One may well ask whether the man who in his public persona chose to 'disguise' himself as a dandy and jester did not put into these thrilling villains a little piece of his own creative self, giving us a portrait of the artist not just as modest *metteur-en-scène*, but as the man who knew too much. Or, putting it slightly differently, the role Hitchcock, through his long years in California, pleased himself to perform was not, as many believed, that of unofficial ambassador. Instead, he was the secret agent of an Englishness more devious for being deadpan, in a medium that happily knows loyalty and pays allegiance not to King and Country but to the customer as King: His/Her Majesty the spectator. However, this loyalty, too, must not be taken altogether at face value. Hitchcock's films - splitting our gaze and dividing our attention, transferring our identity and switching our allegiance - teach us the subtlest and most beguiling form of treason: recognising in the other a part of ourselves. Putting our ordinary selves under erasure, the Dandy in Hitchcock makes us rediscover the morality of artifice. With such Traitors, who needs Royalists? ...

Notes

1. It is this very paradox that has made biographical enterprises such as John Russell Taylor's (1978) and Donald Spoto's (1983) at once so tempting and so troubling.
2. Robin Wood, 'Hitchcock's Films', London 1965, p. 26.
3. Lindsay Anderson, "Alfred Hitchcock", in A. LaValley, ed., 'Focus on Hitchcock', Englewood Cliffs 1972, p. 58.
4. Peter Wollen, "Hitchcock's Vision", in 'Cinema' (GB) no. 3 (June 1969), p. 2.
5. Ibid, p.4.
6. Raymond Durnat, 'The Strange Case of Alfred Hitchcock', London 1978, p. 38.
7. Ellen Moers, 'The Dandy', quoted in Martin Green, 'Children of the Sun', New York 1976, p. 9.
8. John Russell Taylor, 'Hitch', London 1978, p. 159.
9. Ibid.
10. Oscar Wilde, "The Decay of Lying", in 'Intentions', London 1891, p. 1.
11. Francois Truffaut, 'Hitchcock', London 1967, p. 81.
12. Alfred Hitchcock, "I Wish I Didn't Have to Shoot the Picture", in A. LaValley, op. cit., p. 24.
13. Quoted in Chris Hodenfield, "Murder by the Babbling Brook", in 'Rolling Stone', July 29, 1976, p. 26.
14. See, for instance, Peter Noble, ed., 'BFI Index to the Work of Alfred Hitchcock, London 1949, p. 3: 'I aim to give the public good healthy mental shake-ups. Civilisation has become so screening and sheltering that we cannot experience sufficient thrills at first hand. Therefore, to prevent our becoming sluggish and jellified we have to experience them artificially, and the screen is the best medium for this.'
15. Francois Truffaut, op. cit., p. 112.
16. Quoted in André Bazin, "Hitchcock versus Hitchcock", in A. LaValley, op. cit., p. 64.
17. Francois Truffaut, op. cit., p. 164.
18. Cf R. Mundy, "Another Look at Hitchcock", in 'Cinema' (GB) no. 6/7, p. 11:

'The view of Hitchcock as a Catholic moralist is untenable when **I Confess** [1952] is compared to **Downhill** [1927]: public school morality is assigned the same significance as Catholic dogma. The situation where guilt is transferred is what appeals to Hitchcock, and this situation is not necessarily charged with any religious significance. Religion is almost a MacGuffin.'
19. Bellour's most famous article on Hitchcock is his 115-page analysis of **North by Northwest**, "Le Blocage Symbolique", in 'Communications' no. 23, Paris 1975. Available in English are his "**The Birds**: Analysis of a Sequence", mimeograph, The British Film Institute Advisory Service, n.d.; and "Hitchcock, the Enunciator", in 'Camera Obscura' no. 1 (Fall, 1977), pp. 66-91.
20. 'His idea of character is rather primitive.' (Raymond Chandler, quoted in A. LaValley, op. cit., p. 102.)

21. Quoted in Chris Hodenfield, loc. cit., p. 24.

22. Martin Green, op. cit., p. 13.

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Recent 'MacGuffins' have featured **Young and Innocent** (number 13), **The Paradine Case** (12), **Vertigo** (11), Adrian Martin on **Notorious** (10), Evan Williams on **The Lady Vanishes** (9), and **Torn Curtain** (8). These are the issues most recommended! Earlier, there were issues on **Suspicion** (7), **The Wrong Man** plus Charles Barr on Hitchcock's British Period (6), **Number Seventeen** (5), **Psycho** (4), **The Lodger** (3), **Stage Fright** (2), and **Vertigo** and **Family Plot** (1).

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ODD SPOT: A CASE OF KNOWING TOO LITTLE?

Doris Day's song, 'What will be, will be', in the 1956 version of Hitchcock's **The Man Who Knew Too Much** seems to have been inspired by a couple of successful stage musicals of the time. For one thing, the allusion to fate, destiny, repeats the emphasis on 'kismet' in the musical of that title (filmed by Vincente Minnelli in 1955) - as, on a larger scale, Hitchcock's film itself also does (see 'MacGuffin' 10, p. 5). And the idea of a mother passing on wisdom to her son in the form of a song which she teaches him to both sing and whistle, was anticipated in the 'Whenever I feel afraid' scene early in 'The King and I' (filmed by Walter Lang in 1956, with Deborah Kerr).

But what's odd about Doris Day's song is how it ever came to be called 'Que Sera Sera' (a **French**-language title, which John Michael Hayes's script uses) when Day so clearly gives it the **Italian** pronunciation: 'Che sarà, sarà'. Moreover, the latter is what you'd expect, because Italian is the traditional form of the expression (see, for example, lines 75-76 of Christopher Marlowe's 'Dr Faustus', 1604).

Also, there's another reason. The expression, and its Italian pronunciation, seem themselves to have arrived in Hitch's film via Joseph L. Mankiewicz's **The Barefoot Contessa** (1954). There, it's the family motto of Count Torlato-Favrini, played by Rossano Brazzi.

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