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The MacGuffin

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EDITORIAL

This time, my biggest 'thank you' must go to reader Jay Giswein in Highland Park, Los Angeles, who has sent along a copy of Janet Leigh's new book, **'Psycho: Behind the Scenes of the Classic Thriller'** - personally autographed and inscribed by Ms Leigh herself. The inscription (let me share it with you) reads: 'To Ken Mogg, Good luck with "The MacGuffin". Janet Leigh.' So, wow! And, of course, thank you to Ms Leigh!

Now, I can tell you that 'The MacGuffin' hopes to feature **Psycho** in either our next issue or the one after, and will review Ms Leigh's book there. Also coming soon is another of our 'sources' articles, this time on **Bear Window**. If you were agreeably surprised by the number and variety of sources we came up with for **Vertigo** ('MacGuffin' 11) and **Foreign Correspondent** ('MacGuffin' 16), you won't want to miss the **Bear Window** issue. Meanwhile, spare a thought for Hollywood independent producer, Dr Steve Sohmer, once head of Columbia Pictures. A part-time literary scholar, he recently 'discovered' one more possible source for Shakespeare's 'Hamlet' (1601) - and was so excited that he promptly began a massive publicity campaign for his find by publishing it on the Internet, at the same time asking his solicitors to send a warning to a rival scholar and former friend, forbidding her to discuss the play in public! At last report, this not-so-happy pair and their lawyers had reached an agreement that would permit both of them to publish their theories about 'Hamlet' independently.

Well, this 'MacGuffin' has its own find to present, though it's not about 'Hamlet'. It's about **Vertigo** again, and it concerns how the major source for 'D'Entre les Morts', on which **Vertigo** was based, was almost certainly the Georges Simenon novel, 'Lettre à Mon Juge' (1947). I use that novel here to test how far Professor Leland Poague's description of **Vertigo** as a veiled 'comedy of remarriage' stands up - if at all. And here's a point of clarification for what I say in my article. In 'MacGuffin' 10, Adrian Martin 'tried out' (as he put it) various 'generic descriptions' of Hitchcock's **Notorious**, one of which was indeed a combination of Hollywood remarriage comedy (a genre often featuring Cary Grant or James Stewart) and the tragic 'melodrama of an unknown woman' (in which Ingrid Bergman had already appeared: viz, Cukor's **Gaslight**). But what I find significantly different about Martin's and Poague's respective approaches is that Martin sees **Notorious** as capable of sustaining **many** different generic descriptions, whereas I think Poague tries to impose a too artificial, **single** main reading on **Vertigo**.

Next, we were speaking of the Internet ... I thank Australian reader Tim Costello for being the first to send me details of what information about Hitchcock is available on-line. Checking it out, I found an interesting item among the otherwise routine credits for **The 39 Steps**: namely, that the film's composer was Hubert Bath. Normally, the sole musical credit for many Gaumont films of the period, including **The 39 Steps**, is given to Louis Levy as 'Musical Director'. You can find that particular Internet entry, compiled by one Colin Needham, at cn@hplb.hpl.hp.com. But now there's more! Someone has started an Alfred Hitchcock Home Page on the Web. It's said to be excellent (further reports welcome) and even includes 'a cheesy little animation of the shower scene from **Psycho**'. Look it up at <http://www.primenet.com/~mwc/index.html>.

I haven't space to thank in detail all the other good people who've forwarded information lately. Nonetheless, especial thanks to John Trause (e.g. for a copy of the MoMA monograph, 'Junction and Journey: Trains and Film', 1991); Leslie Shepard (for several letters, including the information that 'the shoot-out in the 1934 **The Man Who Knew Too Much** has shots that are carbon copies of grouping and action from Lang's **Dr Mabuse - Inferno**' of 1922); old friend Mike Campi (again for several letters, one of which described the marvellous theatre-organ accompaniment provided at this year's Hong Kong Film

Festival for the screening of the 1931 Chinese film, **Love and Duty**, recently found in Uruguay); and 'Sight and Sound' and 'Film Comment' writer Philip Kemp (whose "Hitching Posts" will be in our next issue). Philip spotted the reference in 'MacGuffin' 14 to the influence of Sidney Gilliat's **London Belongs to Me** (1948) on **Frenzy**, and commented: '**London Belongs to Me** seems to be a much-imitated movie. The initial appearance of Alec Guinness's Professor Marcus in **The Ladykillers** [Alexander Mackendrick, 1955] looks very like a parody of the arrival of Mr Squales (Alistair Sim) in Gilliat's film - especially since Sim was Mackendrick's original choice to play the Professor.' (Yes, but as I promptly wrote back to Philip, the arrival of Mr Squales was itself an echo of the arrival of the Ivor Novello character at the door of number 13 in Hitchcock's 1926 **The Lodger!**)

Just yesterday I got another long letter from John Kuhns of Woodland Hills, California. Very pleasant it was, too, though John properly took me to task at one point for several times in these pages getting the title wrong of Hitchcock's (as opposed to Conrad's) **Secret Agent** - there's no definite article. A major piece of news in the letter concerns a coming Hitchcock Conference to be held next March in Austin, Texas. The organiser is a Professor Garrett. I'll try to print more news of this event in our next issue, due in February.

Another conference mentioned in this 'MacGuffin' is one held last August by the Australian Screen Directors' Association. Tina Kaufman was there, and in her 'Oz-report' she tells us about what Peter Weir and others said to the conference delegates. A book-review in this issue, of Robert J. Corber's excellent 'In the Name of National Security', and a special article on the famous Major Armstrong murder case in Wales, both link up with the discussion of **Vertigo** I've already referred to. (I trust readers will forgive any slight indulgence on my part where I've included material in these two pieces that I felt was relevant to the larger theme ...)

That's about it from me for now. Oh yes, contrary to what was foreshadowed last time, there's no 'MacGuffin' overseas-price rise. (We simply swapped banks, to one with more reasonable charges for handling 'foreign' drafts!)

To everyone, good viewing.



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LETTERS

Ronald Conway, Hawthorn, Victoria, Australia

Your range of references for **Foreign Correspondent** [in 'MacGuffin' 16] reminds me of the decidedly **useful** uses of obsession. I could not imagine any writer in the world doing a more detailed job on it. ... However, the footnote on the wooden cart in the windmill garage seemed to be one of [a few times] where you push the minutiae a bit too far. Also, I'm not **entirely** convinced that Frollo's final dispatch from Notre Dame in **The Hunchback ...** is connected with Rowley's fall from Westminster [Cathedral] tower. But these are quibbles about quibbles and don't detract from the fine, meticulous job you have done on the film.

(Editor's note. Thanks, Ron. Easy to see from your note on obsession that the professional psychologist never forgets his trade! And, yes, I plead guilty as charged! Now, if anyone wants some further reading on **Foreign Correspondent**, with plenty of production detail, I see that there's an article about that film in 'American Cinematographer', August 1995, pp. 75-81.)

* * *

'Huntley Haverstock', [reincarnated at?] Rhode Island, USA

'The MacGuffin' may appear innocuous to some but I confess that I perceive something more sinister behind

its rather ordinary facade. Indeed, I harbour a suspicion that reading 'The MacGuffin' could be quite hazardous to the young and innocent due to its ability to induce an addiction which causes one to repeatedly attempt to decipher beyond a shadow of a doubt all of the insights of its notorious artists, particularly those who reside under Capricorn ... Such an obsession, particularly if it propels one in a northwesterly direction towards the ghastly crystal trench, could have fatal consequences.

(Editor's note. What, more obsession?! But about 'The Crystal Trench' now. Hitchcock filmed that particular story by A.E.W. Mason ('The Four Feathers') for an episode of 'Alfred Hitchcock Presents', didn't he? I've not seen it, but have heard that it ends with an unfaithful husband being killed when he falls down inside a glacier, where his body remains in full view for ever afterwards! Did you know that that incident is reprised in Chapter 12 of 'The Third Round', 1925, by 'Sapper', though the accident-victim there is a local celebrity? The story's hero, Bulldog Drummond, muses: 'A terrible position for a self-respecting community, don't you think? To have the leading citizen in full view in a block of ice gives visitors an impression of carelessness.')

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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.)

Angel Baby, you did it!

Winner in all the main categories, including Best Film, at this year's Australian Film Institute Awards was first-time director Michael Rymer's **Angel Baby**, about a pair of young schizophrenics in Melbourne.

Rymer's film thus joined previous Best Film award-winners, including **Muriel's Wedding** (d. Paul Hogan, in 1994), **The Piano** (Jane Campion, 1993), **Strictly Ballroom** (Baz Luhrmann, 1992), **Proof** (Jocelyn Moorhouse, 1991), and **Flirting** (John Duigan, 1990).

Oz films in the US

Meanwhile, Australian film has had a boost overseas with the mounting of a special season - currently running - at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. The season is called 'Strictly Oz: A History of Australian Film', and it continues until next January 16. After that, it will go on to the University of California, for screening in February. The curator and co-ordinator of film exhibitions at MoMA, Larry Kardish, commented perceptively: 'There's a nice, healthy cynicism running through Australian film, and I wanted to illustrate that.'

The season follows hard upon an earlier, relatively minor, one, consisting of films made in Melbourne (e.g. **Proof**, **Romper Stomper**), and screened last July at the New York Guggenheim Museum's small branch in downtown Soho.

More plans to film Conrad's 'The Secret Agent'

We've announced this before, but now it looks like at least one new film version of Joseph Conrad's 1907 novel (and 1921 play) is going ahead. It was previously filmed in 1936 by Hitchcock, as **Sabotage**.

Other Conrad adaptations looming are a BBC-TV/Italian RAI Network mini-series version of 'Nostromo' (published in 1904) - variously announced as being in four parts or of six hours' duration - and a film of 'Victory' (published in 1915). The simultaneous adaptation of several Jane Austen novels for either TV or film ('Pride and Prejudice', 'Sense and Sensibility', 'Persuasion', 'Emma') has prompted at least one commentator to suggest that these two authors have very dry, even bleak, views of human nature, and that this suits our pre-millennial bile!

It's certainly true that Conrad had a 'pessimistic' view of people. He was an admirer of Schopenhauer's philosophy, and supposedly the hero Heyst's 'clear-sighted' father in 'Victory' was based on that German thinker.

Other literary adaptations announced as coming soon may, or may not, fit the same pattern. They include Henry James's 'Portrait of a Lady', Nathaniel Hawthorne's 'The Scarlet Letter', Robert Louis Stevenson's 'Kidnapped', and Rudyard Kipling's 'Captains Courageous'.

Not quite in the spirit of Norman Bates

Australia has its very own Norman Bates Society, whose serious purpose is to research and hold public meetings about true crime. The society recently brought to Australia retired FBI special agent Robert Ressler, who was technical advisor for the book and film of **Silence of the Lambs**. For information about future activities of the society, write to P.O. Box 385, Petersham, NSW 2049, Australia. Phone/Fax: 61 2 3104454.

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OZ-REPORT

A Conference of passion and commitment

The annual conference held by the Australian Screen Directors' Association is a highlight of the film community calendar for me, as it's always adventurously programmed and well-attended. Invariably, the audience of film and TV directors, writers, producers, actors, film teachers and students, and industry bureaucrats, become very involved and passionate about the proceedings. This year's event commenced with a stimulating opening address from Peter Weir, proceeded through structured sessions and panel discussions on relevant issues designed to provide variety and choice, and culminated in a warm and heartfelt tribute dinner. Altogether, the conference was as lively and thoroughly engaging as ever.

Held at the National Film School, Sydney, during two packed days in August, it's an event that asks the over 200 attendees to sacrifice luxury for content. For lunch one grabs fresh and plentiful sandwiches, fruit from large baskets, and fruit juice, and goes outside to the spreading lawns or courtyard seats, thus earning more time for discussion and catching up with old friends. Morning and afternoon tea breaks mean queuing around the tea and coffee urns, grabbing a cup and a biscuit or two, and mingling and chatting on the move.

The theme of the conference was 'The director's voice: craft, creativity, and power', and an exhilarating opening address from the normally reclusive Peter Weir set the scene. He began with a lighthearted description of both his inability to say 'Cut!' on the set, and his innovative attempts to deal with this problem. Then he took us on a gently anecdotal stroll through his career, making some cogent points about the conference's main theme on the way. Asked about his timeframe on filmmaking, he replied that he always thought of the film he was making as his last, and as films take a lot of his energy, he usually takes a year off between them. 'I've always lived here [in Australia] ... and I cut down on the newspapers, live close to nature, do a lot of reading. I'd like to make more films, but ...'

'As long as the idea is powerful, the casting is right, and the actors are comfortable with the script, I can try and keep the idea of filmmaking as a unique experience, keep my love of filmmaking by providing an atmosphere with a lot of humour, a spirit of unpredictability. Humour is good, it's some sort of Zen thing - like the Dalai Lama, who always has that smile.' On that note ended a session that thoroughly delighted its audience.

An issue that came up time and again over the two days, and was obviously of considerable concern to many of those present, was the diminishing role of the director in TV drama. Several sessions were devoted to just that issue. Series television was described as the most onerous and least rewarding area of work for a drama director, as, with tight budgets and schedules, the director is now brought on to the project very late in the piece, and is often reduced to merely 'shooting the schedule'. Meanwhile, actors, writers, and even script editors can also influence the direction of the work. One frustrated conference

participant asked whether the director's voice could even be heard in this climate of drastically reduced directorial control, while another described the ideal: the director being brought on to the project early, having more access to the writer and being involved in the final draft, having more involvement in casting, and being allowed to produce a proper director's-cut.

Discussions exposed much dissatisfaction with current practice by the commercial TV networks, in particular the provision of a list of acceptable cast members, the distribution of a draft of the script superseding the 'final draft' the director had agreed to, and, in the most recent occurrence, the requesting of an additional two minutes in the 'final cut', which would allow the network to cut any two minutes it wanted. The conference's concern on this issue resulted in a strong recommendation at the wrap-up session which the Directors' Association was to take into forthcoming contract negotiations with the producers' peak body.

One director, with the national broadcaster for many years and now a freelancer, voiced many people's concerns when he described TV drama as an industry, 'raw material in one end and product out the other'. But then he talked about the great respect he has for his craft and for the crews with whom he works: 'I love walking onto the set, I love the soundstage, despite the pace at which we, as TV directors, now work. The achievement and knowledge of craft is something I have great pride in.'

He added that these days 'the director's voice is very muted out there in TV ... I'd be very cautious advising anyone to go into TV - you have very little opportunity to make your mark. But just occasionally the magic happens.'

The other major issue to be addressed in several sessions at the conference was the blurring of the lines between documentary and drama, and the changing shape of documentary itself, and one session looked at the ways in which documentary makers choose to represent 'truth' and 'reality'. Lastly, in the session before the conference wrap-up, directors from different production areas were asked to talk about survival and empowerment.

The special conference dinner celebrated the centenary of cinema, and saw the presenting of the inaugural 'Cecil Holmes Award'. Tributes from friends and colleagues combined with a wonderful archival presentation to commemorate the work of Cecil Holmes, the pioneer director who died last year, and the first award-recipient, director-turned-producer Richard Mason, who got his first job in the wardrobe department of **Bureka Stockade** (1947), worked in England and Australia in both those countries' national filmmaking organisations and as an independent, and has been influential in shaping the Australian film industry by his enthusiastic involvement in many events and industry bodies over the last 30 years. He is probably best known outside the industry for the four films he produced for John Duigan, including **Winter of Our Dreams** (1981) and **Far East** (1982).

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BLOOPERS

The biggest blooper this time consists in my again not leaving enough room to put right all the previous bloopers! Nor is there yet enough space to run a page of footnotes left over from the **Spellbound** article in 'MacGuffin' 15 - nor to print a Table of Contents for issues 13-16. (In the unlikely event that anyone wants either of those items in a hurry, please write and request a copy.) But, speaking of the **Spellbound** issue ... I'm aware that, towards the end, there's some loose use of the two terms 'noumenal' and 'numinous' as if they were interchangeable. More on that next time. The hermit scene mentioned on p. 21 as being in **Frankenstein** is actually in **The Bride of Frankenstein**, of course. And, lastly, a note to John Kuhns re **Elstree Calling** (1930), mentioned in 'Letters' of the same issue. A definitive note on Hitchcock's participation in that film is included in a 'Monthly Film Bulletin' analysis, in the November 1975 issue, pp. 246-47 ...

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BOOK REVIEW

Corber, Robert J.: 'In the Name of National Security: Hitchcock, Homophobia, and the Political Construction of Gender in Postwar America' (Duke University Press: Durham and London, 1993; 262 pp, pb)

While [Ernesto] Laclau agrees that no one is unaffected by the structure of social relations - to the point indeed where we are partially determined by them - at the same time no identity is entirely determined; a space of autonomy exists, albeit one constituted through dislocation.

- John Lechte¹

Under the postwar settlement, Americans inhabited a set of discursive structures in which they experienced as subjective relations that were in reality political and social. That is to say, they experienced their lived relations to the world as originating in themselves rather than in specific political and social conditions. Thus [Norman] Mailer felt that the only way in which Americans would give up their faith in consensus politics was if they experienced a violent shock to their subjectivity, so deeply rooted was that faith in their identities as Americans.

- Robert Corber²

Professor Corber's working perspective for this book is derived from Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's notion of the 'impossibility of society' - the notion that 'society' is no more than a prevailing hegemony of some social antagonisms over others -³ and it serves him very nicely, thank you. He shows clearly how Hitchcock's films would seem to go along with, even reinforce, current social attitudes and prejudices but would also subtly call them into question. For example, **Strangers on a Train** (1951) was timely because it dealt with the then-perceived threat to the fabric of American society and of 'the national security state' posed by Communists and homosexuals; but it also ('unintentionally', Corber thinks) 'acknowledged the homoerotics of male spectatorial pleasure'⁴ and, by making the homosexual Bruno Anthony the most charismatic character, ended up constituting a 'heterosexual paranoid fantas[y] about the instability of the sex-gender system'.⁵

Typical, too, of Corber's historicist approach is what he makes of the Muir Woods scene in **Vertigo** (1958) in which Madeleine/Judy (Kim Novak), pretending to be possessed by her ancestor Carlotta Valdez, points to the outer rings of a felled tree, and says, 'Somewhere here I was born, and there I died. It was only a moment for you, you took no notice.' Here's Corber's comment:

At first sight, Madeleine merely seems to be acknowledging that in comparison to the tree ... Carlotta's life was short and insignificant. Yet in the context of the dates marked on the tree, she also seems to be calling attention to Carlotta's exclusion from the history they narrativise: there is apparently no place in official representations of the nation's past for the story of a Hispanic woman who was seduced and abandoned by her Anglo lover in the nineteenth century.⁶

That Carlotta's story is indeed meant by the filmmakers to epitomise a forgotten, and regrettable, incident from 'the small-stuff of history' (in Scottie's phrase) is quite evident, I think. What's refreshing about Corber's discussion of the film is the knowledgeable way in which he spots details like that one and gives them an historical context - not forgetting that the film itself is part of such a context. (Corber, as we'll see, wants to show that Scottie is guilty of perpetuating the same arrogant myth of male supremacy as Carlotta's lover displayed, and he explains it in precise psycho-historical terms: Scottie, a product of postwar America with its 'consensus politics', is desperate to recover his previous respectability, i.e. to show that he's still a virile heterosexual, no bum or beatnik.)

Mind you, Corber is yet another academic who on viewing this scene simply cannot bring himself to acknowledge that Madeleine/Judy here apostrophises 'God' - I think he believes Madeleine is talking to the trees! In effect, and ironically, he criticises a lack of pluralism in Scottie (James Stewart) yet is guilty of the same thing himself: after all, belief-systems do have a degree of reality give ~~or~~ take their historical context. Corber evidently sees his position as a matter of integrity. At one point, he notes 'the similarity between Laclau and Mouffe's theory of the impossibility of society and Jacques Lacan's concept of the Real, that which is excluded from the Symbolic, excluded from the network of

signifiers which build up the reality of the world, and which is hence (we're told)⁷ impossible to know. But Corber insists 'that when I refer to the impossibility of fixing the social in a sutured totality, I have in mind the subject's construction across a multiplicity of contradictory discourses, and not the Lacanian Real'.⁸

Well, fair enough, but what if the **filmmakers** had in mind a different opposition again between the knowable and the unknowable? After all, Lacan's distinction between the (knowable) Symbolic and the (unknowable) Real bears its own similarity to Kant's distinction between the (knowable) phenomenal world and the (unknowable) noumenal realm, the thing-in-itself. Moreover, it was the latter distinction which Schopenhauer adopted when he coined the notions of (multitudinous) Representation and (a single) Will - and which has long seemed to me to resemble Hitchcock's own world-view. I'm suggesting that Corber's one-track historicist perspective may at times take him straight to the heart of an issue raised by a film - yet at other times cause him to commit some blatant solecism.

Thus in general his analysis of **Vertigo** is sensible, and adds appreciably to our sum of knowledge about that film. (First, though, he has done his homework, and has dutifully read and assimilated what most of **Vertigo's** major critics have said about it.) Perhaps only once did I feel that he was quite wrong, and it was precisely an occasion when his historicist method was dictating to him. I'm thinking of his description of the moment in the opening scene when Scottie looks down and finds out he has acrophobia (vertigo), about which Corber tells us: 'Scottie's sudden loss of perspective ... is so traumatic because he discovers that what he simultaneously desires and fears is not so much falling to his death as relinquishing his duties as an officer of the law.'⁹ Which of course is nonsense! What Scottie at that moment both desires and fears (cf Keats's notion of being 'half in love with easeful death') is getting killed. Nothing else!

That's to say, the phenomenon itself is that simple. I think everyone has felt it (including the thought, 'All I'd have to do is let go'). I once wrote of this scene that 'fear of heights is something innate in us all, and absolute - in the sense that it isn't culturally determined'.¹⁰ Thus the scene approximates what Hitchcock called 'an effect of pure film'. (Cf Schopenhauer on music: 'pure Will'.) Unfortunately Corber has just said that Scottie and Gavin Elster represent 'the postwar rebellion against middle-class conformity', and so he finds himself stuck with the over-interpretation above. He implies that Scottie on the spur of the moment decides he'd like to quit his job and become a beatnik - but that simultaneously he (Scottie) feels guilty for having such an 'unmasculine' thought. Also, he (Scottie) could be feeling just a little bit worried about being killed, though clearly Corber thinks that's a secondary matter!

Quite seriously now, what is Corber driving at? Well, in the first place he's making the point that San Francisco in the late 1950s was the centre of the Beat movement, and that no part of the city was more central to that movement than the North Beach area where in the film Scottie lives near Coit Tower.¹¹ Moreover, though the film never refers to the Beats, it does pivot on Carlotta Valdez's story which is set in a **previous** 'Bohemian' era of San Francisco history. (The film specifically mentions, in Midge's words, 'the gay old Bohemian days of gay old San Francisco'.) Thus it seems that history may be about to repeat itself - and in the harsh treatment of Madeleine/Judy by Gavin and then Scottie the film certainly has a plot to match.

Corber gives a lot more detail about the Beat movement, detail which often proves directly pertinent to the film. I'll come to some of it. But first, let's notice the picture that Corber has (unintentionally?!) painted for us. Neither Gavin nor Scottie is an authentic beatnik, of course. For instance, each is middle-aged and outwardly 'respectable'. So, to the extent that they engage in 'beatnik-type' actions, their particular search for 'colour, excitement, power, freedom' offers the audience both more and less (or other: e.g. in the matter of 'power') than it might expect - but always with plenty for it to think about. Hitchcock had been using such a ploy for decades. I was reminded of how, during the climax of **Blackmail** (1929), he'd placed his essentially drab characters in a spectacular setting featuring in particular the Egyptian Room at the British Museum. For audiences of the time, that setting gave an instant reminder of stories then circulating in popular magazines and the Sunday papers about pharaohs' curses and the like. (One of the Museum's mummies was said to have a tortured expression, and in 1920 a seance had been held to end its misery. But for decades afterwards, Museum attendants reported being asked by visitors to show them the 'mummy with the curse'.)¹²

So I have no problem with accepting Corber's introduction of the Beat movement into his discussion of **Vertigo**. Indeed, I fancy that Hitchcock, sniffing the air, may have sensed more of that movement's nuances than Corber describes: for instance, its receptivity to Eastern thought. I also think that you can draw a parallel, which in fact Corber implies, between the film's first-half indulgence of Scottie and his fantasies and a similar degree of indulgence/sympathy which **Strangers on a Train** extends in its first half and beyond to Bruno Anthony (Robert Walker). By the same token, Hitchcock's films of the 1950s reflected the existence in their audiences of a strong unconscious drive towards social conformity.¹³ Thus crucial to Corber's historicist analysis is this sentence from his book's Introduction:

The emergence of the national security state virtually insured that Americans scrutinised themselves for any indication of sexual and/or political deviance that might call into question their loyalty to the nation.¹⁴

Scottie in **Vertigo** indeed questions himself that way quite early in the film ('Midge, do you suppose many men wear corsets?' - with all that that implies). And in **Strangers on a Train** the rather less astute Guy (Farley Granger), who is Bruno's alter ego, does likewise - though it takes him perhaps the entire film to manage it (the scene with the clergyman at the end). All of this is inserted by Hitchcock into some sort of Oedipal trajectory for the hero, about which Corber manages to offer some fresh insights. But as he himself indicates, and Raymond Durnat's 1974 'The Strange Case of Alfred Hitchcock' (not cited by Corber) had already pointed out, the resultant pattern of eddying narrative currents had long been a Hitchcock speciality. Also, Hitchcock's characters' need for self-scrutiny can be found at least as early as **Blackmail**, where its emblem is the pointing jester.

Now, the reason that Corber makes his strange claim that Scottie on the rooftop suddenly feels job-dissatisfaction (!) is connected with the fact that a popular perception of the Beats was that they were social drop-outs (and, Bernard Wolfe insisted, homosexuals).¹⁵ Here again I feel Corber is perhaps being too single-minded in his interpretative zeal. These things **are** a part of Scottie's make-up, at some level, but so too are less culturally-specific things like a general world-weariness (implied when Scottie later tells Judy that 'these are the first happy days I've known in years'). In turn, I could wish that Corber had been able to see the films in a broader, Schopenhauerian (or Kantian) perspective. True, at times he does sound a little like Schopenhauer, as when he remarks of **Vertigo** that it forces the spectator to see 'that social reality is not only an effect of representation but also its excess, or what remains uncontained by representation and that can destabilise or rupture it'.¹⁶ But Corber's use of the word 'representation' is strictly that of Laclau and Mouffe. It doesn't carry the fuller determinism of Schopenhauer whereby Will is constantly frustrating all our subjectively-conceived plans and hopes, a determinism which I think informs **Vertigo** - if only as one more nod by Hitchcock to Eastern thought. (Could the Chinese symbol for 'double happiness' in the railing outside Scottie's front door be signalling the quest that motivates people everywhere, in both East and West, and which proves so deceptive?) I notice that a recent review of a book of selected letters by Jack Kerouac (1923-1969), the man who named and epitomised the Beat generation, concludes on this observation about its subject's growing world-weariness (after about 1954):

The evaporation of optimism, his growing realisation of the Buddhist truth that all life is suffering, and his eventual failure to transcend it, was Jack Kerouac's tragedy.¹⁷

Mind you, I think **Vertigo** is ultimately about the life-force itself, in both its creative and destructive aspects. (That's precisely why Schopenhauer is more deterministic-pessimistic than Laclau and Mouffe. Will is in everything, and **no** absolute 'space of autonomy' exists.)¹⁸ Analysing **Spellbound** (1945) in 'MacGuffin' 15, I tried to show how strongly such a concept of Will runs through Hitchcock's films, extending even to the spectator's 'libidinal' investment in them. Echoing Schopenhauer, I spoke of how only 'detachment' might offer a form of liberation - yet of how that's the hardest thing to achieve, and how not even the character Dr Brulov (Michael Chekov) is up to it. Well, Corber concludes his **Vertigo** chapter with a discussion of the cinematic apparatus itself. The lesson he draws is almost pure Schopenhauer:

Because of the spectator's libidinal investment in the filmic text, s/he does not question its construction of social reality.¹⁹

In other words, without detachment the spectator cannot see her/his true situation, and how it operates. Someone else who sensed the truth of that in the 1950s was surely the great American film critic, Robert Warshow, whom Corber cites in Chapter 1 as being one of the 'liberals' whose world-view Hitchcock's films both approximated and critiqued. On separate occasions, Warshow criticised both fellow-liberal Lionel Trilling and film director Leo McCarey for lacking the 'compassionate detachment' needed to realistically depict aspects of American life.²⁰ In contrast, I'd say that Hitchcock's **Vertigo** is very specific about the importance of compassion and detachment (vide the characters of Midge and the nun), even as it ambivalently correlates these things with dying to the world ...

I learnt a great deal from reading Corber's excellent book, which contains keen insights into **Bear Window**, **The Man Who Knew Too Much** (both versions), **North by Northwest**, and **Psycho** besides the films I've chosen to discuss above. It does have some repetitiveness and occasional slips (like the name of the composer of 'The Storm Cloud Cantata' in **The Man Who Knew Too Much** - not in fact William Walton but the Australian Arthur Benjamin), yet these are not grave faults. Overall, the writing is lucid and painstaking, the tone that of someone who knows his American history and his Hitchcock movies, and who believes in the importance of the points he makes.

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Notes

1. J. Lechte, 'fifty key contemporary thinkers: from structuralism to postmodernity' (1994), p. 191.
2. R. Corber, 'In the Name of National Security' (1993), p. 171.
3. Ibid, p. 229n.
4. Ibid, p. 14.
5. Ibid, p. 239n.
6. Ibid, p. 154.
7. See entry on "real" in Alan Bullock, et al. (eds), 'The Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought' (1988), p. 724.
8. Corber, p. 229n.
9. Ibid, p. 173.
10. Ken Mogg, (review of) 'Hitchcock: The Making of a Reputation' by Robert E. Kapsis, in 'Hitchcock Annual' (1993 edition), p. 111.
11. Corber, p. 158.
12. "Curse of the Pharaohs", in Richard Cavendish (ed.), 'Man, Myth, and Magic', no. 21 (c. 1970), back cover.
13. Cf passage from Corber's book, referring to Norman Mailer, at the head of the present article. Mailer's point, about how it seemed to him that Americans needed 'a violent shock to their subjectivity' (as Corber puts it), strikes me as being very pertinent to some Hitchcock films of the period, and especially **The Wrong Man** (1957) ...
14. Corber, p. 14.
15. Ibid, pp. 161-62.
16. Ibid, p. 183.

17. Mick Brown, (review of) 'Jack Kerouac: Selected Letters 1940-1956' edited by Ann Charters, in 'The Weekend Australian', October 14-15, 1995.

18. Cf passage from John Lechte's 'fifty key contemporary thinkers' quoted at the head of the present article. Schopenhauer's position on determinism versus free will is set out most definitively in his long essay, "On the Freedom of the Will". The deft translation by E.F.J. Payne (1985) makes an excellent introduction to Schopenhauer's thought. Like nearly everything by the great German philosopher, it's beautifully written. A representative passage: 'Our acts are indeed not a first beginning; therefore nothing really new comes through them into being. But this is true: **through that which we do we only find out what we are.**' (p. 62)

19. Corber, p. 184.

20. Ibid, pp. 45-48. The phrase 'compassionate detachment' is first quoted on p. 47.

.....

Murder in a Small Town

The town in question is Hay-on-Wye in Wales, and the murder, a particularly famous one, is that of Mrs Katherine Armstrong by her husband, Major Herbert Armstrong. It took place on February 22, 1921, and there are Hitchcock connections, as we'll see ...

But our story really begins a year-and-a-half earlier, and some kilometres further west, in the town of Kidwelly. There, on the night of June 16, 1919, a Mrs Greenwood died in agony. Her unsuspecting doctor certified the cause of death as a faulty heart. Yet not all the locals were happy with that finding. When, just four months later, the middle-aged Harold Greenwood married again, and to a noticeably younger woman, there was so much gossip that it forced the police to request that Mrs Greenwood's remains be exhumed. These were found to be well-preserved and to contain arsenic. Harold Greenwood was charged with murder.

At his trial, which began on November 2, 1920, he pleaded not guilty. He was defended by the brilliant Sir Edward Marshall Hall - who was the model for the advocate Sir Malcolm Keane in the Robert Hichens novel, 'The Paradine Case' (1933), filmed in 1947 by Hitchcock (see 'MacGuffin' 12). Testimony was given that Greenwood put arsenic in a bottle of burgundy (another detail used in 'The Paradine Case'), and that Mrs Greenwood had drunk some of the burgundy at lunch on the day before she died. But Hall managed to cast doubt on this crucial piece of evidence, and he suggested that the doctor had accidentally poisoned Mrs Greenwood himself. Greenwood was acquitted.

So now our scene moves to sleepy Hay-on-Wye, just inside the Wales-England border. In 1920, everyone must have thought that the town's best days all lay behind it. Originally the site of a Norman fortification against the invading Romans, it had been given one moment of glory when, in 1400, the English were forcibly expelled from Hay Castle by local hero Owain Glyndwr, who then claimed both town and castle in the name of Welsh independence.

Now, like Harold Greenwood, Major Herbert Rowse Armstrong was a solicitor. The Armstrongs had lived at Hay since their marriage in 1907, and they'd had three children. Unfortunately Mrs Armstrong had become a hypochondriac and a nagger, and she stood a good six inches taller than her diminutive (seven-stone) husband. She was also a stickler for things like teetotalism and punctuality. She thought nothing of loudly summoning the Major away from the tennis court where he'd been in the middle of a doubles game. 'Come, Herbert!' her voice would boom out. 'It's six o'clock - how can you expect the servants to be punctual if the master is late for dinner?' Once, she broke up his game by reminding him that this was his 'bath night'.

In July of 1920 - just a month after Harold Greenwood in Kidwelly was charged with poisoning his wife - Major Armstrong saw fit to persuade Mrs Armstrong to make a new will. She owned some property, which had been willed in part to her children, and in part to her husband. The new will was rather irregularly witnessed. Yet it left all the property to the Major.

A month later, the Major went out and bought three cans of weed-killer. It seems that during that summer the dandelions in his lawn were proving particularly troublesome. Still, he'd show them! The only problem was that Mrs Armstrong soon wasn't feeling up to appreciating the lawn's improvement, having herself taken sick. Indeed, after falling quite severely ill, she was certified as suffering from delusions, and her doctors thought it best to send her to a private asylum. That was a good move in the short-term, for the lady made a quick recovery, both in body and mind.

Mrs Armstrong returned home in January, 1921. But just before she came back, her husband did something strange. Though it was midwinter, and no dandelions were sprouting, he bought half a pound of pure arsenic. Immediately, Mrs Armstrong's health suffered a relapse. And on February 22, she died. The cause of death was given as gastritis. Freed of his nagging wife, the Major went on a long recuperative holiday, which was notable for his philandering with a married woman he'd known since the War.

What finally caused his undoing, though, and helps make his case a true classic, was how he now proceeded to overreach himself. I've called Hay-on-Wye a small town, and even a recent census figure gives its population as just 1,293. Yet in 1921 the Major wasn't the town's only practising solicitor. Across the street from his office was that of a rival firm, whose head was Mr Oswald Norman Martin. Following a dispute between the two firms over a professional matter, Mr Martin one day received in the mail a box of chocolates from an anonymous donor. Mr Martin himself did not eat any of the chocolates, but a dinner-guest accepted some, and was soon taken violently ill.

On October 26, Mr Martin actually went to the Major's house for tea; the host handed him a buttered scone with the ostentatious remark, 'Excuse fingers'. And, yes, within a few hours, Mr Martin was severely sick. But his doctor was the same one who had attended the dying Mrs Armstrong, and something made the medical gentleman suspicious. He ordered tests, which showed that Martin had been poisoned with arsenic. Now it was only a matter of time before Armstrong was arrested and Mrs Armstrong's body exhumed. When the body proved to contain poison, the Major was formally charged with his wife's murder. His trial began on April 3, 1922, and it lasted ten days. At the end of it, he was found guilty. He was subsequently hanged at Gloucester Prison on May 21 of that year.

* * *

Those are the facts, and I've said that there are Hitchcock connections. Probably the most obvious connection concerns the syndrome of the hypochondriac or invalid wife whose husband is seeing another woman on the side. When Hitchcock first read Cornell Woolrich's short story called 'Rear Window' (1942), he would have recognised that syndrome, and from his encyclopaedic knowledge of true murders would probably have immediately thought of the Major Armstrong case. This passage from near the end of the story would have helped jog his memory:

"Here's the way I have it lined up, just in theory. [Mrs Thorwald's] been in ill health for years, and [Mr Thorwald's] been out of work, and he got sick of that and of her both. Met this other - " "She'll be here later today, they're bringing her down under arrest." "He probably insured [his wife] for all he could get, and then started to poison her slowly ..."

Just one important detail about the wife is missing from Woolrich's story: her nagging. The fact that Hitchcock 'restored' that detail in his screen-version of the story (1954) seems to me good evidence that he had the Armstrong case in mind.

Still, it might not have been as simple a matter as I've made it sound. Following the trial and execution of Major Armstrong, the case had formed the basis of several fictional accounts. Perhaps it was one of the latter, or even a feature-film version, that Hitchcock particularly remembered. Here, two authors stand out: Aldous Huxley and Anthony Berkeley Cox ('Francis Iles').

Huxley (1894-1965) got in first. Indeed, his famous short story called 'The Gioconda Smile', which was clearly inspired by recent events at Kidwelly and Hay-on-Wye, was published as early as 1922. It tells of a doctor in a country town whose wife is an invalid, but whose own strong sexual urges compel him to flirt with, and sometimes seduce, a succession of women. Of these, two had been his special favourites: up at the manor, the enigmatic, still virginal (at 36) Janet Spence; and, literally closer to home, the altogether more common Doris, a good-looking Cockney lass. When the wife dies unexpectedly, it's Doris whom the doctor next marries. But soon he's charged with having poisoned his first spouse ...

The story has a surprise twist at the end: the doctor is found guilty and executed, but the true murderer (we learn) is actually Janet Spence. Hence the fittingness of the story's title, both in Huxley's original version (i.e. 'The Gioconda Smile') and in Zoltan Korda's 1947 film-version (**A Woman's Vengeance** - where Janet had been spurned by the doctor). The story remains one of Huxley's best-known works, probably not far behind his famous novel, 'Brave New World' (1932), in total number of readers.

Like Huxley, Anthony Berkeley Cox (1893-1970) began his career as a journalist. At first, he signed all his work, including a comic mystery novel, simply 'A.B. Cox'. But he is chiefly remembered today under the names of 'Anthony Berkeley' and 'Francis Iles'. Moreover, he seems to have become fascinated with the Major Armstrong case, for at least four of his best stories - two by Berkeley, and two by Iles - use significant details from it. Let's take them in order.

'The Avenging Chance' (1929), by Berkeley, is a short story just about as famous as Huxley's 'The Gioconda Smile'. (In 1950, a poll by 'Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine' put both of them in a list of the best detective stories ever written.) Its ingenious plot involves a box of chocolates which has been poisoned with arsenic. Now, the fact that the short story immediately proved hugely popular no doubt explains why its author went on to write a novel-length version, published the same year, called 'The Poisoned Chocolates Case'. This is still regularly in print. In it, an adulterous baronet gets a gift sample of chocolates in the post and passes it on, unopened, with fatal results. But there's a shock ending in store for readers.

Next, 'Malice Aforethought' (1931), by Iles this time, is unmistakable for being a novelisation of the Armstrong case. Its author seizes the opportunity to promote his favourite, anti-marriage, theme, as when the hen-pecked little country doctor ponders his situation:

From what he had seen of marriage he did not doubt that most married men spend no small part of their lives devising wistful plans for killing off their wives - if only they had the courage to do it. Where his superiority was going to show itself was in putting his own dreams into action.
(Chapter VI)

The theme is the same one that's at the heart of the two Anthony Berkeley stories I've already mentioned: for instance, 'The Avenging Chance' refers sardonically to 'that eighth wonder of the modern world, a happy marriage' - before it proceeds to show just how sour a modern marriage can turn.

Well, Alfred Hitchcock was also fascinated by the theme. Indeed, as noted in 'MacGuffin' 14, he told Francois Truffaut that he'd long wanted to make a film of 'Malice Aforethought', but finally he'd had to settle for directing just a half-hour radio version of it, in 1945. Also, he'd been able to film **Suspicion** (1941), which was adapted from Iles's 1932 'Before the Fact'.

At first glance, 'Before the Fact' doesn't bear much relation to the Armstrong case. That's partly because its story of a philandering husband who ends up murdering his wife is told from the wife's point of view, and sympathetically at that! Early in the novel, we learn that Lina, at 28, is unhappy because she isn't yet married:

Having lived all her life in the country, where people do not talk about these things, she had never realised that the percentage of happy marriages among the population of Great Britain is probably something under .0001. (Chapter I)

Then, too, Iles makes considerable use of material he's taken from another famous British murder case, that of the gambler, forger, and mass-poisoner, William Palmer, who was hanged at Stafford in 1856 (see 'MacGuffin' 7). Nonetheless, in several ways - but especially the story's inclusion of details drawn from small-town life - it seems obvious that Iles hasn't forgotten the Armstrong case. You could almost say that 'Before the Fact' is simply a surreal, inside-out version of 'Malice Aforethought'. And, after a couple of other famous real-life cases, those of Crippen and Jack the Ripper, that of Major Armstrong does seem to me to offer the best clues to understanding Hitchcock's oh-so-British fascination with murder and murderers.

Two recent (1994) British films allude to Major Armstrong and the town of Hay-on-Wye. For British television, Mike Hodges has made a dramatised version of the Major's life, called **Dandelion Dead**. I don't think this has been shown in Australia yet, but I see that 'Sight and Sound' (May, 1994, p. 41) calls it 'astutely scripted' and notes in particular how, in the changing social climate after the Great War, the Major was 'held back by the stagnant snobbery of his spouse'. (Again I'm reminded of Lina in 'Before the Fact'.)

A British comedy-thriller released to cinemas and called **Deadly Advice** (d. Mandie Fletcher) was actually filmed on location at Hay. It purports to tell the story of a present-day Hay resident and mass-murderer, Jodie Greenwood (!), played by Jane Horrocks, who can talk to the spirits of murderers past, among whom, naturally, is the spirit of Major Armstrong. (Also doing walk-ons, and giving advice, are the spirits of Dr Crippen, Jack the Ripper, George Smith, i.e. the notorious 'Brides in the Bath' Murderer, and Kate Webster, who in 1870 was convicted of killing her widowed employer with an axe.) The 'Sight and Sound' reviewer writes that Hay is depicted as 'a hodge-podge of sexual repression and Enid Blyton cuteness, where butchers [still] wear straw hats and striped aprons and wave cheerio outside their shops.' Sounds to me like the filmmakers may have been thinking of a couple of other provincial towns in movies about murder: namely, those in Claude Chabrol's **Le Boucher** (1970) and David Lynch's bizarre **Blue Velvet** (1986).

* * *

Finally, then, and to set the record straight, here's what I know about the real Hay-on-Wye as it exists today. It has become known as the second-hand bookshop capital of the world. There are roughly thirty bookshops in Hay, of which the largest by far is Richard Booth's Bookshop in Lion Street, with more than 400,000 volumes. That Booth's should be the largest bookshop is fitting, for the eponymous Mr Booth pioneered the town's specialisation in second-hand books back in 1961. Thus he has been instrumental in putting Hay 'back on the map' where - if you exclude Major Armstrong's unintentional publicity-effort earlier this century - the town has scarcely figured since that moment in 1400 when Owain Glydwr sacked Hay Castle.

Curiously, Booth's has its own link to Hay Castle, which still dominates the town. The castle and its grounds have been converted into the Hay Castle Bookshops, where Mrs Booth, the wife of Richard Booth, specialises in books on American Indians, art, cartoons, and film. The stock of film books alone consists of 5,000 volumes, and there's also a large collection of film stills.

At the other end of town, another shop also carries a good stock of film books. This is the Hay Cinema Bookshop (aptly located in an old picture-house), which in addition specialises in books on travel, natural history, and art and architecture.

The picturesque town itself, set in the valley of the magnificent Wye River, even has an Australian connection. Many Australians have settled there. Most famous of them all, until his death in 1992, was the painter, Sidney Nolan.

I'm told that you can visit Hay-on-Wye all the year round, but that a particularly stimulating time to go is in May and June when the town holds its annual Summer Festival of Literature. Then the town fairly buzzes with books-connected activity, and writers both acclaimed and aspiring read their works in centuries-old settings. And if you can't go at present, there's still Booksearch. That's a service which specialises in tracking down out-of-print books, with no fee charged if the search fails. For details, write to Booksearch, Hay-on-Wye, via Hereford HR3 5EA, United Kingdom. (Please enclose an International Reply Coupon.)

K.M.M.

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copies), \$4 (Aust. or US) per surface-mailed copy (at least 4 copies please). BACK-ISSUES IN AUSTRALIA are \$5 each. Recent 'MacGuffins' have featured **Foreign Correspondent** (no. 16), **Spellbound** (15), Thomas Elsaesser on "The Dandy in Hitchcock" (14), **Young & Innocent** (13), **The Paradine Case** (12), **Vertigo** (11), **Notorious** (10), **The Lady Vanishes** (9), and **Tom Curtain** (8). These are the issues most recommended.

.....

Engendering the Truth about 'Vertigo':
thoughts on an article by Leland Poague in the 1994 'Hitchcock Annual'

It is clear why the Romantic artists took 'Faust' as their bible: it depicts the quest for total experience.

- Jacques Barzun¹

I had to kill the Other, once and for all, so that my Martine could live at last.

- Georges Simenon, 'Act of Passion'²

My specification of **Vertigo's** participation in the genre of remarriage comedy can (and must) be brief - precisely **because** the links are so systematic.

- Leland Poague³

I have read and re-read Professor Poague's 37-page article on **Vertigo**, and have come away dissatisfied! The article doesn't seem to me to be driven by insight into what Hitchcock was trying to do; instead, Poague has seen fit to interpret the film according to certain generic concepts borrowed from Stanley Cavell, William Rothman, et al. Now, I'm not saying that a film is never greater, or other, than the sum of its makers' intentions. But in this case what seems to have occurred is that Poague has been guilty of a common critical failing. He has allowed his theories and his subjective knowledge to box him in. Alleged similarities between **Vertigo** (1958) and some films of Frank Capra (on which Poague is an authority)⁴ receive a stilted a priori interpretation, a regrettable situation made worse by Poague's resort to a piece of **trompe l'oeil**: insisting on a correspondence where it's most tenuous! At such times, he will usually say that the correspondence is 'beyond dispute' or 'self-evident' ...⁵

More on that below. In addition, what follows represents an extension to the article on **Vertigo** and its sources that I wrote for 'MacGuffin' 11.⁶ There, I too drew a parallel: namely, between what I saw as a key aspect of **Vertigo**, its vitalism, and Arthur Schopenhauer's term 'Will', or life-force, which in fact has a long tradition, spanning West and East. For example, Edgar Allan Poe's 'Ligeia', written in the 19th century, thrice quotes this revealing passage from 'Lux Orientalis'/'Light of the East' by English theologian Joseph Glanvill (1636-80):

And the will ... dieth not. Who knoweth the mysteries of the will, with its vigour? For God is but a great will pervading all things by nature of its intentness. Man doeth not yield himself to the angels, nor unto death utterly, save only through the weakness of his feeble will.

I'll explain. First, notice how Glanvill, anticipating Schopenhauer (1788-1860), contrasts the imperishable - but destructive - will with human mortality. In 'Ligeia', the eponymous first wife of the story's narrator seems to return miraculously to life, as if embodying will itself.

Next, Poe (1809-49) was the young Hitchcock's favourite author, a fact that may explain why you feel Poe's influence so strongly when you read the novel 'D'Entre les Morts' (c. 1955) that Pierre Boileau and Thomas Narcejac wrote with Hitchcock in mind, and which did in fact become **Vertigo**. In turn, though, as I noted in 'MacGuffin' 11, that novel also shows the influence of the Belgian writer, Georges Simenon (1903-89), about whose life and work Narcejac had recently produced a most appreciative study, 'Le Cas "Simenon"' (1950). Accordingly, I'll try below to demonstrate the **specific** influence of Simenon's novel,

'Lettre à Mon Juge' (1947), called in English 'Act of Passion', and its French film version, Henri Verneuil's **Le Fruit Défendu/Forbidden Fruit** (1952), on 'D'Entre les Morts', and hence, indirectly, on **Vertigo**.

Also in 'MacGuffin' 11, I showed how **Vertigo** appears to allude to various 'archetypal' fascinating women in fiction (e.g. Ligeia, Marguerite Gautier). To that list I would now add Goethe's Helen of Troy, who supplants the simple and abused Margaret/Gretchen in Faust's fancy, and who effectively points him towards 'the world of eternity where all the opposites are transcended' (as Dr Jolande Jacobi puts it)⁷ - though in herself she fails to give him the lasting happiness he has sought. The fact that, as we'll see, 'Faust' offers several other parallels with **Vertigo** suggests that Hitchcock may well have had the two Parts of Goethe's play (1808, 1831) in mind when making his film.

* * *

Leland Poague tells us that 'little of substance is finally left unsaid in either **Vertigo** or [Capra's 1946] **It's a Wonderful Life**'.⁸ Citing Peter Brooks's 'The Melodramatic Imagination' (1976), Poague assigns to **Vertigo** a number of characteristics of melodrama:⁹ **topoi** (motifs) such as 'the "enclosed garden"' and 'the "tribunal scene"'; a "'fascination with the city, either as the symbol of corruption lying in wait" or "as an unexplored world offering layers of mystery"'; "'evil monks and nuns"' working "at the behest of a guilty aristocrat"; tyrannical villains who oppress innocent victims who "'most often belong to the democratic universe"; and, very importantly, 'the trope of "muteness", in which "Virtue, expelled, eclipsed, apparently fallen, cannot effectively articulate the cause of the right"'. More generally, there is 'melodrama's deepest ambition', which is 'to "say all"'.¹⁰

Further, Poague makes extensive use of Stanley Cavell's concept (from 'Pursuits of Happiness', 1981) of 'the Hollywood comedy of remarriage', a genre in which the film's drive 'is not to get the central pair together, but to get them **back** together, together **again**'.¹¹ For Cavell, such a reuniting of a couple is designed to show them the deepest, spiritual meaning of their bond, to effect a working out in 'dailiness' (Cavell's term) of the **potential** of marriage.

Lastly, Poague invokes William Rothman's essay on **Vertigo** (in 'The "I" of the Camera', 1988), which notes how Hitchcock's film may be seen to concern 'a search for [both male and female?] identity'¹² and what Cavell, a colleague of Rothman's at Harvard, 'has called "the identifying and inhabitation of a feminine region of the self"'.¹³ 'If this is true,' continues Rothman, '**Vertigo** has a close affinity to so-called women's films, in particular to the genre Cavell terms "the melodrama of the unknown woman."¹⁴ Only, in the case of **Vertigo**, it's ultimately the director himself who is the 'feminine' figure, who longs for 'acknowledgment'. 'Hitchcock', says Rothman, '**is** the unknown woman ...'¹⁵

(On the special Cavell-Rothman term, 'acknowledgment', Poague¹⁶ usefully cites a passage from 'Pursuits of Happiness' stating that to **acknowledge** someone is to put a halt to a 'circle of vengeance' that has done violence to the true identity and worth of that person. Implicit, too, is Rothman's central thesis in 'Hitchcock - the Murderous Gaze', 1982, that Hitchcock's camera is continually wreaking its own vengeance on the naïve spectator who won't **acknowledge** Hitchcock's authorship of the film's world.)

The above, then, summarises the powerful theoretical underpinning for what Poague now attempts: an explication of the dynamics of **Vertigo**, aimed at showing how it constitutes, like Shakespeare's 'Othello', "'a failed comedy of remarriage" in which "the reunion is hideously parodied and becomes possible only a moment too late"'.¹⁷ Already the strengths and drawbacks of Poague's argument may be anticipated: how, for instance, it catches the film's pungency, but also how it locks itself into a most inflexible position. Typically, Poague **insists** on his interpretation. The reader is told that 'apart from grasping [the notion 'that **Hitchcock** is the film's primary token of unknownness'] ... there is no way of comprehending the power and poignancy of the film's last shot'.¹⁸

* * *

Here I must say that nothing in the above seems to me **incompatible** with my own, essentially 'Schopenhauerian', understanding of Hitchcock's films, and of **Vertigo** in particular. For instance, when I first read one of Professor Brian Henderson's criticisms of 'Pursuits of Happiness' - that Cavell's use of terms like 'true marriage' disregards 'historical or material realities' -¹⁹ perversely I thought of

Sören Kierkegaard and his profound reflections on conjugal love in 'Either/Or' (1843). Then, on reading Cavell's book itself, I found that its author had gone one better than I had, by invoking (re Leo McCarey's **The Awful Truth**, 1937) both Kierkegaard's 'Repetition' (1843) and Friedrich Nietzsche's doctrine of the Eternal Return!²⁰ Note that both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche had read Schopenhauer,²¹ and that both of them had **made a point of** rejecting what they thought was the emphasis of his contemporary and foe, Hegel, on the primacy of historical, 'objective' knowledge.²² As for Schopenhauer himself, a passage in his 'The World as Will and Representation' virtually anticipates Kierkegaard's central doctrine:

Concepts always remain universal, and so do not reach down to the particular; yet it is precisely the particular that has to be dealt with in life.²³

Now, firstly, could **that** in fact be the message of **Vertigo's** last shot? Is **that** what's behind the film's implied critique of 'Scottie' (James Stewart)? Before answering those questions, I've some related observations to make.

Here's one. Given the detectable influence of both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche - as well as Goethe - on some of the plays of Henrik Ibsen,²⁴ I believe Cavell is merely being consistent when he introduces into a discussion of Hollywood romantic comedies some key passages from Ibsen's 'A Doll House' (1879).²⁵ So I accept Poague's point, effectively a rejoinder to Brian Henderson, that Cavell is 'fully mindful' of how marriage is both 'a trope of the social contract' and 'equally a trope (and a tool) of patriarchal oppressiveness'.²⁶ By the same token, I could wish that Poague had made at least a passing allusion in his analysis of **Vertigo** to Ibsen's 'The Master Builder' (1892), a play which provides some intriguing parallels to the critique of Scottie offered by Hitchcock's film. For instance, the ruthless but now aging master-builder, Solness, inspired by the woman called Hilde Wangel, finally overcomes his guilt-feelings and his fear of heights, only to fall to his death from a tower. Might such symbolism as Ibsen employs here perhaps **also** further illuminate the effect Hitchcock sought at the end of **Vertigo**?

And again, that a lack of 'acknowledgment', at the level of plot, was sometimes an issue for Hitchcock is borne out by a key moment, and indeed the very title, of the film he made immediately before **Vertigo**: namely, **The Wrong Man** (1957). In 'MacGuffin' 6, I drew on Kierkegaard (and Dickens and Jung) to show how the bourgeois 'Manny' Balestrero (Henry Fonda) is portrayed as 'the man who knew too little'.²⁷ At the film's climax, Manny fails a crucial test when he finally confronts his 'double'. He immediately assumes this other man's absolute guilt, as various people had earlier assumed his own. 'Do you realise what you've done to my wife?' he asks peevishly, without thought of (acknowledging) this man himself or **his** wife and family - and certainly without thought for Jung's point that 'None of us stands outside humanity's black collective shadow'. By contrast, Hitchcock's in-person introduction to **The Wrong Man** (set in a shadowy film studio, prefiguring the 'noirish' look of what follows) makes at least a gesture towards his own 'at-one-ment' with the events and characters portrayed. I'll come back to **The Wrong Man**, and the term 'at-one-ment', shortly.

To sum up this part of my argument, I simply want to re-affirm its broad Schopenhauerian content. Everything I've just described shows the general working of a basically blind, typically destructive force. Its most significant manifestation in the West has been called 'Faustian', but it's by no means confined to the sort of masculine striving associated by Oswald Spengler (1880-1936) with Faust and Western man generally. On the contrary, the world's Will is operative everywhere, at many levels (Schopenhauer says at **all** levels). Thus a recent book by an eminent biologist, emeritus Professor Charles Birch, significantly called 'Regaining Compassion for Humanity and Nature' (1993), comes close to expressing that idea when it describes how 'all living creatures' have 'an inner life and internal relations'. It adds that

the concept of internal relations extends right down to entities such as protons. Of course, we don't talk about conscious feelings at that level, but we do suppose that something analogous to mind is present there.²⁸

As I showed in 'MacGuffin' 11, **Vertigo** is very much about the Schopenhauerian idea that only compassion, which resists the promptings of Will, can effect a true oneness of individuals in this world, the world of phenomena ('Representation'). Therefore, something else I find significant about Birch's observation

just quoted is that it occurs in a chapter he calls 'At-One-Ment' - which carries the additional meaning of 'atonement' (for past divisiveness and environmental spoliation). I'm impelled to ask whether that particular dual meaning isn't one more (in this case, ironic) connotation of **Vertigo's** ending.

* * *

Speaking of dual meanings ... the reader may have noticed above how I've used contrary meanings of the term 'Faustian'. As applied to Goethe's play, the term means 'open', i.e. 'open to all experience'. But when applied to Faust himself, or his kind as described by Spengler, the term means 'closed', i.e. 'self-centred' or 'single-visioned'. Well, every time that Leland Poague insists too heavily, or improperly, on a particular interpretation of a scene or effect in Hitchcock, I see him as guilty of writing 'Faustian' film criticism - in the Spenglerian sense of the term! Similarly, I see Scottie in **Vertigo** as essentially an unregenerated Faust-figure (see below), but I see the film itself as much more **healthily** 'Faustian', i.e. endeavouring to be as 'open' as possible.

The film's 'method' involves the use of ambiguity, multi-valence, and self-critique (reflexiveness). Above, I defended Cavell and Poague against Brian Henderson's jibe that Cavell ignores historical realities. In truth, though, I feel that Poague's citing of some attributes of melodrama (which also apply to much 19th-century fiction and 19th-century art-forms generally) does perhaps serve to hide his inattention to the historical reality that is critiqued in **Vertigo**. Note that I believe thinkers like Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard, et al., deal particularly with **inner** reality (which is very important, very real, and certainly for much of the time the stuff of **Vertigo**), but now I'll mention briefly some aspects of an equally important **outer** reality. I especially want to mention a recent historical study by Peter Gay (but see also the review in this 'MacGuffin' of Robert Corber's 'In the Name of National Security'). Gay's book, published last year, bears the descriptive title, 'The Cultivation of Hatred: The Bourgeois Experience: Victoria to Freud'.

19th-century bourgeois society, says Gay, was marked by an aggressive will to dominate and control, from the development of industrialisation and urban growth to the polarisation of the sexes. Pivotal was how individuals and classes, races and nations, were divided into insiders and outsiders. According to Gay, the construction of a hateful Other was central to bourgeois (Victorian) ideology. Women, through being defined as the mysterious sex, were decidedly 'Other'.²⁹

Gay elaborates on that last point in quasi-Freudian terms: 'by concealing woman behind the veils of her enigmatic nature, men could evade the unpalatable truth that their mother was a sexual being'.³⁰ Now, without at all exhausting the many potential readings of the scene in question, let's come back to the climax of **Vertigo**, i.e. the scene on the bell-tower. In effect, what happens is that the sudden arrival of a mother-figure, literally a mother-superior, garbed in black, deprives Scottie of the mysterious and desirable Madeleine/Judy (Kim Novak) he'd finally seemed on the point of winning. That fits with how, in 'MacGuffin' 11, I quoted art lecturer Victor Burgin as saying that Scottie throughout the film enacts 'a primary scenario of male Oedipal desire for the mother'. Necessarily, of course, in Scottie's pursuit of Madeleine/Judy (and 'Carlotta'), he is unconscious of the true nature of his quest; somewhat differently, when he's with Margaret/'Midge', his girlfriend of college days, his desire is diminished, precisely because Midge is so **overtly** 'motherly'.

In 'MacGuffin' 11, too, I observed that 'in **Vertigo** even nuns are figures of both life and death'. That's because Scottie is indeed repressed. As the mother-superior's title indicates, she effectively represents what Camille Paglia calls the Great Mother. As such, her apparition on the bell-tower may recall Faust's journey to the supernatural realm of 'the Mothers', where the spirit of Helen exists in eternity. As Paglia says:

The Mothers appear in 'Faust' when the hero tries to materialise the spirit of Helen. Adult love is overshadowed by maternal claims to priority. The male struggles through his sexual stages, returning to the mother even when he thinks himself most free of her.³¹

Paglia notes how Faust 'descending to the Mothers makes a journey to **terra incognita**, his own repressed feminine side, where his mother still dwells'.³² Interestingly, whereas in most modern treatments by artists of the Great Mother, 'she controls only green nature', in 'Faust' she inhabits a 'gloomy Stygian cavern with which western myth associates swarthy male hierarchs'.³³ I'm reminded of how I further

wrote, again in 'MacGuffin' 11, that **'everything** [in **Vertigo**] reflects [a similar] dualism. For instance, is Muir Woods with its Sequoias ("always green, ever-living") a place of life or is it (being dark and overwhelming) a place of death? Is even the busy city of San Francisco truly living, or is it just a place of death-in-life? (Its people seems to move as if underwater.)'

* * *

In order to better connect the matters raised in the last section, let's first note other parallels between **Vertigo** and 'Faust'. Paglia sums up Goethe's great drama thus: 'Gretchen is naïve sentiment, Mephistopheles cynical sophistication. Faust is caught in the middle, like all mankind.'³⁴ I think we may see a similar configuration in **Vertigo**. Margaret/Gretchen becomes Margaret/Midge, perhaps the hero's first sweetheart, though in this case their engagement lasted just three weeks before Midge broke it off. The fact is that Midge senses that she lacks something that Scottie seeks, which is precisely mystery and sophistication. Yet, for those with eyes to notice it, she has another quality, her capacity for compassion. Think of her reaction to the story of Carlotta ('Poor thing!') ...³⁵

Enter the film's Mephistopheles, the suave and fiendish Gavin Elster. He quickly grasps Scottie's discontent, his frustrated ambitions. In effect, Gavin now presents Scottie with his true heart's-desire: the infinitely sophisticated yet mysterious and other-worldly Madeleine, the film's equivalent of Helen of Troy. For a time, Scottie tastes happiness, only to be left desolate when Madeleine 'departs' (cf 'Faust', Part Two, Act III).

Scottie, like Faust before him, now begins to think of true beauty as something spiritual. At least, that seems to be an underlying meaning of the last third of **Vertigo**, in which Scottie attempts, artist-like,³⁶ to re-create Madeleine in Judy. (Here, cf 'Faust', Part Two, Act IV.) The film moves to its climax, described above.

Camille Paglia offers this further comment on the two Parts of 'Faust': 'Goethe makes an analogy between the exploitation of women by men and the exploitation of nature by the self-infatuated western mind.'³⁷ Exactly. It's as if Goethe had anticipated by nearly two centuries Professor Birch's argument concerning our desperate need to seek at-one-ment/atonement with our environment and each other. Sadly, the means advocated - by Goethe, by his contemporary Schopenhauer, and by Birch - involving compassion, is precisely what Scottie, in his rejection of Midge, has forgone. Given the imperfect, i.e. repressed and repressive, world that **Vertigo** depicts, the nun's behest that 'God have mercy' sounds rather like both the film's message and its ultimate irony. We may even vaguely hope (in defiance of Freud and passion) that Scottie and Midge can be reconciled, but the general outlook is surely deeply pessimistic.

Here's another irony. Leland Poague astutely notes some individual details of the above pattern: for instance, he sees the sort of person Gavin Elster is, though he likens him not to Mephistopheles but to the 'guilty aristocrat' figure of melodrama (Elster is played by the English actor Tom Helmore).³⁸ Likewise, he sees how put-upon are the women in the film, and he's especially eloquent in an abstract way about 'male-authored fictions of deficient female inheritance or parenting ...'³⁹ But while detailing all this destructiveness and masculine aggression, Poague, somewhat like Cavell and, even more, Rothman, never clearly defines it - or its shaping by history - except indirectly, as what needs to be overcome in 'dailiness' and 'acknowledgment'.⁴⁰ Consequently, his writing overall, for all its energy, tends to show the closed 'Faustian' character I've attributed to it above. A further consequence, or perhaps a cause, is his undue reverence for his two Harvard power-brokers - neither of whom, in my view, can hold a candle to Camille Paglia in matters of good writing and sustained insight.⁴¹ I detect a parallel with what seems to have befallen Peter Gay. Reviewing 'The Cultivation of Hatred', Melbourne academic Anthony Elliott comments:

It seems to me that in defending the cultural rewards [if not the methods] of aggression, Gay slides into an indiscriminate celebration of power and mastery as such. ... For all the excellence of its historical analysis, 'The Cultivation of Hatred' is flawed by the imperative to sustain the authority of self-legislating aggression, thus downplaying the counter-story of affection, intimacy and compassion.⁴²

From an attitude of compassion comes openness. So my point is this. Film scholars who aren't theory-bound, who aren't primarily just system-builders (or system-endorsers), should be able to see

that, for example, the last scene and the last shot of **Vertigo** allow **many** readings. I've already implied some of those readings above.

Now, I would concur with a reading that says an aspect of the last scene, at the level of plot, is Scottie's lack of 'acknowledgment' of Judy, at least up until this moment. (Though perhaps not even now. Scottie's exclamation of 'I made it' seems as revealing of basic self-centredness as Manny's 'Do you realise what you've done to my wife?' at the end of **The Wrong Man**.) But such an attitude of Scottie's in the past also illustrates the Schopenhauerian/Kierkegaardian point that most of us fail to properly deal with the **particular** in life - occasioning in **Vertigo** Judy's lament that Scottie isn't treating her authentically. In turn, a reason for that is Scottie's 'Faustian' ambitiousness, like Solness's in 'The Master Builder'.

Crucially, I wonder what the film's last **shot** is saying. Is there, for instance, any question of 'atonement'? Well, I've long felt that the typical ending of a Hitchcock film is reminding its audience, 'Now it's over to you', and **not** asking selfishly, 'Why don't you acknowledge me?' Here I think Hitchcock is following the path of such artists as Goethe, Thomas Mann (who wrote his own version of the Faust story), Luigi Pirandello (one of the theatre's great advocates of the need for compassion), and even Georges Simenon (see below). Each ends up telling us of himself that having explored to the limits of the human psyche, he remains baffled by the pathology he finds there. In Goethe's case, it's surely significant that for all his vast erudition and insight, he always refused to answer questions about one aspect of 'Faust': its episode of 'the Mothers'. Camille Paglia calls that episode a trip 'to the omphalos of the universe, a female heart of darkness'.⁴³ (Note: I would further concur, in general, with a reading of **Vertigo** that emphasises **Hitchcock's** 'femininity' - but again see below.)

Some other points. I noted above Paglia's observation that these days the Great Mother is usually only associated with green nature, but I added that in **Vertigo**, as in 'Faust', the figure's chthonic (dark and ghostly) aspect also seems to be implied, notably in the Muir Woods scene. So perhaps the following claim by Poague isn't quite as unlikely as it may appear on a casual reading:

I take it that Scottie senses himself as unknown, as empty, as ghostly, - a trope taken over quite literally from **It's a Wonderful Life** where Mary's mysterious disappearance from her bathrobe, only to reappear in a hydrangea bush, provides the 'green world' prototype for **Vertigo's** Muir Woods sequence in which a fantastically evanescent Madeleine accuses Scottie of having taken, like George of Mary, no notice.⁴⁴

But if that isn't, exactly, risible, for me it still shows Poague at his most typically over-dogmatic (and cavalier, where matters of hard evidence are concerned.)⁴⁵

And a couple of related matters. As noted, Poague's main thesis is that **Vertigo** is "a failed comedy of remarriage". Such a stretching of the meaning of both 'comedy' and '(re)marriage' may fairly be permitted in the case of Shakespeare's plays (which all at least refer to marriage, regardless of whether the play in question is nominally a comedy or a tragedy). And certainly Hitchcock at times worked in the genre of the **Hollywood** comedy of remarriage, both overtly (as in the case of **Mr and Mrs Smith**, 1941) and covertly (as in such films as **Rebecca**, 1940, and **Marnie**, 1964). But what of a play like Goethe's 'Faust' (admittedly influenced by Shakespeare), a story like Poe's 'Ligeia', and a film like William Dieterle's **Portrait of Jennie** (1948) - all of which have correspondences in **Vertigo**?⁴⁶ In at least one of those works, marriage is never an issue; in two of them, comedy is virtually absent. On the other hand, they **all** seem to me very much concerned with matters of Will and its permutations ...

Lastly, I think it's ludicrous of Poague to claim that a shot of Madeleine's garments on an impromptu clothesline in Scottie's apartment must represent 'a direct allusion' to a scene in Capra's **It Happened One Night** (1934);⁴⁷ or that **Vertigo** is 'aptly' to be compared to Preston Sturges's **The Lady Eve** (1941) simply because both are about the ups and downs of human existence and have things like dream-sequences (with an avuncular British villain) in common.⁴⁸ Any experienced film teacher remembers plenty of occasions when a film shown to a class on Monday had seemed to possess 'marvellous correspondences' to a quite unrelated film shown to a different class on Thursday - if you take my meaning. But I'd have thought it a **sine qua non** that such a teacher should quickly learn to distinguish the authentic connection from the fortuitous. I'm not sure that Poague has done that here. As for his claims that **Vertigo** alludes directly to the Capra films mentioned, those claims simply lack all proof. By contrast,

when I sometimes tell people that a couple of scenes in **Mr and Mrs Smith** (the Mama Lucy's episodes) are adapted from ones in King Vidor's **The Citadel** (1938), filmed in England and starring Hitchcockian actor Robert Donat, the borrowing is both palpable and demonstrable. Also, Hitchcock's great admiration for Vidor's films is on record ...

* * *

In this last part of my article, I come to a 'test case'. Two then-recent French films seem to have influenced the authors Boileau and Narcejac while they were writing 'D'Entre les Morts'. One was Robert Siodmak's **Le Grand Jeu/The Big Game** (1954), with its redhead who 'rematerialises', subtly changed, as a brunette (see 'MacGuffin' 11). The other was Henri Verneuil's **Le Fruit Défendu/Forbidden Fruit**, adapted from a typically fine (though non-Maigret) Simenon novel whose French title, 'Lettre à Mon Juge', refers to how it purports to be written by a condemned man who has strangled his mistress. (In 'D'Entre les Morts', too, the central character, called Flavières, strangles his mistress, Madeleine/Renée.) Verneuil's film stars Fernandel, in one of that actor's rare non-comedy roles, as the twice-married Dr Charles Alavoine; Françoise Arnoul plays the doctor's mistress, Martine Englebert.

Actually, I **most** want to stress the influence of Simenon's novel on Boileau and Narcejac's work, for the reason that the film-version had to make several compromises with the original (as Narcejac would have known, having lately written about it).⁴⁹ In particular, Martine's death has gone. Also gone, therefore, is the core idea of a man's 'killing the thing he loves' and Alavoine's insistence to his 'judge' - the examining magistrate - that he had not been mad: rather, as he says, 'I killed her that she might live'.⁵⁰

If I now recount some further main ideas and plot-points of Simenon's novel, I trust my readers will forgive such a necessary undertaking, and will be alert to spot correspondences, or otherwise, with what has been discussed above. The important issue, I think, isn't so much whether 'Lettre à Mon Juge' influenced 'D'Entre les Morts' (that will surely soon become obvious), as whether what I describe lends support to a 'comedy of remarriage' interpretation. And, if so, how far. After all, the two novels between them constitute a veritable ur-**Vertigo**, well worthy of study by disinterested Hitchcock scholars!

* * *

So let's start with this. Alavoine's first sexual experience, he tells us, had occurred when he was sixteen, in the city of Caen - which turns out to be the native city of his examining magistrate.⁵¹ For a few hours, the young woman had given Alavoine 'the sensation of infinity'.⁵²

But in later years he had endured two passionless marriages. Commenting on that time, he remembers it as no more than 'a waking dream'.⁵³ Eventually he had found himself, still married to his second wife, Armande, settled comfortably in the barracks city of La Roche-sur-Yon and practising as a local doctor. But one day he had needed to go alone to Nantes to treat a patient. There, filling in time before catching his train home, he had encountered Martine in a bar, and his life had been transformed.

Though Martine seems outwardly 'a banal little thing',⁵⁴ Alavoine quickly detects in her a still-burning spark of goodness. Quickly becoming very possessive of her, he feels that he has leapt 'suddenly into unknown regions of space'⁵⁵ and that she, for her part, has 'a will, no less desperate, to escape ... to be delivered'.⁵⁶

He takes her back with him to La Roche, and installs her at first in a local hotel, the Hotel de l'Europe. (She had been coming to La Roche anyway, fairly obviously to be the new mistress of a wealthy property owner who lives in the town, and whom she had met in a Paris bar.)⁵⁷ Meanwhile, Alavoine still goes about his practice which he conducts from his home, where he lives with both Armande and his elderly mother.

Now he finds himself existing in a state of 'continual tension',⁵⁸ aggravated by the unusual weather - gloomy and windy - which reminds him of Caen.⁵⁹ Nonetheless, for the first time, he feels in himself 'The irresistible force of life',⁶⁰ and comes to believe that he's no longer 'a man without a shadow'.⁶¹ At last he has found love. However, neither his wife nor his mother appears at first to notice any change in him.

Martine begins to work for Alevoine as his daytime assistant. They seize what surreptitious moments together they can, and he visits her after hours at her hotel. Their love-making becomes ever more passionate, though on his side it's prone to violence. He later explains this to the examining magistrate as representing his attempt to try and eradicate in Martine what he calls the 'Other': the woman who had frequented bars, smoked lipstick-stained cigarettes, and crossed her legs in a certain way.⁶² By the same token, Alevoine makes an interesting set of denials. He denies 'the least predisposition to sadism or to masochism';⁶³ equally firmly, he says he 'did not create the new Martine. I have no such pretension. I don't take myself for God the Father.'⁶⁴

A new phase in the couple's relations begins when Armande finally learns what has been going on, and the couple head off together 'for the unknown'.⁶⁵ Alevoine finds work in Paris. I see this final part of Simenon's novel as roughly corresponding to the later stages of **Vertigo**. For one thing, a sense of unreality asserts (or re-asserts) itself. Alevoine speaks of how whole areas of Paris seem to him to be 'peopled with phantoms',⁶⁶ yet he knows that these people are actually 'flesh and blood'.⁶⁷ He and Martine now tend to keep to themselves, and to go out very little. At the same time, his **inner** 'phantoms'⁶⁸ assail him the more, and both he and Martine sense what is coming.

The couple have their compensations. In an explicit passage, Martine for the first time experiences full orgasm, not just a faked one.⁶⁹ Shortly after this, Alevoine announces that they are going to take a few days' vacation, 'a pilgrimage',⁷⁰ to Martine's native city, Liège, in Belgium. To the reader, i.e. to the examining magistrate, Alevoine confides that he now 'felt that I had to get possession of her childhood, for I was jealous of [that] too'.⁷¹

We already know, from an earlier description, that Martine as a girl had attended the convent of the Daughters of the Cross, and had been a boarder there. Now the couple go there together, and to several of the other places in Liège that hold strong memories for her. 'All that she had told me', says Alevoine at the start of a striking passage, 'was like a novel for young girls, and I went there to get at the truth, which turned out to be not so very different. I saw the big house, Rue Hors-Château, which she had so often described, and its famous porch with the forged iron hand-rail.'⁷² And so on.

But finally even here 'phantoms' catch up with them. When a young man in a café calls out to Martine by name, the spell is broken. 'The more she was mine ... the more I felt the need of absorbing her in even greater measure.'⁷³ Back in Paris, Alevoine strangles Martine in what he insists to the examining magistrate was a premeditated act. 'I killed her that she might live, and our eyes continued to embrace to the very end.'⁷⁴

He adds a coda: 'If I am writing you this long letter, it is so that the day I finally weigh anchor, someone will succeed to our heritage, so that my Martine and her love will never wholly die.'⁷⁵

* * *

As I see it, that final sentence is one more equivalent of the last shot in **Vertigo**, but it **isn't** asking the reader to 'acknowledge' Simenon behind his story and his characters. Its appeal is to something more impersonal than that, more like the world's Will. That is, to something indestructible, that lasts forever, of which we are all part but certainly never 'possess', and are only ever possessed **by**.

Note that Alevoine remembers his first sexual experience as having shown him 'infinity'. That's a cliché, of course, but equally the expression of a powerful archetype. Leland Poague finds significant that in **The Lady Eve** Henry Fonda twice tells Barbara Stanwyck that he feels he's known her forever ('You seemed to go way back'): Poague offers this as part of his 'self-evident'⁷⁶ case for why **The Lady Eve** and **Vertigo** are alike, indeed for why they're both 'comedies of remarriage'. But he's being very facile, I think. **Vertigo**, in which Madeleine provides Scottie with a glimpse of 'eternity' (see 'MacGuffins' 1, 11) resembles many other art-works far more than it resembles **The Lady Eve**. Just two of those works are 'Lettre à Mon Juge' and (I'm arguing) 'Faust': in neither of them, notice, is the emphasis on remarriage but rather on **escaping from** or **avoiding** marriage.⁷⁷ Further, I'd have to say that Poague seems at best only somewhat aware (from his reading of Northrop Frye?) of the archetypal resonances operating in Hitchcock's film. On matters of 'infinity' and 'eternity' (space and time) that are relevant to **Vertigo**, I much prefer this discussion of 'Faust' by Jung's associate, Dr Jolande Jacobi:

In the first half Gretchen carries the projection of Faust's anima [his unconscious feminine side]. But the tragic end of this relationship compels him to ... seek this part of his psyche in himself. He finds it in another world, in the 'underworld' of his unconscious, symbolised by Helen of Troy. ... Helen is the typical anima figure, Faust's soul-image. He wrestles with it in different transformations and on different levels up to its supreme manifestation, the Mater Gloriosa [Glorious Mother]. Only then is he redeemed, permitted to enter the world of eternity where all the opposites are transcended.⁷⁸

Well, neither Alevoine in 'Lettre à Mon Juge' nor Scottie in **Vertigo** ends up redeemed, exactly, but I've no doubt that's mainly because the two works keep a foot planted firmly in an 'historical' context, the workaday world of the reader or viewer: the world where all ideals and dreams get compromised.⁷⁹

Or worse. Alevoine, one more Everyman figure, has a strong sense of the daily world as largely 'Other', as corrupt(ing) and vulgar. That could be just the legacy of his bourgeois upbringing (cf Peter Gay's 'The Cultivation of Hatred'), but the novel gives plenty of evidence for there being a matching reality (e.g. as represented by the wealthy property owner who picks up and drops a succession of mistresses from Paris bars). Hence this key passage from near the end of the novel:

It was Martine, the real Martine before the bastards had sullied her, that I persisted in trying to extricate. She was the one I loved and whom I love, who is mine, who is so much a part of my own body that I can no longer distinguish between them.⁸⁰

Schopenhauer said that the world is an endless round of suffering, and that seems to me what 'Lettre à Mon Juge' and **Vertigo** both confirm, very poignantly. Moreover, in my view neither work can be seen to hold out either marriage or its avoidance - or anything else - as a 'solution'. Both works are informed by a special truthfulness, even about the way in which 'inner' and 'outer' reality finally meet at the level of the body. Predictably, that too is a basic Schopenhauerian insight about the nature of Will.⁸¹

* * *

Finally, I want to query a couple more of Poague's emphases. Though it's clear that Scottie in **Vertigo** has an unconscious 'mother-fixation' (perhaps echoing Hitchcock's own?), I wonder whether it's true to say, as Poague does, that Scottie shows a 'propensity for dwelling in a world of women, even and especially in his dreams'.⁸² There is, in fact, just one dream-sequence in **Vertigo**, and in it we see Scottie fall from the bell-tower where earlier we'd seen Madeleine/Judy fall. But such identification (if that's what it is) hardly suggests, let alone proves, a wish on Scottie's part to dwell among women. After all, we'd also seen, at the start of the film, a near-identical shot of Scottie's police colleague falling from a roof. Surely the 'identification' involved is largely just a sign of good, old-fashioned guilt feelings, a willingness to have died in the victims' places - and/or a sign that already, like Alevoine in 'Lettre à Mon Juge', Scottie (for whatever reason) can hardly distinguish his own body from someone else's ...

As for the scene that Poague says amuses 'most audiences', in which Scottie describes for the madam in the dress-shop the precise neckline and sleeve-length of the suit he wants for Judy, I must disagree that it shows Scottie to be 'far more comfortable' in the "feminine" world.⁸³ What I think it mainly shows - the source of the viewer's amusement - is Scottie's obsession, his virtual **obliviousness** to his surroundings. (Yet note, too, his exaggerated 'masculine' bossiness, a sign of his underlying embarrassment at the particular situation his determination to re-create Madeleine has put him in.) Earlier, he had been a reasonably good cop: vide Captain Hansen's testimony at the inquest into Madeleine's death. True, he would often drop in after hours to visit the companionable Midge - for Scottie, no more than that now - but that's hardly evidence for his feeling 'more comfortable' among women. Indeed, recall that when Midge had happened to introduce him to a new type of brassière, he had actually shown traces of alarm - poking at it with a stick and asking 'What's this do-hickey here?' (We sense, of course, that deep down it has stirred his mother-fixation.)

No, I'd say that Scottie is simply a discontented all-rounder (cf the start of 'Faust'), and a good professional, and that **that** is the significance of the casting of James Stewart in the role.⁸⁴ In turn, such casting - such exceptional **range** as Stewart possessed - makes matters all the more affecting

for audiences when the time comes for Scottie to show whether he can swallow his pride and be truly forgiving and compassionate (in Schopenhauer's terms, turn his will back on itself). As we find out, he can't, which failure is pretty much a recurring story of humankind to date. That is, we're reminded of our own essential pathology, which may betray us yet again, one of these days ...

* * *

Several times, Poague's approach to **Vertigo** is so 'theoretical' that he fails to see or hear accurately what occurs. In the Muir Woods scene, 'a fantastically evanescent Madeleine' doesn't in fact accuse **Scottie** of 'having taken ... no notice':⁸⁵ she apostrophises 'God'. ('Here I was born and here I died. It was only a moment for you.') Judy-as-Madeleine-as-Carlotta is here playing at being 'eternal' (or 'eternally recurrent'), no doubt as Gavin Elster had instructed her to do - with the intention of trading on Scottie's sense of weakness, his 'Faustian' longing for power and/or escape.⁸⁶

Again, when Hitchcock makes his cameo appearance in **Vertigo**, outside Gavin's shipyard, what he's carrying is not, as Poague claims, a flashlight, but a horn case. (I must admit, though, that for years I took it to be a coal-scuttle! For being at last corrected on that, I'm grateful to Jane Sloan's 'Alfred Hitchcock: a filmography and bibliography', 1995.) Undeterred, Poague launches, Cavell-fashion,⁸⁷ into an ambitious interpretation involving Hitchcock's intention to mark **himself** as mortal, as seeking no exemption; we might say he is enlightened [about human frailty]' ...⁸⁸

Ironically, that interpretation seems to derive in part from the one I made in 'MacGuffin' 6 - and have cited above - concerning Hitchcock's expressionistic pre-credits cameo in **The Wrong Man**. Poague and I once had an agreeable exchange of letters about what I wrote there. In his **Vertigo** article, he seems in addition to avail himself of another of my previous points - that several characters in **The Wrong Man** are like ghosts or wraiths - in order to say repeatedly of Scottie and Madeleine/Judy that they're bound together in 'a sense of mutual ghostliness',⁸⁹ of mutual repression. (Cf my point in 'MacGuffin' 6 that Manny in **The Wrong Man** knows 'too little', that he's no Nietzschean 'Superman'.) I hasten to claim no offence from Professor Poague! I see that his remarks on 'ghostliness' **also**, or chiefly, derive from Cavell - writing on how 'Women's lives heretofore have been nonexistent, as if they have haunted the world'.⁹⁰ And I recognise that we're **all** 'repressed' in one way or another, i.e. not always giving due 'acknowledgment'! That last point explains why the critical task still seems to me to involve helping each other pursue true(r) judgment (at-one-ment?). So I'll conclude thus. Given Cavell's transcendental-romantic sympathies (not least to the New England transcendentalists of the 19th century), and his particular indebtedness, recalling Schopenhauer's, to Kant, I sense that Poague's espousal of his (Cavell's) work isn't so far removed in spirit from my own of Schopenhauer's.⁹¹ Perhaps the present article has been no more than a trailer.

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Notes

1. J. Barzun, "Romanticism", in Jack Sullivan (ed.), 'The Penguin Encyclopedia of Horror and the Supernatural' (1986), p. 357. Barzun sees the Romantic imagination as 'a window open on the infinite'.
2. G. Simenon, 'Act of Passion' (Penguin Books edition, 1965), p. 215.
3. L. Poague, "Engendering **Vertigo**", in 'Hitchcock Annual' (1994 edition), p. 35.
4. Poague's book, 'Another Frank Capra', was published in 1994.
5. See, for example, "Engendering ...", pp. 37, 36.
6. Ken Mogg, "The Fragments of the Mirror: **Vertigo** (1958) and its Sources", in 'The MacGuffin', no. 11 (November, 1993), pp. 7-22.
7. J. Jacobi, 'The Psychology of C.G. Jung' (1968), p. 124.
8. "Engendering ...", p. 49.

9. Ibid, pp. 27-28.
10. Ibid, p. 49.
11. S. Cavell, 'Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage' (1981), p. 2.
12. W. Rothman, 'The "I" of the Camera: Essays in Film Criticism, History, and Aesthetics' (1988), p. 152.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid. Cf Adrian Martin, "Luminous Alicia, Sore Devlin, Poor Alex: Around **Notorious** (1946)", in 'The MacGuffin', no. 10 (August, 1993), p. 17.
15. Rothman, p. 172.
16. "Engendering ...", p. 32.
17. Ibid, p. 35 (quoting Cavell's 'Pursuits of Happiness').
18. Ibid, p. 27.
19. B. Henderson, "Harvard Film Studies: A Review", in 'Film Quarterly', Summer 1982, p. 22.
20. Cavell, p. 241.
21. Kierkegaard recognised that his work and Schopenhauer's touched each other at 'many points', though he 'completely disagreed' with what Schopenhauer was saying! See Bryan Magee, 'The Philosophy of Schopenhauer' (1983), p. 42n.
22. There's certainly more to Hegel's position than this!
23. Quoted by Magee, p. 42, to illustrate Schopenhauer's affinity with Kierkegaard in this matter at least.
24. See Michael Meyer, 'Ibsen' (Penguin Books edition, 1985), pp. 185, 841, 768.
25. Cavell, pp. 20-24. This particular rendering of the title of Ibsen's play is the one Cavell prefers.
26. "Engendering ...", p. 19.
27. K. Mogg, "The Man Who Knew Too Little: Hitchcock's **The Wrong Man** (1957)", in 'The MacGuffin', no. 6 (February, 1992), pp. 17-25. Recently I've revised and expanded this article for possible inclusion in a forthcoming *Mensa* anthology edited by Dr Geoffrey Marnell of Melbourne.
28. C. Birch, 'Regaining Compassion for Humanity and Nature' (1993), p. 223.
29. This passage was quoted in a review of Gay's book by Anthony Elliott, 'The Weekend Australian', 23-24 July, 1994. Mind you, Victorian attitudes to women probably weren't much different in the US (or in Ibsen's Norway, for that matter). Just read your Edith Wharton! Cf too a passage in John Buchan's 'Greenmantle' (1916), Chapter Sixteen, in which the American, Blenkiron, says, 'We've exalted our womenfolk into little tin gods, and at the same time left them out of the real business of life.'
30. Elliott, as above. Gay, of course, is a recent biographer of Freud.
31. C. Paglia, 'Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence From Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson' (Penguin Books edition, 1991), p. 257.
32. Ibid.

33. Ibid, p. 256.

34. Ibid, pp. 254-55.

35. I say more about this aspect of **Vertigo** in 'MacGuffin' 11.

36. Again see 'MacGuffin' 11, which includes a discussion of how 'D'Entre les Morts' makes Flavières (the Scottie character) 'almost an artist'.

37. Paglia, p. 254.

38. Cf "Engendering ...", p. 36.

39. Ibid, p. 47.

40. I recognise that the terms themselves, as used in various contexts, imply what must be overcome. Nonetheless, my strong feeling is that Poague sees individual waves but not the sea - when really there's **only** the sea ...

41. Somebody once defined good writing as showing courtesy and consideration towards the reader. Now, while I find these two Harvard academics - Cavell and Rothman - often self-centred or arrogant (Cavell frequently has 'conversations with himself', as Tania Modleski noted recently), I consider Paglia the very model of a brilliant **communicator** on aesthetic matters. In short, a very good writer. Dr Paglia comes from Yale, by the way!

42. Elliott, op. cit. Anthony Elliott's book, 'Psychoanalytic Theory: an introduction', was recently published.

43. Paglia, p. 256.

44. "Engendering ...", p. 44.

45. I'm not even sure that Poague's description of the marvellous scene in the moonlight in Capra's film is fully accurate. (By the way, his **Vertigo** article doesn't elaborate at all on the passage I've quoted here.) For instance, what exactly is 'mysterious' about Mary's disappearance from her bathrobe, given that George's foot was resting on the robe's cord? I surmise that Poague is hinting that George's action wasn't entirely an accident! But, in that case, the epithet 'mysterious' is surely being stretched to breaking-point, if Poague intends using it to draw a connection with the ambience of **Vertigo**'s Muir Woods scene.

Anyway, my readers with a sense of humour may like to refer back to 'Odd Spot' in 'MacGuffin' 7, which featured another instance of Poague's over-reaching in matters of interpretation (there, re the licence-plates on Marion Crane's car in **Psycho**). And cf note 87 below.

46. For a discussion of **Portrait of Jennie**, and its relation to **Vertigo**, see 'MacGuffin' 11.

47. "Engendering ...", p. 36.

48. Ibid, pp. 36-37.

49. Narcejac's 'Le Cas "Simenon"' was translated into English as 'The Art of Simenon' (1952). Its chapter called "Sympathy" includes this observation:

It has never been sufficiently realised that Simenon's subjects are always drawn from those little news paragraphs which everyone ignores because their unhappy heroes end up at the Assizes. But Simenon tries to reconstitute the truly human origin of these pathetic dramas. He relives them in order to make us understand that they concern us, and that the accused man has often ventured further in his discovery of the human than those who condemn him. In this sense, each of Simenon's novels is a new 'Letter to my Judge'. By a natural development, sympathy, little by little, becomes

much more than a method of knowing; it becomes transformed into a system of values. ... Thanks to this sympathy, Simenon reveals something of the world soul, the universal psyche. (pp. 31-32, 34)

50. Quoted on the back-cover of the Penguin edition of 'Act of Passion'. Cf the passage from the novel I've included at the head of the present article.

51. Simenon, p. 16. On p. 12, Alevoine had remarked, 'We are almost identical men, your Honour'.

52. Ibid, p. 22.

53. Ibid, p. 48.

54. Ibid, p. 94.

55. Ibid, p. 106.

56. Ibid, p. 107.

57. Ibid, p. 97 (cf p. 111). The man's name is Raoul Boquet, and he seems to be roughly the counterpart of Gévigne in 'D'Entre les Morts', and of Gavin Elster in **Vertigo**.

58. Ibid, p. 131.

59. Ibid.

Notes 60-91 will appear in 'MacGuffin' 18.

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ODD SPOT: UNSTINTING

John Houseman ('Unfinished Business', 1988) said of Alfred Hitchcock that he approached his work 'with an intelligence and an almost scientific clarity to which I was unaccustomed in the theatre'. A small instance of what Houseman may have meant can be glimpsed in Hitchcock's method for filming the Ernie's Restaurant sequence in **Vertigo** (1958).

An exact replica of that famous San Francisco meeting-place of the rich and famous was built in the Paramount studio in Hollywood. Everything in it was authentic, including the menus, ashtrays, napkins, matches, and rare antique plates and paintings. To give a further touch of realism, Hitchcock brought from San Francisco Roland and Vic Gotti, co-owners of Ernie's, and Carlo Doto, maître d' hôtel, to play themselves and to act as 'technical advisors' during shooting of the sequence.

.....
 STOP PRESS. THIS SHOULD HAVE GONE IN 'BLOOPERS'. SAD TO REPORT, THERE MAY WELL BE NO EXTANT SCENARIO OF **THE MOUNTAIN EAGLE** - LET ALONE A PRINT OF THE FILM ITSELF - AFTER ALL. CF 'MACGUFFIN' 16, PP. 6-7. THE USE IN TRUFFAUT'S 'HITCHCOCK' (ENGLISH VERSION) OF THE TERM 'SCENARIO' IS A SLOPPY TRANSLATION. IN THE ORIGINAL VERSION, TRUFFAUT SAYS, 'J'AI LA UN **RESUME** DU SCENARIO' (EMPHASIS ADDED). THANKS TO JOHN KUHN FOR POINTING THIS OUT. MORE NEXT TIME.

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