Newsletter of the Film/Alfred Hitchcock Special Interest Group

The MacGuffin

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EDITORIAL

Hitchcock fans should be reasonably happy with the content of this second pilot-issue of 'The MacGuffin', but I'm not sure about the rest of you. You may feel a little short-changed. Certainly you won't find any reviews of current or recent films this time around.

But, like I said, we're talking of a pilot-issue, and the problem is being addressed. Look for an altogether more inclusive, and more up-to-the-minute, newsletter starting with 'MacGuffin' 3.

Meanwhile, please lend your support in any way you can. Elsewhere in this issue you'll find details of how to subscribe. The annual fee of $12 Australian (4 issues) equals about $10 American. Not a lot to pay for what will accumulate into a considerable body of Hitchcock and other film lore.

In addition, as a subscriber you'll be part of our "friendly international group". Starting this issue, I'm offering tangible inducements for people to send in letters; and I will reward other contributors with one complimentary copy of 'The MacGuffin' per article used. Think about it - and act accordingly!

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Speaking of contributors, thanks to Sarada Holt and Ronald Conway for their pieces in this issue. Sarada read Anthony Burgess's 'A Clockwork Orange' at school; her essay printed here gives us pointers to the structure of both the novel and Stanley Kubrick's film. In Ron's case, he took time off from his practice as a psychologist - and doubtless from celebrating his mention in the recent Australia Day Honours List - to share with us his appreciation of Freudian content in Hitchcock's films, especially Marnie. He makes a nice point about some of Hitchcock's tough ladies.

The other main Hitchcock article this time is a long analysis of the comedy-thriller Stage Fright (1949). You might want to check out the Warner video before, or after, you read the analysis.

Also, there's a review of a rather donnish book on the terror-film, 'Caligari's Children'. The title refers to the classic German silent film, The Cabinet of Dr Caligari, which proves to have an unexpected link with my favourite philosopher, Schopenhauer. The latter, so relevant to film generally and Hitchcock in particular, is mentioned a few times this issue. See 'Letters', for example.

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Lately I've seen a couple of criticisms of old Alfred and his movies. One of them came in a letter, and suggested that any film about the topic of murder couldn't be very nice. Well, maybe not. But should I now think about giving up reading my favourite authors like Dickens, Flaubert, and Dostoevsky? The letter-writer didn't say.

And in a teen magazine someone complained that Hitchcock was a sadist. There's some truth in that, of course. Schopenhauer said that we're all constituted of self-interest, malice, and compassion. The thing is, the very fact of the sadism helps explain why the films themselves are often so fascinating. In the case of Stage Fright doesn't everyone identify with Alastair Sim when he tries to expose Marlene Dietrich in public as a murderess? (And with James Stewart in Rear Window when he tries to do the same to Raymond

Burr?) And what about some of Hitchcock's casting? Dietrich in Stage Fright plays a desperately world-weary theatrical star. It was surely not coincidental that she herself at that time had appeared in a succession of unsuccessful 40s pictures following her hey-day working for director Josef von Sternberg (The Blue Angel, The Scarlet Empress).

The writer in the teen magazine called French film critics' liking for Hitchcock an aberration, adding that France itself is a bit strange and has never produced a major rock star. (Come to that, nor has it produced many first-order classical composers.) But shouldn't he have spared a thought for all the great French novelists and painters?

Anyway, let me finish by thanking my friend Stephanie for her support over rather trying times lately. (That's not a reference to overseas events.) Peace, too, to all our SIG members and friends.

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Notes on copyright

All original material published in 'The MacGuffin' is subject to normal copyright. In all cases, permission to re-publish must be obtained from the author and from the editor of 'The MacGuffin'. Copyright resides with the original author.

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"Foreign copyright owners are protected in Australia and Australian copyright owners are protected in most other countries. To obtain the most extensive international protection available, the copyright notice should be placed on all copies of published works."

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LETTERS

Professor Don Cupitt, Cambridge, England

Thanks for your letter and copy of 'The MacGuffin'. It prompted a further thought. Schopenhauer's contrast between the Will and 'representation' is very strongly reflected in Hitchcock's type of auteur and genre cinema. For Hitchcock, what matters is the underlying emotional drive and tension of the thriller. The surface flux of visual images, human characters, etc. is subordinated to a very powerful noumenal, underlying force of which it is the mere expression or manifestation. Freud is of course very close to Schopenhauer and to Hitchcock on this point, making a similar contrast:

Will/representation : libido/mental images : cinematic narrative drive/edited visual imagery etc.

(Editor's note. I quite agree with Professor Cupitt. For schematic illustration of the Will at work in Hitchcock's movies just watch Saul Bass's driving credit-titles for North by Northwest, Psycho, The Birds, and Marnie. And for characters not comprehending the split between appearance and reality, the phenomenal and the noumenal, just think of the endings of films like Stage Fright, Vertigo, and all four of the above titles. Such characters typically stay bound in subjectivity - what Schopenhauer called "the principle of sufficient reason".)

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Karim Gawor (Australian SIGs Co-ordinator), Surfers Paradise, Qld, Australia

Thanks for the newsletter. It looks great. It's the most professional effort I've seen. Lots of content, too. Good luck with the SIG.

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Paul B. Priest, Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

I saw Hitchcock's *Psycho* when I was twelve years old. I had to be accompanied by an adult so I took my mother. She proved to be useful for I covered my eyes whenever the music reached a fever pitch - a harbinger of a gory scene - and would ask her if it was safe to look. Since that time I haven't gone back to see the parts that I missed. Recently I saw a book dealing with the person Hitchcock based this movie on [name of Ed Gein - Ed.]. The cover sported a chilling photo of the real-life "Norman". I can tell you he is not the kind of person you would want to meet in a dark alley or a well-lit one for that matter.

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Letters needed!

Our Film/Alfred Hitchcock SIG is a correspondence-only, international group of film lovers, albeit a mixed one. It would be nice if we all knew something about each other's tastes and interests. To that end, you are asked to send:

(a) The title of your favourite film (or one of your favourite films)
(b) Ditto, your favourite Hitchcock film
(c) Ditto, the first Hitchcock film you ever saw - and something of the circumstances.

(For instance, one favourite film of mine is the French *Claire's Knee* - it's charming, limpid, and very sexy in a subtle way. My favourite Hitchcock film is *Vertigo* - I find it both profound and poignant. The first, or one of the first, Hitchcock films I saw was the James Stewart/Doris Day version of *The Man Who Knew Too Much*. I saw it at a local scout hall on 16mm gauge. The projector had to be stopped and re-threaded after each of the reels, and invariably the reel-breaks came in the most exciting parts.)

By a fortunate coincidence, it's 'MacGuffin' subscription time. So you'll be writing in anyway, no doubt! Depending on the number of letters received, I will give a prize for either the most interesting or the best-described answer to (c) above, or for the best letter on anything at all that arrives in time for the next issue.

This seems a good place to raise a couple of policy matters regarding letters generally. First, a letter writer's full address will not be published unless the writer requests it and the circumstances seem apt. Second, any letter received by me *may* be published, either in whole or in part, except when the writer asks me not to do so.

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BOOK REVIEW

Prawer, S.S.: 'Caligari's Children: The Film as Tale of Terror' (O.U.P., 1980; hardcover)

he reputation of Oxford University Press as a publisher of film books has always been one of would-be espectability, not innovation. Its initial titles included 'American Silent Film' by the veteran film istorian William Everson, 'Film Language' by noted French scholar Christian Metz, and 'A Discovery of inema' by Thorold Dickinson, the director of *The Queen of Spades* who had become a lecturer at London's lade School. There was also 'The Oxford Companion to Film', but users rather felt that this failed to atch its one-volume rivals (notably Ephraim Katz's 'The International Film Encyclopedia').

n the case of another early Oxford title, Professor Prawer's 'Caligari's Children', you at least find signs hat its author meant it to break a few moulds. Typical of Prawer's approach to the terror-film is how he hooses to lump together *Metropolis*, *Frankenstein*, *2001* and the Russian *Solaris* on the grounds that with eir "continuity between magic and science, between the incantations of the past and the technological nders of present and future", they each evoke 'the uncanny'. (More on the uncanny in a moment.) He adds

that all four films "partake in an unmistakable fashion of the very essence of cinema", and in support he cites one of the earliest film theoreticians, Hugo Münsterberg:

> The photoplay tells us the human story by overcoming the forms of the outer world, namely, space, time and causality, and by adjusting the events to the forms of the inner world, namely, attention, memory, imagination and emotion.

Well, I'm practically certain that this formulation lacks rigour. (As I understand the matter, there can be no ultimate distinction between outer and inner worlds, object and subject. The forms of space, time and causality rule both. Which is why the intriguing title in 2001, "... Beyond the Infinite", is at best only figurative.) Even so, in bandying around dubious or figurative notions, Prawer does manage an occasional insight. Which raises the question, 'How much insight?'

To answer that, we may turn to the book's central chapter on 'The Uncanny'. I'm happy to report that it's rich in quotation and allusion, for Prawer is nothing if not eclectic. He first states the twin concepts of Freud: the uncanny is either (a) the 'un-homely', that which makes you feel uneasy in the world of your normal experience, or (b) the 'un-secret', that which should have remained "mysterious, hidden, latent and has come to light" (as the philosopher Schelling put it). To be uncanny, Prawer says, a work need not provide shocks of horror: the uncanny may be diffused over the whole like the thick fogs or eerie light found in certain pages of Dickens or Gogol or Dostoevsky.

If that sort of allusion appeals to you, as it does to me (who can't get enough of it when it synthesises or summarises diverse areas of films viewed or books read), then enjoy! After discussing Freud, Prawer considers in turn the relevant contributions of psychiatrists, philosophers and theologians. Of the neo-Freudian Jacques Lacan's analysis of the 'disjunction' between lived experience and the mental sign which replaces it, and his stress on the Freudian concept of 'splitting' (easily symbolised in fiction by 'the double'), Prawer acknowledges a profound influence on the way critics now look at the tale of terror. Especially have those critics learned to examine the structure as well as the content of a novel or film. But Prawer adds: "I must admit that I myself have not found Lacan's writings helpful, and that I doubt whether his influence - so strong at the time of writing - will long outlast him." (Would my academic readers agree that Prawer is proving correct?)

Pointing out that many earlier observers before Freud (and Lacan) succeeded in uncovering the psychological springs of the uncanny, Prawer turns first to Arthur Schopenhauer:

> We need think only of Schopenhauer's celebrated analysis of the terror we feel when some apparent exception to the law of causality makes us doubt the principle of individuation ...

Schopenhauer himself called such terror dread. By coincidence, the general passage referred to is the very one I quoted in the last 'MacGuffin' when discussing Hitchcock's Vertigo. As examples of dread Schopenhauer cites occasions "when it appears some change has occurred without a cause, or a deceased person exists again; or when in any other way the past or the future is present, or the distant is near". All of which surely confirms why in Vertigo it's more than just the San Francisco fog that helps make the film such a memorable instance of the uncanny.

But I have now indicated the richest parts of Prawer's book and they comprise perhaps twenty pages of its overall 300. For the rest, there are chapters on individual films, chapters which seem to me to lack any special originality: films discussed are Rouben Mamoulian's Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde (1931), Carl Dreyer's Vampyr (1931) and, naturally, Robert Wiene's trendsetting The Cabinet of Dr Caligari (1919).

To write about Caligari, Prawer obtained a copy of the screenplay, something that the editors of the Lorrimer Classic Film Scripts had not been able to do a few years earlier when they ended up transcribing an archive print of the film. And, of course, Prawer's notes on Caligari and its "children" (descendents) contain plenty of useful material. I liked his note on the ambiguities introduced into the 1919 film by its added framing-story and by lines in the script itself (notably the Doctor's final remark: "At last I understand ... He thinks I am that mystic Caligari" - when clearly Francis does not think that at all). Nor would I question the link Prawer sees between Caligari's "small-town paranoia" and the "urban paranoia" of certain Hitchcock movies (The Lodger, Stage Fright?).

On the other hand, the further you advance into the book, the more you feel its general lack of direct engagement with the over 400 movies it mentions and tries to cover. With some exceptions (for example, a spirited apologia for Werner Herzog's 1979 Nosferatu), the author often seems to be working from old file cards, many of them containing obvious or clichéd comments. He deals too frequently in familiar generalities like the sexual analogues of vampire tales, and only rarely in real insights such as his note on the rise of 'vulgar' Hammer Films at the expense of 'tasteful' Ealing Studios.

Even though he strives to be comprehensive, and clearly thinks he has succeeded, Prawer still misses some important points. While mentioning the prominent role of games like chess and cards in the post-Caligari terror-film, he omits reference to the gambling motif/metaphor in films by Lang, Hitchcock and others. And for a book that spends so much time on the notion of the uncanny, it's strange that no connection is drawn between Caligari and the works of the German writer E.T.A. Hoffmann (whose 'The Sandman' was discussed by Freud and whose eerie character in that story, Coppelius, might almost be the spiritual prototype of Caligari himself; the physical prototype, as Prawer notes, was Schopenhauer, seen in a portrait made during the philosopher's old age).

All told, this is a rather long-winded and fairly typical O.U.P. film book. Best for libraries and specialist reference, I would have to say.

K.M.

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NEWS

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

'Rear Window' wranglings

The Hitchcock film Rear Window, based on the 1942 short story called 'It Had To Be Murder', seems forever the subject of litigation. Recently, a literary agent who bought copyright in the story for $US650 after the author died, sued the film distributors and the film's part-owner, actor James Stewart. He alleged that the 1983 re-release of the film interfered with plans for a television version of the story. Now judges have ruled that the $US12 million profit from the film must be shared with the agent.

In the 70s Rear Window was shelved indefinitely after a man whom Hitchcock called an "ambulance chaser" (possibly the same literary agent) invoked an obscure copyright law and sued Hitchcock and Paramount Pictures for failing to respect a prohibition against screening a film based on a written work until the late author's estate was settled.

The latest ruling will have billion-dollar repercussions: there are thousands of films based on underlying copyright works, and before any of these is re-released lawyers will have to negotiate payment with the writer.

Literature into film

By a long chalk the most popular 'classic' author in contemporary cinema is Joseph Conrad, whose work contains a distinctive strain of pessimism. There have been at least twenty films made of Conrad's fiction since a silent version of Lord Jim in 1926; Hitchcock filmed 'The Secret Agent' in 1936 under the title Sabotage (A Woman Alone in the US). Now two more Conrad films are coming: Bob Hoskins's new version of The Secret Agent (with Hoskins both directing and starring) and David Lean's long, and long-awaited, Nostromo.

The runner-up to Conrad is E.M. Forster because - with next month's release of Where Angels Fear to Tread and the Merchant-Ivory team settling into production on Howard's End - there will be only one novel of his that hasn't been filmed, The Longest Journey.

Other films being made or in the recent-release category are a British-Soviet co-production of Virginia Woolf's Orlando; Edith Wharton's The Children (starring Ben Kingsley); a new version of Nabokov's Lolita; Roland Jaffe's film of Dominique Lapiere's The City of Joy (shooting in India); Michael Crichton's sophisticated SF novel, Jurassic Park; William Burroughs's The Naked Lunch (directed by David Cronenberg); and J.P. Donleavy's The Ginger Man.

Australian director Fred Schepisi's film of John le Carré's The Russia House, starring Sean Connery and Michelle Pfeiffer, may get a release in the Soviet Union. In France, Henry Miller's Quiet Days in Clichy has been adapted, reportedly with great licence, by Claude Chabrol.

'F/X' and 'F/X 2': the Hitchcock connection

The 1985 F/X starred Australian actor Bryan Brown playing a special effects wizard who learns of an intended real-life assassination - his own.

The film was directed by Robert Mandel. Hitchcock buffs may recall that Mandel was one of three promising young film makers presented to Alfred Hitchcock in 1979 at the American Film Institute's Life Achievement Award tribute held in Beverley Hills.

Now F/X 2 is being completed after shooting in Toronto, Canada. Bryan Brown again stars. But this time the director is another Australian, Richard Franklin (Psycho II).

In a letter, Richard tells us that his new film will contain "some Hitchcock pastiche".

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'A Clockwork Orange': an essay

(Editor's note. The following article refers principally to Anthony Burgess's novel but includes an assessment of Stanley Kubrick's 1971 film. A second article takes up some of the points raised.)

Futuristic societies in which people become passive and apathetic, and the government controls their every thought, had been portrayed before in such novels as 'Brave New World' and 'Nineteen Eighty-Four'. In 'A Clockwork Orange', set in an England of the near future, there is no totalitarian government but the beginnings of it are evident.

The principal character, 15-year-old Alexander de Large, is an anti-hero: a device Burgess also used in 'The Wanting Seed' published the same year as 'A Clockwork Orange' (1962). Both novels envision dystopias, worlds with terrible living conditions, but while the predominant problem in 'The Wanting Seed' is over-population, in 'A Clockwork Orange' it is an absence of law and humanity.

The anti-hero device may seem strange, but it takes us to the heart of Burgess's novel. Alex, who narrates, is corrupt, evil, and despicable, yet we learn to pity him. For a start, he is no ordinary thug but one who loves the music of Ludwig Van Beethoven. He steals, rapes, fights, and even murders, but when the government conditions him with its 'Ludovico technique' against these acts and against Beethoven's music, and he becomes helpless, the reader's anger is directed towards the government. 'Good' and 'evil' become inverted, and we find that stripping an individual of free will is worse than stealing and raping.

To this metaphysical element of his novel Burgess adds autobiographical ingredients. Alex's namesake, Mr Alexander, is writing a book called 'A Clockwork Orange', a piece of anti-government literature. Also, Burgess's wife died some time after being attacked by young criminals, as does Mr Alexander's wife after being attacked and raped by Alex and his 'droogs'.

The novel displays a strange formal geometry, as if every factor had been carefully plotted out and mirrored. Its three sections contain seven chapters each. The sections show, respectively, Alex sinning,

being treated, and returning to the outside world, where everyone he has committed a crime against takes revenge on him. For instance, Dim, one of his former droogs, and Billy Boy, his arch enemy during his street-fighting days, become policemen and beat him severely after they first rescue him from some intellectuals whose library he had once destroyed. But the novel's mirroring is also evidenced in the names 'Alex' and 'Mr Alexander', 'Ludwig Van' and 'Ludovico'.

If Mr Alexander represents Burgess, perhaps Alex does as well, as Burgess himself suggests: "It is the novelist's innate cowardice that makes him depute to imaginary personalities the sins he is too cautious to commit himself". But as we've seen, Alex suffers. The same music of Beethoven that had once delighted him and filled him with violent imaginings makes him sick after the Ludovico treatment, for the doctors had played Beethoven in the background as they showed him gruesome films and fed him drugs to induce nausea.

All of this is graphically depicted in Stanley Kubrick's film version, which captures much of the spirit of the novel. The film, though, omits the novel's last chapter, as does the American edition of the book. That chapter deals with Alex's growing up after he recovers from the Ludovico treatment and considers starting his own family.

Burgess and most critics prefer the uncut version of the book, for in that final chapter may be found the quality that defines a novel: the principal character exhibits some kind of change. Although Alex had changed earlier in the book, that was artificially induced, and when he was released from his conditioning he appeared to return to his old ways. The last chapter allows us to see how Alex decides that "ultra-violence" has lost its appeal. Free will has triumphed over forced choice, and the individual over the government.

Meanwhile, for the rest of us, faced with determining our own moral choices, the mechanics of politics and religion continue to tick away, making each of us a part of the one giant clockwork orange that is the world.

Copyright 1991, by Sarada Holt

The ending of 'A Clockwork Orange'

Has anyone taken a close look at the ending of Kubrick's film lately? Or, for that matter, at the ending of Burgess's novel (the American edition, the one used by Kubrick)? For I want to question whether either of them really leaves the way open for free will to triumph, whatever the novel's added chapter may seem to indicate.

In other words, I want to suggest that the added chapter is either 'tagged-on' (perhaps to satisfy the British publisher) or has been misinterpreted, even by Sarada Holt whose perceptive article appears above. Sarada says that "Burgess and most critics prefer the uncut version of the book" but that's not what I once heard. I was told that it's a let-down. Indeed, how could it be otherwise? Any "change" in Alex so late in the story is going to look contrived. Unless, that is, the change reads as the final stage in the Ludovico treatment - just as at the end of Orwell's 'Nineteen Eighty-Four' Winston Smith returns brain-washed to 'society', more abject than ever ...

Both 'A Clockwork Orange' and 'Nineteen Eighty-Four' are about social isolates, and I will press the parallels between the two novels in a moment. Meanwhile, here are my thoughts on the ending of Kubrick's film.

To begin with, just because young Alex pronounces himself "cured" (of the effects of the Ludovico treatment), why should we believe him? The image we see of well-dressed men and women applauding a naked, romping couple is obviously Alex's fantasy, not reality, for all that it marks the return of his libido. But libido, sexuality, may itself be a trap, as sociologist Michel Foucault has often warned us ...

Next, I am reminded by the film's ending of poet William Blake's ambivalent portrayal of Satan:

Spectre of Albion! warlike Fiend!
In clouds of blood and ruin rolled,
I here reclaim thee as my own,
My Selfhood - Satan armed in gold!

For Blake, Satan always represented the isolated ego cut off from the universe that is "One continued Vision of Fancy or Imagination". (And 'Albion' was Blake's poetic name for Britain.) In similar fashion, Alex in 'A Clockwork Orange' is a completely anti-social being, someone whom the film's imagery likens to a vampire who preys each night on his crippled or weakened victims. One critic rightly called him "evil personified". Accordingly, to attribute to such a figure the possibility of free will, while in theory it might not be false theology, strikes me as either a slighting of the 'poetic' concept involved or as suddenly wrenching that concept into a wholly new mode (to satisfy the novel's final chapter). And if the latter, how can there be a "triumph" of free will? More like a contradiction - an imposition by the author from above.

And again, even if it's granted that Alex has been cured after a fashion - libido restored, and able once more to relish the music of his beloved Ludwig Van - we must surely observe how this has diminished him. He has been bought off. His former fight has been quelled or trivialised, and he has made a dubious pact with his worst enemy (who long ago supplanted Billy Boy) - the State.

Certainly Blake would now disown him. Instead of a glorious Satan waiting to be incorporated into a truer vision, the end of Kubrick's film (I suggest) is really showing us a pathetic, self-deluding teenager still clinging to delusions of glory. Someone has pulled a plug and the 'poetry' has been drained from him. No triumph this - except for Kubrick's excellent timing in concluding his film just at this point.

* * *

Not only is Alex anti-social, he is a practising sadist. In this respect, his character stands out until the end of the film from the sublimated or displaced sadism around him (e.g. the Cat Lady, the prison procedures). Almost inevitably, the story tends toward 'Nineteen Eighty-Four'. But more than that, I think both works are alike in illustrating the modern "Faustian pact" to which Foucault says we are tempted by our rulers and their very potent institutions:

> We must not think that by saying yes to sex, one says no to power; on the contrary, one tracks along the course laid out by the general deployment of sexuality.

For instances of how institutions may control and manipulate us, look at such works by Foucault as 'The History of Sexuality' and 'Discipline and Punish'. Then turn back to 'Nineteen Eighty-Four' and 'A Clockwork Orange' and note the parallels. There are many. But also note that both novels are themselves allegories of such control. For instance, what finally allows Winston's torturer, O'Brien, to break him down, is bringing him against an instance of his own potential sadism. After that, Winston is easily persuaded to love that ultimate abstraction, Big Brother ...

Here's how I see the matter. If it is Winston's sexuality which betrays him into the government's power - and the whole novel points that way - then I believe the same is also the case with Alex in 'A Clockwork Orange'. Roughly equivalent to O'Brien is the nice-seeming man Alex likes to call the Minister of the Inferior. But don't be fooled. For if you really think that the government has capitulated to Alex in the film's last scene, then you'll believe anything, oh my brothers ...

K.M.

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COMING ATTRACTIONS

Cinema in Asia; the real-life cases that Hitchcock filmed; books (e.g. 'Acting in the Cinema', 'The Hitchcock Romance').

Plus, as always, whatever the editor receives: short items and reviews especially welcome.

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Back issues and subscriptions

Subscription time is now. Four air-posted issues per year will cost you just $12 Australian, or $8 Australian if you're under 18. Please use a bank draft or similar, payable in Australian currency and made out to 'The MacGuffin'.

If you contribute articles to us, as payment you will receive extensions to your subscription at the rate of one issue per article.

Back-issues are available for $5 Australian per copy, including air postage overseas. ($3 per copy within Australia.) NB: the inaugural 'MacGuffin' included two articles on Hitchcock's Vertigo plus an account of the director filming Family Plot.

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Hitchcock's Disturbed People

Alfred Hitchcock was always fascinated by the motivations of his characters and it was not true that he treated actors as would a master puppeteer. Within the carefully planned and story-boarded method he preferred, Hitchcock encouraged his cast to play as resourcefully and in as nuanced a manner as possible. This was true of his disturbed characters in particular, right back to Oscar Homolka's ambiguous Verloc, the saboteur in Sabotage (1936). Other examples appear in the exaggerated deadly calm of Judith Anderson as Mrs Danvers in Rebecca (1940) and Robert Walker's boyish jocularity as Bruno, the intending parricide, in Strangers on a Train (1951).

Psychiatry, particularly Freudian psychoanalysis, was a strong interest of Hitchcock and we know that he was well read in the area. Yet only Spellbound (1944) is actually constructed around psychoanalysis as a full-blown theme. Here there is a fascinating interplay between the young psychiatrist Constance (Ingrid Bergman), her teacher Alex (Michael Chekhov), the pseudo-psychiatrist (Gregory Peck) and the coolly arrogant head of Green Manors Sanatorium, Dr Murchison (Leo G. Carroll). Alex conforms to the stereotype of the sort of psychoanalyst the audience is anticipating. He is bearded (like Freud), sardonically quizzical and humorous, and easily notes, without saying so, the essence of the relationship between his pupil Dr Constance and the obviously disturbed "Dr Anthony Edwardes". We soon realise that Edwardes is desperate and on the edge of a catatonic breakdown but we trust Constance's faith that he is not a murderer. Yet both her chief, Dr Murchison, and old Dr Alex keep us in some doubt as to how right her view really is. Perhaps Edwardes was really a killer in an unintended accident? And of course he was - in childhood.

There is, of necessity, a drastic telescoping of young Edwardes's treatment and his progress towards the truth. Conventional treatment rarely proceeds so rapidly or so fascinatingly. Nor does the mental defence system of a real patient yield up its secrets so dramatically. But such is Hitchcock's skill at building tension and keeping us wondering that we believe strongly in the truth of the process. Meanwhile the final twist where Murchison is revealed as the real paranoiac murderer and "Edwardes" merely an innocent general physician is delayed long enough to surprise us.

In Strangers on a Train psychiatry plays no direct role but in Bruno (played with an edgy, alarming charm by Walker) we encounter a character disturbed yet clever enough to embroil a sane young man, Guy (Farley Granger), in his murder plot. Bruno is clearly a pre-psychotic homosexual with a classical oedipal

fixation. As critic Donald Spoto has noted, Guy and Bruno represent the "light and dark" aspects of each other. When they first meet, it is Guy who seems worldly and confident, while Bruno is coy, introverted and diffident. Before long, the balance of confidence is reversed and the power of Bruno to mesmerise Guy (an affianced heterosexual) is sufficiently connected with Guy's inner weakness (and possible bisexuality) to bring an innocent bystander into part-complicity with a killer. The intermingling of male sexuality and pathology in this film is the better done for being subject to the taboos of the old Hollywood Production Code. A modern remake would probably have Bruno make a pass at Guy! As for Guy himself, we have already had a clearer version of the morally compromised, ambiguous relationships of his type to other men in the character of Philip in Rope (1948), again played by Farley Granger.

The oedipal theme of a son partly or wholly emasculated by his mother reaches a shocking climax in Psycho (1960). It was not surprising that many clinical workers at the time objected to the film for its possible destructive effect upon disturbed young male viewers. The linking of the unwholesome oedipal love to necrophilia, with a mummified parent in the basement, is the stuff of true nightmare. Especially when one considers the role played by the mother in the life of her children in days before women's liberation arrived to act as a domestic pressure valve. But in many ways Psycho stands as much as a warning about the brinkwomanship practised by aggressive women as about men. Marion (Janet Leigh) and Lila (Vera Miles) are both women with potentially emasculating qualities. Marion robs her employer, and her love affair with Sam Loomis is underlined at the beginning as potentially hazardous for him. The large physique of John Gavin as Sam is belied by the obvious vulnerability (out of bed) of the character he plays. Lila is latently even more predatory, and director Richard Franklin further developed her forceful character in Psycho II. At the film's centre however is the gentle Norman Bates who kills at the behest of his "mother-half". "Mother" is shown as the only ultimately "virile" aspect of a tragically castrated son peeping through holes in walls at what he cannot permit himself to have. Simon Oakland's psychiatric exposition of Norman's dual nature at the end of the film could have seemed a trite device but in Hitchcock's hands it comes off beautifully.

Marnie (1964), the last of Hitchcock's films on an overtly clinical theme, is in many ways the least-esteemed. Such low regard is hardly justified as Tippi Hedren plays the sexually frigid kleptomaniac heroine to near-perfection. Her cool statuesque blonde looks are in brilliant contrast to the dark, saturnine eroticism of Mark Rutland played by Sean Connery. Interestingly, both the sexual aversions of Marnie and the sexual arrogance of Mark tend not to make them very sympathetic figures. Yet in none of his films has Hitchcock explored the theme of sexual psychopathology more expertly and less sensationally. Marnie's reactions to men are entirely credible to a practising professional where the syndromes of "Dr Edwardes" in Spellbound and of Norman in Psycho sometimes strain one's credulity.

Marnie is the child of a man-hating former prostitute who once involved her amnesiac daughter in the murder of a dangerously aggressive sailor. Marnie's fear of red (blood), her curious reaction to the death of her horse, her compulsion to steal from employers who have treated her generously, her life-threatening struggle to accept Mark, all fit into the complex pattern of her psychiatric history. Thus Marnie may not be Hitchcock's most popular heroine but in terms of characterisation she is surely one of the most sophisticated. The film itself is crisp and humanly elegant throughout - despite all complaints of clumsy back-projection and the like - and shows the director in his best form as the master psychologist.

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Do you know about the Video SIG?

Mensa video buffs, especially those whose television uses the 525-lines American system, should think about joining the American VidSIG. Newsletter (4/yr) costs $4 (North America) or $6 (foreign). Sample $1.50. For swapping videos and/or information. Write to Dale Watson, 3987 Bainbridge Dr., Sharonville, OH 45241-2601.

Two more SIGs you might join are the Writers' SIG whose newsletter, 'Calliope', is edited by Donna Bocian, 3905 N. Panama Ave, Chicago IL 60634; and the Bibliophile SIG whose co-ordinator (and editor of 'BookworMs') is Lisa Beglinger, 3208 Rogers Ave, Walnut Creek, CA 94596. More SIGs information next time.

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Best of 1990

Martin Scorsese's GoodFellas was mentioned by most critics. Here's what Melbourne media lecturer and film critic, Tom Ryan, said of his first two choices for best feature film in 1990:

> "Two outstanding American films - Martin Scorsese's magnificent GoodFellas, perhaps the best gangster film ever made, and Brian De Palma's ferocious Casualties of War, vastly superior to the confused Born on the Fourth of July, would deserve acknowledgement in any year. Both are extremely violent, constantly unsettling in the way they draw us into their nightmare worlds (even if GoodFellas is also very funny). And both strike a discordant note in a year in which most of the film released, whatever their merits or failings, seems to have assiduously avoided making us feel uncomfortable."

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Hitchcock's 'Stage Fright': an appreciation

[Synopsis of the film. A student at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, Eve Gill (Jane Wyman), endeavours to clear a handsome chorus-dancer, Jonathan Cooper (Richard Todd), of suspicion of murder; simultaneously, she tries to make the police suspect Jonathan's mistress, the music-hall star, Charlotte Inwood (Marlene Dietrich). But the unexpected happens. Perhaps because of a hunch, Eve finds herself shifting her romantic allegiance from Jonathan to the gentlemanly Detective Smith (Michael Wilding). Events climax in a theatre, after which it appears that at least one character has gained a new maturity.]

(a) Seeing illusions

Hitchcock's visit to England in 1949 to make Stage Fright coincided with the publication there of 'The Concept of Mind' by philosopher Gilbert Ryle. That now-classic book states as its central proposition what is almost a film maker's, or a film actor's, credo: the mind is part of the body's activity. Therefore, any mental event should be witnessable.[1]

Stage Fright appears to bear out the implications of this. For instance, Ryle implies that self-knowledge means quite literally watching oneself and one's 'performance'. Here's how the Stage Fright screenplay describes its heroine, Eve Gill:

> Loving acting and the theatre before all else, she is apt to view everything in an overly-dramatic light. She feels all the world's a stage, and, come hell or high water, she's going to act on it! In "Stage Fright" she gets a chance to do just that, and in so doing she really grows up ... [learning] that adventure in the mind or behind the footlights is much easier than in actuality!

In other words, Eve must be chastened for her initial too-fanciful view of things. Ryle's comment might easily be the exception he allows concerning mind-body unity: "much of our ordinary thinking is conducted in internal monologue or silent soliloquy ...". Note the theatrical metaphors. The small importance[2] Ryle attaches to "ordinary thinking" appears to give it the status of a mere rehearsal: definitely not that of an actual performance or something done in the real world.

So when Stage Fright shows Eve speaking lines to herself and in other ways preparing (i.e. rehearsing) for her big scene which takes place in a theatre, you sense an affinity: Hitchcock and Ryle. I'll come back to it. The point for now is that at the climax, egged on by her loving father-cum-critic (Alastair Sim), Eve makes all the right responses. Though the scene doesn't exactly occupy centre stage, Eve's triumph is still a middling one ...

As for the film's spectators, Hitchcock asks us to remember that the cinema isn't reality, either. The best that the medium can offer us is a run-through of what it takes to be more human or more alive. That is, we are put in the learning position Eve occupies for most of Stage Fright. At the start of the film, a theatre safety curtain rises to disclose not a stage but a view of 'real' London - a clear hint that appearances may be fabricated. And at the end, a similar safety curtain, suddenly lowered, causes the death of the film's

most passive character. For neither the first nor the last time in Hitchcock, we find we have been watching an allegory about the dangers of merely watching.

(b) Mere players

I had better note here my agreement with those of Stage Fright's commentators who say that the film is more interesting for its abundant ideas, and the light these throw on Hitchcock's other movies, than it is for its sometimes languid screenplay and its indifferent villains (who, as Hitchcock himself pointed out, aren't the masterful ones of his best work). Even so, the reason for discussing the film here is that it's still one of the director's quintessential works, one that looks both back and forward: to his populous English comedy-thrillers of the 30s, and to the thematically richer, more pessimistic American films of the 50s, 60s, and 70s. I urge readers of 'The MacGuffin' who haven't seen it to track it down.

Incidentally, I'll try in this article not to give away the villains' precise identity. And, as I've been able to consult both the unpublished studio screenplay (already quoted) and the original novel, I may indicate points of interest in these as we go along.

Now, arguably the key to Stage Fright is that everybody is acting, some more bravely than others. The safety curtain that rises at the start bears an image of Minerva, helmeted goddess of the arts. That image pointedly resembles Marlene Dietrich. We've seen how the screenplay describes Eve; here's how it refers to Dietrich's character, the inscrutable lady of the theatre, Charlotte Inwood:

> A strikingly attractive woman with many sides to her nature. She is a very successful musical comedy star, who, on the stage, can make her audience roll in the aisles with a comic song. Off stage, her sultry sort of beauty and slightly flashy mannerisms keep one guessing about her true personality.

Although the film hints that Charlotte has almost reached the end of her tether (note, for instance, her ambiguous line, "I can't go on"), she keeps an admirable composure until near the climax. For mixed reasons, Eve pursues her, even posing (i.e. acting) as a maid in Charlotte's house in order to try and obtain incriminating evidence.

Further, the film makers appear to have drawn material for Charlotte's character from the real-life Thompson/Bywaters murder case heard at the Old Bailey in 1922. Young Edward Bywaters was accused of murdering Edith Thompson's husband, the Crown alleging that Bywaters and Mrs Thompson had been lovers. What quickly made the press take more than its customary interest in the case was the appearance and demeanour of Mrs Thompson in court. Although she had led the outward life of a suburban housewife, her courtroom manner was that of the theatrical star. What is more, she carried off her performance superbly. Everyone in court who saw her, from the reporters to the barristers, felt a special atmosphere like that of a play or opera, and noted Mrs Thompson's remarkable propensity to switch from one role to another depending on who she was addressing.[3] When in Stage Fright Eve first encounters Charlotte, who is trying on a mourning-veil as people come and go in her room, the screenplay emphasises how "Charlotte plays many parts, and switches from one to another according to the person she's speaking with". Not surprisingly, it's one of the film's best scenes.

For years after the Thompson/Bywaters case, books and plays inspired by it kept being published. Among them, almost certainly, should be included the 1948 novel, 'Man Running', by screenwriter-turned-novelist, Selwyn Jepson. (The novel twice alludes to the trial.) Hitchcock bought the film rights to the novel and proceeded to turn it into Stage Fright.

Naturally he followed his usual procedure: taking from the book just what he needed, intensifying or adding to that, and discarding the rest. In the case of Stage Fright he gave the film its theatrical bias. Although the novel's Charlotte is a celebrated actress - with a portrait of herself "at a thousand guineas the square foot" hanging in her library to prove it - Eve is not a drama student. She is simply a well-off young lady who lives in an isolated Suffolk farmhouse with her invalid father. In almost total contrast to the book, the film is shot through with both overt and covert references to the theatre.

Something else that is largely of the film's making is the implicit Eve-Charlotte rivalry. Its most obvious aspect is that both women fancy the same young man, Jonathan, who has been Charlotte's lover (as Bywaters had been Edith Thompson's). We may also recognise youthful ambition imputing to the older person knowledge of the life and wisdom it so zealously seeks. Which is the All About Eve syndrome: a tiro actress understudying the worldly star, secretly hoping to supplant her some day. While there's no question of Hitchcock's having yet seen Joseph Mankiewicz's film, which in 1949 was even then being made, it's possible that he had read the original short story, 'The Wisdom of Eve', which appeared in 'Cosmopolitan'' for May, 1946.

Again, there's the subtle snobbery of Eve, a student at R.A.D.A., pitting herself against Charlotte, the music hall star. The legitimate theatre versus vaudeville. This piquant aspect of Eve and Charlotte's rivalry shades into one more aspect, the characteristic Hitchcockian opposition of city and country. Eve commutes to London by sports car from a modest dwelling on the Essex Flats near the Thames Estuary. Charlotte lives in her plush mansion in Mayfair. The suggestion of class distinction is both suitably 'English' and in line with how in film after film Hitchcock's villains have 'arrived'; often the latter show considerably more taste and aplomb than the brash or callow heroine or hero who would oppose them.

* * *

Eve and Charlotte are not the only characters whose actions are 'theatrical', whether performed on or off the stage. Throughout the film, life and theatre reflect each other. Consider the emphases I've given the following description of some key scenes.

Charlotte's principal maid, Nellie Goode, is the person who sees Jonathan fleeing the scene of the murder; soon she is regaling her pub-mates with boasts of how she'll "be a star witness at the trial". And when Eve takes Nellie's place, she immediately disobeys directions from Groves, the butler, oversteps her mark, and goes to Charlotte's room unannounced; Groves comes after her and in a stage whisper - for the benefit of the film audience - angrily tells her, "I thought I told you to wait downstairs".

Next follows the scene where Charlotte tries on mourning-clothes (i.e. one more costume). On Eve's introducing herself as "Doris Tinsdale", she receives the reprimand, "Not so loud, dear", as if she were back at the Academy, rehearsing. However, Charlotte quickly finds her a part, telling her to be ready to introduce the doctor when Charlotte gives her a cue by coughing. During this scene Charlotte keeps forgetting her new maid's name - despite some prompting from Eve. And when, as bidden, Eve goes into the next room to await the arrival of the doctor, the ensuing action is photographed as if from the wings of a theatre. There, Eve hovers as if she were suffering from the titular stage fright, for she fears being recognised by Detective Smith who is interviewing Charlotte after having earlier met the real Eve in the pub.

The film is full of this sort of thing. Instances of it, some more blatant than others, illustrate what one critic has called the film's "duplicitous text" - lies within lies, a whirlpool of unfathomed appearances. At another level, the theatrics simply refer to the idea that the world's a stage and we are part of the melodrama enacted on it.

I use the word 'melodrama' advisedly. That honourable theatrical form is evoked on several occasions, not least by the use of music and musical interludes. Commodore Gill has an expressive way with a piano-accordion, as when he plays 'Hearts and Flowers' for an early scene between Eve and Jonathan. Later, Detective Smith gives a soothing rendition of a Chopin Ballade on the piano. Charlotte's stage numbers include 'The Laziest Gal in Town' - which looks like a comment on the casting-couch syndrome.

Then, too, apposite to everything we've been considering, there's the film's Theatrical Garden Party ...

(c) The Theatrical Garden Party

This is where the film brings together all its main characters - with a significant exception - plus some notable 'bit' players (Joyce Grenfell, young Patricia Hitchcock), and pertinently defines the 'Englishness'

that has been another part of its design. Crucial to the concept is the rain. It's not improbable that Hitchcock thought of the latter after remembering the popular Ealing production, It Always Rains on Sunday, which his friend Angus MacPhail had helped script two years before. At any rate, I would question actress Jane Wyman's recent claim that the film makers merely took advantage of some passing showers on the day of shooting.[4] The studio screenplay fully treats the rain idea and, moreover, shows no sign of last-minute revisions - although such revisions occur on several other pages.

The rain makes everyone 'bear up'. Seen in conjunction with the fact that the occasion is a war orphans' benefit (which the theatrical profession is organising and sponsoring), it carries a strong reminder of the recent past. Another reminder of that past, and of the London blitz in particular, opened the film: as the safety curtain slowly rose, it disclosed St Paul's Cathedral standing defiantly amidst a wasteland of rubble.

Into this context, then, Joyce Grenfell's memorable cameo ("Lovely ducks") fits perfectly. I shan't spell out the implications of it. It's sufficient to note that with her uniquely cheery grin and undismayed headmistress's voice, Grenfell is a perfect foil for that other, more phlegmatic, English eccentric, Alastair Sim - who is soon literally spilling his own blood for the common cause.

The ruse of the bloodstained doll is a device for catching out Charlotte Inwood's conscience, and is Stage Fright's most theatrical gesture of all - straight from 'Hamlet'. Of course, like most ideas of the characters in the film, it doesn't work out as intended. Even the Commodore must proceed by trial and error, rehearsal and performance. Yet his ruse does have significant results.

For the garden party is also where Charlotte finally breaks down in public. As her charity performance nears its climax, she finds herself confronted by a calculated reminder of her late husband's murder. I suspect that her shock comes as much from the gesture's callousness as from her enforced confrontation with her own fear and guilt. (Nor would I put it past Hitchcock that he was consciously playing on the irony of the 'charity' involved.) But neither the Commodore nor Eve, nor for that matter the film audience, notices anything of this at the time. Instead a more paranoid logic is at work. In a scene where everyone else down to a diminutive cub-scout with an umbrella is being so resourceful and plucky, Charlotte becomes the German woman who lets 'our' side down.

By the same logic, the absence of Jonathan from the scene acquires significance of its own. In the novel, he mentions how "I had a difficult war ... rather more mental as well as physical strain ... than some chaps had to take". The screenplay follows this up: "His handsome face seems immature ... and a trifle weak". Hence excluding him from the garden party leaves him in the 'un-tried' (i.e. non-performing) category, and sets him apart. With just the theatre climax to follow, we've already taken sides, whether we know it or not.

I've said little of the garden party's swirling, ebullient feel which anticipates the more raucous fairground of Strangers on a Train. Nor about how it works to consolidate Eve's new-found feelings towards Detective Smith. But those things are also deftly managed. Altogether, the garden party is one of Hitchcock's finest set-pieces to that time.

(d) Signs of life

Stage Fright contains elements that link it to such earlier Hitchcock movies as Young and Innocent (similar stop-at-nothing heroines) and The Paradine Case (similar inscrutable 'villainesses'). But as I've indicated, it also anticipates Hitchcock films to come, and in this respect once again several ingredients stand out.

I began by invoking philosopher Gilbert Ryle's concept of the unity of mind and body. An identical concept had been held by Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860), who concluded that self-knowledge comes from seeing what we do. Experience is all. Which is a basic enough tenet of Stage Fright. But when, in addition, you take Ryle's insistence that in theory all mental events are witnessable, you have a credo for film makers which is distinctly Hitchcockian. Again and again, Hitchcock said that he must fill the tapestry, charge the screen with emotion. As much as anything else, this meant winkling out inner states for our inspection.

Hitchcockian-type acting emphasises body language no less than 'verbal' performance. It isn't opposed to the theatrical type of acting, but is merely a more nuanced form of it, taking full advantage of editing and camera techniques. And as good stage actors and producers know, such acting succeeds best when the on-stage energy level is greatest. Put simply, the more life, the more communication. Or, with Gilbert Ryle in mind: the more signs of life, the more communication of mental events.

Now, a summit of Hitchcockian-type acting is surely Cary Grant's serio-comic performance as ad-man Roger Thornhill in North by Northwest (1959). Physical, supple, and witty, it constantly takes you by surprise. Here I always think of Grant's knee-jerk towards the door when he learns enemy spies are on their way up from the hotel lobby. His body/mind outruns by several micro-seconds his verbal response (a minimalist "They are?"). It's only fitting that he soon says, "I never felt more alive".

A related point concerns how North by Northwest, whatever its expensive, if intermittent, outdoors look, is really one of Hitchcock's most theatrical entertainments.[5] Overall, it's like a musical or a fairy tale. Particularly relevant to Stage Fright is how its characters lead charmed lives, and mentally inhabit a world that exists at least one remove from everyday reality. (For instance, a running gag is that Grant keeps getting away with breaking one law or ordinance after another.) So much so, that the chief spy (James Mason) ends up complaining to the police, "That wasn't very sporting of you, using real bullets." Immediately one thinks of the fatal 'safety' curtain in Stage Fright

* * *

Eve Gill also leads a charmed life. If her father occasionally indulges a fondness for small-scale smuggling, she spends much of the film engaged in false pretences or worse. (In the novel, someone goes so far as to tell her, "You've broken every law in the criminal calendar, as far as I can see.") So its appropriate that she finally confronts the now demented villain in a fairy-tale carriage in a theatre props bay. And must step back out of the carriage - a fateful moment which Hitchcock emphasises with pixillated slow-motion - if she is to return to the unglamorous 'real' world.

Now we can sum up. With its constant theatrics, Stage Fright predates the use of a similar formula in North by Northwest by a decade. In the later film the theatrics are referred to as "games", as when Mason again complains, "Games? Must we?" And the formula for both films runs something like this: laws = symbols of inhibition; theatrics/games = overcoming inhibitions; the hero/heroine's actions = self-growth within a protective fantasy (such as Eve's conviction that all the world's a stage for her to act on); the finale = return to reality (and probably the inhibitions: self-knowledge doesn't mean licence).

(e) Riddles

Some final thoughts. If in Stage Fright Charlotte and Jonathan are in some measure Edith Thompson and Edward Bywaters of the real-life murder case, the film follows post-trial thinking that Mrs Thompson may not have been fairly dealt with by the judge. (The novel takes a different slant again, for there the murderer is neither Charlotte nor Jonathan but Charlotte's manager, the depraved Freddie Williams.)

In keeping, too, with Hitchcock's customary even-handed view of guilt, not to mention of what generally passes as reality, he allows both Charlotte and Jonathan their respective curtain speeches. Jonathan's speech is rattled, Charlotte's the more deeply considered, but both contain a measure of explanation that gives the lie to our earlier paranoid feelings. In what is almost a throwaway line, we even learn that the late Mr Inwood was himself far from blameless. "He was an abominable man", Charlotte muses. Then she adds, a last, unfathomable note: "Why do women marry abominable men?"

As for Eve, after her big adventure what has she really learnt? The film's last shot, of Eve and Smith walking away from us down a backstage corridor, suggests that for the time being she has found her place. But the image isn't wholly innocent. Pools of light suggest footlights. Turn to the screenplay, and a scene not used in the actual film, and there we find that Eve could hardly wait to go back to R.A.D.A. and spout stagy lines like, "There is nothing left but happiness ... For us alone." Watching from the wings, fiancé Smith feels (we are told) "some lack of appreciation for these sentiments".

Wasn't it Schopenhauer who said that a person's character never changes?

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Notes

1. Compare: "Ryle ... held that ... all references to the mental must be understood in terms of, at least theoretically, witnessable activities." (Columbia Encyclopedia)

2. Compare: "[Ryle's] thesis allows the existence of inner processes but minimizes their importance." (A.J. Ayer, 'Philosophy in the Twentieth Century')

3. Author Max Pemberton, whose book, 'Stranger Than Fiction', was published in 1947, writes there of Edith Thompson: "Those who saw her at the Central Criminal Court - of whom I was one - perceived in her such frequent and amazing changes of mood and manner that we imagined the whole story of her life could be read in them."

4. The claim is made in the film, Hitchcock: The Thrill of Genius, shown at the Melbourne Film Festival in 1987.

5. Theatrical? Outdoors? Well, for a start, think of the crop-dusting scene as something scripted by Samuel Beckett ('Waiting for Godot', etc.)!

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ODD SPOT: MULTIPLE VERTIGO

Most Hitchcock followers know that his dizzying 1958 film, Vertigo, starring James Stewart and Kim Novak, was 're-made' as Obsession by Brian De Palma in 1976.

For his leads, De Palma cast two adequate performers, Cliff Robertson and Genevieve Bujold. The Italian city of Florence substituted nicely for San Francisco. Vertigo composer Bernard Herrmann wrote a new score but, like De Palma's film itself, it proved to be bombastic where the original had been subtle and plangent.

Even so, the 1976 film was more exciting than a second re-make: an unauthorised 'copy' shown on Australian television in the early 80s. Called The Illusion, this was an Egyptian feature which went so far as to imitate Hitchcock's cartooned dream-sequence. The principal city had become Alexandria, and a lighthouse stood in for the bell tower.

It was a tawdry imitation, though.

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