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The MacGuffin

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EDITORIAL

MY DEEP THANKS TO Sidney Gottlieb for the interview - conducted by email - which he so kindly consented to give us for this issue. Professor Gottlieb's splendid collection of Hitchcock's published articles and interviews, 'Hitchcock on Hitchcock', will appear in paperback this (northern) Fall. Besides the interview, we print here a review of the book itself.

It seems appropriate, continuing incidentally what is becoming a regular feature, that we also include here a little-known early piece about Hitchcock: himself and his films, this time a piece which first appeared in 1936. Prominent British film journalist of her day, Caroline Lejeune, interviews Hitch - and reveals that he was an expert 'forger' of other people's signatures!

The Hitchcock film to receive special analysis in this issue is one of the director's personal favourites, *Rich and Strange* (1932). I comment in our article on a touching shipboard scene between Emily (Joan Barry) and Commander Gordon (Percy Marmont) in which she first calls him 'Gordon'. She explains that 'the "Mister" got lost out here', and he responds by saying, 'Yes, I'm glad.' But I haven't been able to work out what he says next, and am hoping that someone can enlighten me. I'll try to make it worth your while!

Incidentally, as a glance at our 'Bloopers' section in this issue will show, my ears have played tricks with me at least a couple of times lately. I apologise for that!

Here's special thanks to Evan Williams for his two contributions this issue. Evan is one of three top Australian film critics (*the* three top Australian film critics?) who have each sent us their personal 'best films of 1996' list for our annual feature. Evan, in addition, has written for us a fascinating short review of the recent documentary about Leon Theremin, the inventor of the electronic musical instrument that bears his name and which is heard so memorably in Hitchcock's *Spellbound* (1945).

'Oz-Report' this time is written by Freda Freiberg, a Melbourne authority on film and still-photography and their associated cultural issues. Freda is not as enraptured by the Australian film *Shine* (d. Scott Hicks) as some local and overseas critics seem to have been ...

My very warm thanks, too, to the 'letter-writers' whose work (some of it in fact received by email) is included this time. In addition, I would single out for thanks such people as Leslie Shepard, Dan Auiler, Lary Kuhns, and Philip Kemp, for information they provided and which is drawn on here.

Finally, here's an interesting thing. Author and screenwriter Talmage Powell tells us that the title of his original short story which he adapted for 'Alfred Hitchcock Presents' into the episode called "No Pain", starring Brian Keith, was something quite different - 'Pigeon in an Iron Lung'. The episode-title, it appears, was provided by either the series' producer, Joan Harrison, or the episode's director, Norman Lloyd. What's interesting about that is the fact that in this case the phrase 'no pain' was almost certainly drawn from the famous poem by John Keats, 'Ode to a Nightingale' - which previous issues of 'The MacGuffin' have remarked to be an influence on both the title of an early draft of *Vertigo* ('Listen Darkling') and the climax Hitchcock intended for *Suspicion* (cf. Keats's 'To cease upon the midnight with no pain'). So definitely, I'd say, a Keats influence was 'in the air' around the Hitchcock camp ...

To everyone, good viewing.

P.S. This 'MacGuffin' includes a table of contents for issues 17-20.

NEWS

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

Complete retrospective of Hitchcock's TV work

Some rare items will screen at the Museum of Television & Radio in Beverly Hills during its season called "Murder in the Living Room: Hitchcock by Hitchcock", to run from June 13 to September 28.

For almost the first time in 37 years, 'Incident at a Corner' is being shown. Made in colour by Hitchcock for 'Ford Startime' in 1960, this 50-minute program stars Vera Miles and George Peppard. Miles, following her performance the same year in *Psycho*, here plays the daughter of a man falsely accused of a crime involving some schoolgirls.

The MTR's program notes mention Miles's earlier falling out with Hitchcock after she became pregnant and turned down the female lead in *Vertigo*. Hitchcock had first seen her in black and white on television, in a potboiler called 'The House Where Time Stopped' - which opens the MTR season. Some of his original fascination with Miles seems reflected in the character eventually played in *Vertigo* by Kim Novak. As the MTR program notes imply, the character's grey suit - which Hitchcock insisted on - hints at the director's first vision of Miles in black and white.

Closing this season of all the nearly 20 shows Hitchcock directed for television will be the 50-minute episode of 'Alcoa Premiere' called 'The Jail', for which Hitchcock was actually just executive producer (the director was Norman Lloyd). But it was a notable episode - harrowing sci-fi script by Ray Bradbury, John Gavin as star - and apart from Hitchcock's own series which continued for another three years, this 1962 television program would be the last to which he would put his name.

- Our California readers wanting more details of the season can phone the MTR on (310) 786-1000.

'Restored' *Vertigo* now available on video and laserdisc

A feature of the laserdisc of *Vertigo* is the inclusion on it of the so-called Foreign Censorship Ending, reporting the arrest of Gavin Elster. That description seems to be something of a misnomer, though, because the scene, part of the Samuel Taylor script almost from the beginning, was written and filmed in response to *American* censorship requests.

The laserdisc has an excellent commentary, on its second audio channel, by the film's associate producer Herbert Coleman. The printed notes included with the laserdisc are also informative. Something we appreciated was the description of Madeleine (Kim Novak) as 'a modern "Bridey Murphy"', thus perhaps invoking the British film *The Search for Bridey Murphy* (Noel Langley, 1956) which had recently helped fuel popular discussion around the world (including in Australia) about reincarnation ...

The lesson of Oscar

Actor-author Simon Callow, who has written splendid biographies of Charles Laughton and Orson Welles, recently opened at the Savoy Theatre, London, in his one-man show 'The Importance of Being Oscar' (originally a vehicle for Michael MacLiammoir). At least two films about Oscar Wilde are coming soon, and this year marks the centenary of Wilde's release from jail after he was convicted on charges relating to his homosexuality.

According to Hitchcock-biographer Donald Spoto, Hitchcock read Wilde's novel 'The Picture of Dorian Gray' (1890) 'several times' as a young man. Not only do such Hitchcock films as *Saboteur* (1942) and *Under Capricorn* (1949) 'borrow' dialogue from Wilde, but Hitchcock's flair for self-publicity and showmanship likewise seem to show the flamboyant Irishman's influence. Consider this latest description of 'the divine Oscar' by Bryan Appleyard:

He treated his life and personality as a work of art, pursuing fame and publicity as no artist had done before. He championed the distinctly modern cause of the artist as outrageous game player and manipulator of expectations.

We might challenge that 'as no other artist had done before' bit - Charles Dickens was no slouch at self-promotion - but nonetheless happily rest our case ...

More on videos, CD-ROMs

'MacGuffin' reader Bruce Christopher recently reported via the <alt.movies.hitchcock> newsgroup on the Internet that Kino Video's release of *Jamaica Inn* (1939) represents 'a vast improvement over previously available video editions'. Mastered from a 35mm archive print, it runs four minutes longer than those other video versions. Price in the US is \$24.95 (as of February 1997). However, there's no word yet of a release on PAL (European)-format video.

Following our mention last time of the limited sales so far of 'The *Rebecca* Project' on CD-ROM, we note that this detailed study of Hitchcock's film, including feminist perspectives, has been picked up for distribution by the British Film Institute. It's still only compatible with Macintosh computers, though. Sales outlet in Australia is Peribo Books, 58 Beaumont Road, Mt Kuring-gai, NSW 2080.

For our Australian readers, too, we can recommend the quality of several early British Hitchcock films on video - titles include *Easy Virtue*, *The Ring*, *The Farmer's Wife*, *Rich and Strange* - available from Movie Boulevard, P.O. Box 1130, St Kilda South, Victoria 3182. Telephone (03) 9534 7911. The videos come from the Aikman Archive and sell for \$29.95, plus \$5 for postage and handling of your order.

For Mensans

The new movie *Contact* (d. Robert Zemeckis), based on the novel by Carl Sagan, has Jodie Foster playing a free-thinking radio astronomer - and Mensa member - who discovers an intelligent signal coming from deep space. Watch for Jodie's Mensa sweatshirt and keychain!

LETTERS

Vertigo

Ulrich Ruedel, Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA

I think Messrs Harris and Katz did a very good job of adding 'authentic' foleys to the restored *Vertigo*, with the exception of the details mentioned in 'MacGuffin' 21. (Incidentally, I wonder why people mention they're upset by those 'seagull' sound-effects yet no-one mentions the bird-song heard during the originally dialogue-only scenes at the mission and in Muir Woods. That, and the amplified and too-directional tram sound-effects when Scottie and Midge leave the book store were the most objectionable effects for me.)

The remix is wonderful, and it would be *completely* unobjectionable had they gotten those few differences right and/or included the original mono soundtrack on the laserdisc. (Yes, I know there wasn't any further track available, due to DTS on the one analog channel and the - excellent - audio commentary on the other.)

Also, the final scenes at the tower look okay now. Harris says that the material had deteriorated so much that it looked flat in the 70mm prints, but they increased the contrast electronically for the video transfer. And I don't doubt, as some critics did, that those scenes were indeed always intended to be that dark. Harris and Katz refer to both Hitch's notes and the original technicolour prints - and they have the assistant producer [Herbert Coleman] on the audio commentary to prove their point, too.

Basically, I admire the work Harris and Katz have done. The picture looks *marvellous*, the colours and textures are incredible, and the deterioration at the end is hardly noticeable anymore on the laserdisc. The soundtrack in general sounds much fuller and in parts more subtle than the original (or what was left of it).

[Editor's note. Excellent points, Ulrich. Nonetheless, in Melbourne, Australia, some of us are lucky enough to have access to an undeteriorated original IB Tech print of *Vertigo*, and we can only regret the 'corrupted text' that *Vertigo* has now become. Scholars are going to have to mentally 'undo' the changes for perhaps ever afterwards. A 1990s lift door-bell dubbed onto Hitchcock's 1950s film! I ask you! It's the equivalent of erasing a word in, say, an original Shakespeare manuscript - perhaps only because the word offends your personal sensibilities - and writing in a substitute term of your own choosing. Note that Hitchcock on the original soundtrack had just the sound of the lift door sliding open, a subliminal reminder of the down-market quality of the hotel in which Judy resides. To quote Steven L. DeRosa's point from last time: 'It is outrageous that such liberties were taken (by the restorers) with an Academy Award Nominated soundtrack.']

Steven L. DeRosa, Yonkers, New York, USA

I did notice another error on the track. During the scene when Madeleine drops the letter in Scottie's mailbox ... when she says 'Goodbye', Stewart's soft 'Goodbye' back to her is completely *gone* now. I double-checked my original disk, and it's sure there.

Jason Rasmussen, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, USA

I just saw the *Vertigo* restoration this weekend; I did notice the sound changes mentioned in 'MacGuffin' 21. One change that particularly bothered me was the omission of some of the street sounds in the scene where Scottie is standing on the stepladder ('I look up, I look down'). On my video copy of the old print, the sound of a car horn immediately before Scottie's fall seems to have 'triggered' his relapse into vertigo. Still, all in all, it was an incredible experience to see the film on the big screen.

Sander Lee, Keene, New Hampshire, USA

I had a great trip to San Francisco, thanks. I visited the Mission San Juan Bautista and it was wonderful. I met a Park Service guide who was there during filming and saw Hitch. She says he got furious when he discovered that the tower he remembered from an earlier trip was gone.

[Editor's note. The tower had burned down, I believe. Anyway, note this rare occasion on which Hitch *did* lose his temper! We mentioned another such occasion in 'MacGuffin' 1. Incidentally, Professor Lee was able to confirm for me something about *The Trouble With Harry* (1956): how location-shooting for that film was centred at Stowe in Vermont's Green Mountains.]

'MacGuffin' 21

Michael Moulds, Editor, International Federation of Film Archives, Brussels, Belgium

I have just finished reading the excellent essay on *The Trouble With Harry* in 'MacGuffin' 21. We would be very pleased to include 'The MacGuffin' in our indexing.

Susan Cole, Concord, California, USA

I greatly enjoyed your latest essay on *The Trouble With Harry*. I had never really thought of this film as having especially deep symbolism, but your essay made me see it in a whole new way. I agree with you wholeheartedly that it is a vastly underrated film and, I might even go so far as to suggest, it ranks with the golden age of romantic 'screwball' comedies. Too bad that many film historians and writers mainly associate it with Shirley MacLaine's film debut. It is a terrific film with universal themes that hold up quite well even when viewed in the context of our cynical turn-of-the-millennium times.

Steven L. DeRosa

Your quite informative and persuasive essay opened many avenues I hadn't fully considered before. But I'd like to concentrate mainly on what you say about 'art' and 'creativity'.

'Through creativity an artist like Klee or Hitchcock arrives at that secret place where he can embrace the life-force and contemplate all time and space.' I have some thoughts along those lines [in my forthcoming book] in looking at the links between *Rope* and *Harry* through the characters of Brandon and Sam.

The films are linked in their discussions of art - a central theme in both. Brandon expresses his desire for artistic talent and in his twisted view believes, 'The power to kill can be just as satisfying as the power to create.' Sam Marlowe, perhaps the most grounded character in Hitchcock's work, can only find satisfaction in his power to create.

Sam Marlowe remains the character least in need of change. From beginning to end, he is open and frank, and seemingly unconcerned by social conventions. This attitude, however, does not take form in feelings of superiority - as it does for Brandon - but rather in something Sam takes pleasure in sharing and spreading. He sings while walking through the countryside for all the world to hear and enjoy, makes over Miss Gravely, openly compliments Jennifer, inspires bravery in Captain Wiles, is unconcerned with an art critic's opinion of his paintings when a millionaire wishes to buy them, and even in the selling of his work he profits not monetarily, but by bartering to obtain gifts for his friends. (I just realised too how both Sam and Brandon act in some way as a matchmaker - although Brandon's intentions in bringing Kenneth and Janet back together are not so innocent.)

Re Calvin Wiggs's lack of 'understanding': it's interesting that he's another representative of the law whose confusion and ineptitude Hitchcock reveals through an inability to comprehend or appreciate art, as had been the case in *Suspicion* (Benson) and *Rear Window* (Doyle). (I'm wondering if Frank's double-take at the laughing-jester painting in *Blackmail* could be included here?)

[Editor's note. Thanks for sharing these fine observations, Steven. They reminded me in turn of *Vertigo*, where Scottie is 'not quite an artist'. And, yes, I'd say that there's a definite theme of 'art' in *Blackmail*, though again *nobody* there seems up to its challenge ... By contrast, speaking of Paul Klee's notion of 'a secret place' where 'all time and space' are knowable, I've lately realised that surrealist André Breton had a similar idea to Klee's: to find the point in the mind where all oppositions cease to be perceived as contradictions.]

Finally, about our Web Page

Jeff Skinner, USA

Thank you for your page. It is one of the best sites on the WWW.

OZ-REPORT Multicultural Melodramas Down Under

THE EXODUS of Hong Kong film talent, prior to the colony's incorporation into the PRC, has benefited the Australian film industry. Jackie Chan has been shooting his stunt films here and Clara Law has made the first Australian film centring on an expatriate Hong Kong family. Co-scripted by her husband, Eddie Fong, and exquisitely photographed by Dion Beebe, Law's *Floating Life* is a three-generation family melodrama, interspersed with comedy, which was shot in Munich, Melbourne and Hong Kong. The performances vary in professional standard and style, and some of the points (about the costs of migration) are too heavily underlined by dialogue, but the different ambiances of the three locations are beautifully evoked; and the delicate handling of the dénouement movingly conveys the pathos of the Chinese diasporic experience.

As shown in her earlier *Autumn Moon*, Law can use the urban landscape very poignantly to convey unarticulated feelings of loss and dislocation. (One is reminded of Antonioni, who is acknowledged as a seminal influence on the Taiwanese art cinema. Though made in Hong Kong, *Autumn Moon* is closer to the art cinema of Taiwan than the genre cinema of Hong Kong.) In *Floating Life*, the wide and grassy deserted streets of outer suburban Australia are invested with a cold lunar luminosity and strangeness through the use of bleached lighting and pastel colours, in marked contrast to the bright garish colour of the Hong Kong scenes and the darkness of Munich.

Some aberrative aspects of *Floating Life* - the shrill voice of the Australian sister and the grotesque comedy of the Hong Kong-based brother's escapades - evince the stridency and bad taste of our so-called 'Ocker grotesque' family satires, the most recent example of which is *A Fistful of Flies*. A first feature by Italo-Australian Monica Pellizarro, this is a savage account of the trials and tribulations suffered by the rebellious daughter of a conventional Italian Catholic family in an Australian country town. The film has been panned by local critics for being joyless and self-hating. Certainly, its targets - sexually repressed mamma, patriarchal papa with double standards, prurient and prying neighbours, kitsch Catholicism - have become clichés; and its message - the need for sexual and gender liberation - smacks of the 60s. But other filmmakers who repeat old formulas and convey trite messages are treated more generously.

Shine, another Australian film with an anachronistic liberatory message, has achieved acclamation. A family melodrama, and bio-pic, it is based on the trials and tribulations of David Helfgott, a young Perth pianist who, after early promise, suffered a psychological breakdown and who, after long incarceration and slow rehabilitation, returned to the concert stage to receive international acclaim. Like 'One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest' and other 60s literature, it preaches the curative

powers of love and freedom, which can undo the damage wrought by nuclear family and mental institution. Like the anti-psychiatry movement of R.D. Laing, it proposes that mental illness is a misnomer; it really should be termed creative and charming eccentricity. Certainly Geoffrey Rush's performance as the adult Helfgott, unlike those of the younger actors, is both creative and charming, thoroughly deserving of his Oscar for Best Actor. And German actor, Armin Mueller-Stahl, provides depth and weight to the role of the troubled and dictatorial father - even if his steely-blue eyes, German accent and prior type-casting as a Nazi can seem jarringly inappropriate to his role here as an emigré eastern-European Jewish father.

In this family melodrama it is a Jewish family that is oppressive - papa a brutal patriarch and control-freak; mamma a weak, docile shadow - and liberation comes in the form of a new-age astrologist, a warm maternal lover, the good mother triumphing over the bad father for control of the soul of the suffering son. In the crucifixes over the Jewish cemetery in the film's final soaring shot, there are hints of Christian redemption from the severity of an Old Testament patriarchy. A stirring musical sound track, full of Sturm und Drang, provides strong emotional support - although the hammy histrionics of Noah Taylor playing young Helfgott racked by Rachmaninov is over the top! Clearly the film, along with its accompanying books and records, has helped to make Helfgott's resurrected concert career successful with audiences seeking melodramatic performance and voyeuristic entertainment rather than the classical restraint of the concert platform.

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Coming Attractions

The sources of *Rear Window*; book reviews, incl. Charles Silet on 'Soul in Suspense'; etc. Extra items always wanted.

Interview with Sidney Gottlieb, editor of 'Hitchcock on Hitchcock'

[Sidney Gottlieb, who teaches English at the Sacred Heart University in Fairfield, Connecticut, was interviewed via email by the editor of 'The MacGuffin', Ken Mogg, earlier this year. Professor Gottlieb's book 'Welles on Welles' awaits publication, pending final clearance by the Orson Welles Estate. A book review of 'Hitchcock on Hitchcock' immediately follows this interview.]

Q. May I start by asking you something about yourself? On the Acknowledgments page (page viii) of 'Hitchcock on Hitchcock', you talk briefly about your own early experience of movies. You tell us that you once worked at the Strand Theatre and the Whitney. Do you have any memories from that time, such as of particular films you saw, that bear on Hitchcock and your subsequent appreciation of his work?

A. Those theatres in my hometown - Hamden, Connecticut, USA, the world, the universe, as Joyce might say! - were two of my favourite hangouts. I saw films indiscriminately (maybe the best way to at least begin watching movies!) and fell in love with the whole movie environment and experience more than any particular films. I suspect that that's what made me ripe for Hitchcock, as well as the many other filmmakers I enjoy. I don't have any particular recollection of films that bear on Hitchcock. I do remember that even though I especially liked classic horror films and monster movies, I purposely avoided seeing *Psycho* when it first came out. (I didn't see it until many years later.) I don't remember seeing any Hitchcock film at the time of its initial release. And I think that the first Hitchcock film I ever saw was *North by Northwest*, still one of my favourites.

Q. It's almost a compendium of Hitchcock's work, isn't it? Speaking of that work, someone once asked Hitchcock what was the deepest logic of his films. What would you say is the deepest logic of your book?

A. I'm wondering what Hitchcock's response to that question was.¹ Perhaps I should have included it as the introduction to the book! As to the book's logic: I think that basically I'm a believer in what might be called the 'Figures in the Carpet' school of thought. Artists are always revealing (even when they are attempting to hide) themselves in their work and also in their comments, writings, actions, etc. (One of the premises of 'H on H' is that we should trust the teller as well as the tale!) We glimpse their diversity and complexity by studying all of this, and we also get a sense of certain recurrent ideas, images, themes, habits, fixations, and so on. I was hoping that a collection of Hitchcock's writings might complement his films, which are already generally available, and simultaneously broaden as well as concentrate our knowledge of him. I think that anyone who has spent any time studying Hitchcock can pretty quickly come up with a list summarising what constitutes 'the Hitchcock touch'. I do this for my classes whenever I teach a Hitchcock film, and I'm tempted to call it 'the Hitchcock package' or 'the Hitchcock caricature'. It's a useful exercise, and perhaps a necessary starting point, drawing this 'figure' with a few strokes, as Hitchcock himself was fond of doing. But the more you get into Hitchcock's films and his writings, the more you see other 'figures' emerge in his carpet.

Q. And, as you say, that was what you aimed to show us. A plurality of Hitchcock 'figures'. But I've a couple of questions about that, based in part on my reading of 'H on H'. First, I see Hitchcock as a past-master of tailoring what he says to a particular audience or interlocutor.

A. Yes, but to a certain extent aren't we all? Well, maybe we're not all masters of this art, but doesn't every communication-act typically involve knowing your audience, sizing up the expectations, framing your comments to take into account the context, etc.? I don't believe you're attacking Hitchcock, but in any event let me spring to his defence, in part because I think he is unduly criticised by some people for being manipulative, calculating, rhetorical, repetitive, and insincere: not only in his public appearances and interviews but in his films as well. My argument is not that he isn't all these things, but that they need to be understood more comprehensively (and sympathetically, if possible) and appreciated as creative skills, not just defence mechanisms or limitations of character.

Q. That brings me to my other question about the plurality of 'Hitchcocks' (both in and out of the films themselves). To me, whatever the many choices Hitchcock made affecting his filmmaking and/or his public image, those choices were still seen by him as ultimately aesthetic ones, i.e., the films remained his first concern. (That's why I'm glad when, on p. xxiii, you chide your colleague Professor Kapsis whose book 'Hitchcock: The Making of a Reputation' tends to treat all of Hitchcock's public utterances as basically publicity material.)

A. To me, many of the most interesting writings in 'H on H' show how Hitchcock struggled to forge a kind of *practical* aesthetics of filmmaking. He is very candid about what he could not do in his films: he couldn't focus on certain subjects because of censorship or lack of financial backing; he couldn't make some kinds of films because of technological limitations; he couldn't completely abandon some aspects of the conventional 'contract' between filmmaker and audience if

he wanted to continue to attract an audience; and so on. And yet at the same time he was an adventurous, audacious, and innovative filmmaker, pushing as well as in some ways following his audience, shrewdly adapting to and gradually influencing a production system to allow him to make the kind of films he wanted to make (although always within certain parameters). Yes, the films were what mattered most to him, but Hitchcock knew early on that the aesthetic of filmmaking - at least in a capital-intensive, commercial, audience-oriented environment - could not, for him, be 'pure'. Inevitably for Hitchcock, creativity was compromise, a negotiation of the desirable with the possible, and that is one of the dramas visible in 'H on H'.

Q. Couldn't we be still more positive about this? You rightly say that for Hitchcock creativity was compromise, yet didn't it work the other way, too? Wasn't commercial compromise for him a creative challenge, very much as a *technical* challenge (e.g., filming on one set) clearly stimulated the creative artist in him?

A. Maybe this says more about me than Hitchcock, but I don't think of 'compromise' as something negative, as though it always involves a betrayal of one's principles. I think of it more broadly as a complicated process of adjustment necessary to make something real, to make something happen, to give something tangible form. I agree very much with you that Hitchcock was fascinated and mobilised by commercial as well as technical challenges. And many of these 'challenges' were what we might call claustrophobic ones, with difficulties associated with pressures and limits. Didn't he want to make a film in a phone booth? I don't think of Hitchcock as a Faustian director like Welles, for whom the figure of the overreacher was central. Even though Hitchcock often spoke of wanting a clear horizon, and of wanting increased creative freedom and technical power, I think much of his energy comes from pushing against the walls around him. And one comes to love those walls! I'm not sure that Hitchcock would have known what to do with 'absolute freedom' or an unlimited budget.

Q. I'd want to suggest that Hitchcock belongs to the great line of artist-entertainers in English literature, from Chaucer through Shakespeare and Dickens, who were all to a large extent men-of-the-people who plainly enjoyed keeping the common touch in their art and indeed felt empowered by it.

A. Yes, the term 'popular artist' is not necessarily a contradiction. But Hitchcock was well aware of the strains involved, especially because being 'popular' - commercially successful as well as pleasing to a mass audience - often seems to pull one in a different direction from being an 'artist' - using one's art as a mode of self-expression, and aiming for the attention and approval of critics whose values, interests, and expectations are typically quite different from those of a mass audience. Hitchcock surely kept the 'common touch', and cared about pleasing the kind of people he envisioned gathering around the refrigerator to talk about a film they had just seen. But he teased, challenged, disturbed, manipulated, mystified, and certainly satirised this audience as well. All this is part of his common touch - and his artistry.

Q. If never exactly 'common' himself, as a person, Hitchcock could sometimes be exceedingly playful, even too-indulgently so! In a 1936 article carrying his name, printed in 'H on H', he says (p. 20) that he found Peter Lorre's sending him a whole crate of canaries at his flat 'one of the classic leg-pulls of British filmland'. (I've heard that Hitchcock later denied it had happened, and I hope that's true!) Only in the Britain of the time would that appear remotely clever or funny, surely! To the rest of us, it may seem to represent the height of inanity. Anyway, here's my point. There seem to be other instances in the book where the director gives himself away, all unawares. Most notably, perhaps, there's the moment (p. 51) when he informs readers that he proposed to Alma when she was seasick, and he seems not to see anything ungallant or unseemly about that. Elsewhere in the book (pp. 70-71), you describe Hitchcock's attitude in published statements about teenage actress Nova Pilbeam as 'both remarkably candid and telling'. Do you think that Hitchcock (like most of us) had a 'blind-spot'? Is editing a book like 'H on H' sometimes an exercise in, well, tact?

A. I really didn't have to face what must often be a painful dilemma for a biographer or an editor of letters, diaries, journals, or other such material. The material I had to work with was, in a way, pre-selected. It had all been published or publicly presented before, and bears the signs of Hitchcock's 'supervision', for lack of a better term. I think much of this material is new - insofar that it hasn't been easily available for modern readers - and interesting, but I never ran across anything that was particularly 'juicy'. So I'm not sure that I had to exercise any unusual amount of tact. And I never had to face any difficult decisions about whether or not to include something, for fear it might let out any dark secrets, or any such thing. Still, I think many of the pieces are indeed 'telling', and they perhaps reveal some things that Hitchcock was not aware that he was revealing about himself. Much of this comes from our interpretations, right or wrong, warranted or unwarranted, of what he tells us. He may very well have expected us to be charmed by his tales of practical jokes, both perpetrated and suffered. Our response, our interpretation of these anecdotes, may be somewhat different. He assembled and presented himself in certain ways in these writings. We may take these materials and reassemble him.

Q. Yes, it's a subjective matter, all right. Now I'd like to defend Hitchcock, a little, against a charge you bring in the book. You say (pp. 69-70) that he doesn't so much 'deny as rationalise' the accusation that he is a misogynist. But surely he had a point about the way women in British society in the 1930s were expected to present themselves? In turn, couldn't he be seen as a potential liberator of those women from their stuffy, society-imposed image? Hitchcock himself defiantly defends his position (pp. 79-81) inasmuch as he says of British film actresses that it is always their desire to appear a lady that makes them 'become cold and lifeless' (p. 80). Mightn't feminists applaud that insight, so unorthodox for its time?

A. When Groucho Marx makes fun of Margaret Dumont, is it because she's a woman or because she's a stuffy aristocrat? I suspect both! It's hard to disentangle the assaults on gender and class in *Duck Soup* - and in *The 39 Steps* as well. I agree with your insistence that what is often somewhat superficially taken as a sign of Hitchcock's misogyny may in fact be something quite different, or in the very least may involve something more complex and far-reaching. I think a strong case can be made that a recurrent action in Hitchcock's films (especially of the 1930s and '40s) is that the 'lady' vanishes as the 'woman' emerges, and frequently this process involves comic discomfort, humiliations, insults, and the mutual education and transformation of a young man and a woman: all qualities that we are familiar with from Shakespearean and screwball comedies. But I'd not dare to fit this rubric to *Shadow of a Doubt*, *Strangers on a Train*, *Psycho*, *Vertigo*, *Frenzy*, or various other Hitchcock films. Critics like Tania Modleski and Robin Wood very persuasively argue that Hitchcock's films should neither be reduced to nor released from charges of misogyny.

Q. Granted some lapses on his part, Hitchcock nonetheless could be *very* objective about the human condition. I find one of the key passages in 'H on H' to be his revelation about the importance to him of Poe and his stories, and why. Hitchcock speaks of 'an extraordinary happiness of sitting in an armchair reading such tales' (p. 143). By the same token, he notes how he responded deeply to the *unhappiness* in Poe's own life. Then, finally, he disavows any real resemblance between himself and the American writer - which understandably you suggest (pp. 104-05) shows him being disingenuous, though I'm not so sure about that, precisely because Poe had no sense of humour. (For the mix of the macabre/grotesque *and* humour in Hitchcock's own work, perhaps the best comparison might be with the works of such British authors as Dickens, Collins, Buchan, and 'Sapper'.) Would you care to comment, and to nominate some other key passages concerning Hitchcock in your book?

A. When I suggested that Hitchcock was being perhaps a bit disingenuous, I didn't mean to deny that he was, in fact, drawing some very precise and shrewd distinctions between his work and Poe's. There may well be a kind of therapeutic function of not only humour but of Hitchcock's constant sense of his connection with an audience. (And, by the way, to that list of British authors you mention let's add Chesterton!) Now, concerning key passages: in my brief section-introductions in the book I tried to call attention to what I felt were some of the most interesting anecdotes, lesser-known bits of information, self-analyses, and intriguing (and perhaps not always intentional) self-revelations. I don't want to merely repeat those comments. Nor do I want to trivialise your question by simply listing some of my 'favourite' pieces in the volume (although I am tempted to do just that because I do have some real favourites!). But let me say that I especially like Hitchcock's many comments on the kind of films he thinks he is making, the kind of films he would like to make, and his not always entirely patient assessment of the recalcitrant material he is always dealing with: censors, producers, budgets, audiences, actors, genre conventions and expectations, etc. And when I talk about Hitchcock with my students, I try to get them to consider very carefully Hitchcock's statements in such pieces as "Women are a Nuisance", "What I'd Do to the Stars", "The Enjoyment of Fear", "Why Thrillers Thrive", "Core of the Movie - The Chase", and "Direction".

But despite all the various 'favourite' pieces I might call attention to, I think of the book as one continuous, though not necessarily seamless and perfectly harmonious piece, where everything qualifies or elaborates or explains everything else, and where everything 'contributes'. I've been reading Truffaut's letters recently and I'm of course especially interested in the sections describing his work on, as he called it, the 'Hitchbook'. In one place, he envisions the book as a whole constituting 'a very precise study of the intellectual and mental, but also physical and material, "fabrication" of films'. I hope it doesn't sound too grandiose or self-serving of me to say that from the beginning I hoped that 'H on H' would serve a similar function, and to do so it must be taken in its entirety.

Q. Yes indeed! Now, here are just two or three short questions to end on. First, you report in 'H on H' that before *The Pleasure Garden* (1925) Hitchcock had already 'directed a film financed by some relatives' (p. 4). Is this film known to still exist?

A. I've never seen any other references to it, and I don't think that it has ever been found or identified. It would be great to see it, though, wouldn't it? I'd also like to have a look at all the other early films that Hitchcock was associated with in some way or another before *The Pleasure Garden*: the films that he composed and drew intertitles for, that he was art director or assistant director on (which may well have involved setting up and perhaps even shooting some scenes), and so

on. Early Hitchcock continues to fascinate me, and I don't think that there's been enough work done on this subject. It's nice to know that there's always more to do!

Q. Hitchcock mentions (pp. 309-10) that he worked in Germany on an early film that duplicated in the studio part of the massive entrance to the Milan Cathedral. In Donald Spoto's 'Alfred Hitchcock: The Dark Side of Genius', Hitchcock identifies the film as Graham Cutts's *The Blackguard*, but elsewhere I've seen it identified as the Cutts film that came after that, *The Prude's Fall*. Do you know what film it was?

A. No, I don't. But I must say that Spoto comments very nicely on the German influence on Hitchcock, especially the films of Murnau. I'm hoping to do some more work on this topic: everybody seems to agree on its general importance, but there's not a lot written analysing the specifics. Lang, Murnau, Wiene, the street films, the city films (especially *Berlin: The Symphony of a Great City*), the 'new objectivity': all this left a mark on Hitchcock. And as the Milan Cathedral anecdote illustrates, it wasn't just the influence of directors that we need to pay attention to: Hitchcock was also deeply influenced by the working methods, the tremendous material advantages offered in the huge German studios that he observed and briefly worked in, and so on.

Q. At one point (pp 161-62), when referring to *The Manxman*, you mention Eisenstein's influence on Hitchcock. Were you thinking of some of Hitchcock's shots of the harbour and the quay-side?

A. Yes, I was thinking particularly of the idyllic shots from *Potemkin* of the small boats in the water, which I thought might be echoed in *The Manxman*. And don't forget the political undercurrent in *The Manxman*: the dangerous life of the fishermen and how they are squeezed by the overseas trawlers, by market conditions, and so on. The political themes are much more prominent in the novel that the film was based on. You and I are among the few Hitchcock fanatics who have gone back to read this fascinating and incredibly popular work by Hall Caine: the early 20th-century edition I read was, I believe, a copy of the 27th printing of the novel! In any event, Hitchcock's early writings convey how intrigued he was by contemporary political problems, labour unrest, the General Strike, and so on, and I see more than a few traces of this in his early films. I'm not trying to turn *The Manxman* into either *Potemkin* or Visconti's *La Terra Trema*, but I think that Hitchcock was a keen social observer, and that spirit animates many of his early films.

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Notes

1. Hitchcock's response was actually quite pithy: 'to put the audience through it!'

2. Lary J. Kuhns in Los Angeles has now checked this matter out and shown fairly conclusively that the film *must* have been *The Blackguard*, filmed at the famous UFA Studios in Berlin. As Lary notes, Hitchcock 'only worked there once'.

Nonetheless, some mystery remains. Philip Kemp saw *The Blackguard* in London last year, and writes to us as follows: '*The Blackguard*, as far as I recall, takes place in France and Russia, so Milan Duomo would seem a bit off the itinerary, and I don't think it figured in the print I saw. On the other hand, the plot's quite daffy enough to take in almost anything ...'

As they say on TV, we'll have further reports as they come to hand - Ed.

BOOK REVIEW

Gottlieb, Sidney (ed.): 'Hitchcock on Hitchcock: Selected Writings and Interviews' (University of California Press/Faber and Faber: USA/UK, 1995; 339pp, hb - but pb due in the Fall)

In a 1957 article, "Murder - With English On It", reprinted in this fine anthology of Alfred Hitchcock's writings and interviews (pp. 133-37), the director cites the Adelaide Bartlett case as typifying the bizarre nature of many English murders. Elsewhere, he called the case "My Favourite True Mystery", and it's not hard to see why. On New Year's Day, 1886, 30-year-old Adelaide Bartlett was accused of murdering her 40-year-old shopkeeper husband, Edwin, after the latter was found dead in bed at their Pimlico lodgings. In Edwin's stomach the coroner found a large quantity of chloroform. Soon another sensation followed, when it was reported that a young Wesleyan parson was involved. It seems that the Rev. George Dyson had effectively been Mrs Bartlett's lover for several months before Edwin's death, having

often visited the Bartletts' home where he'd necked with Adelaide in full view of her husband. The latter, it was later testified, had enjoyed watching them. But when both the parson and Mrs Bartlett were tried on a charge of murder, they were acquitted. An avowedly 'suspicious' jury could not discover how chloroform, which is caustic, could be introduced into someone's stomach without his cooperation. Even the famous surgeon, Sir James Paget, later appealed to the principals, in the name of science, to say how it was done - but got no answer.

Both the Bartlett case and the earlier Madeleine Smith case in Scotland (filmed by David Lean as *Madeleine*, 1949), with its infamous 'Not proven' verdict, must surely have been in Hitchcock's mind during the scripting of *I Confess* (1952). 'It's unthinkable that a priest could be involved', someone says in that film. But of course 'unthinkable' murders had already provided the basis of such notable Hitchcock movies as *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943) and *Rope* (1948); more broadly, to think (or do) something 'unthinkable' seems to have been one of the tasks Hitchcock always set himself. How else to explain, for example, some of the 'practical jokes' he played, or indeed to explain the basis of his 'wicked' line in macabre humour generally?

There were no doubt other reasons why the Bartlett case caught Hitchcock's imagination. For instance, the case probably came to represent for him an image of English reserve and sexual repression. As several recent 'MacGuffins' (and our Web Page) have noted, sexual repression underlies the 'ambivalent' psychological states on display in such films as *Rebecca* (1940), *The Paradine Case* (1947), *Stage Fright* (1950), and *Vertigo* (1958). Also, it encourages the formation of more-or-less 'polite' perversions, such as impotence and voyeurism, both of which Edwin Bartlett seems to have suffered from.

But enough of the Bartlett case. Perhaps my main reason for mentioning it here is to suggest how almost everything in Professor Gottlieb's book, 'Hitchcock on Hitchcock', turns out to be pertinent. True, I had doubts about the inclusion of the (admittedly sometimes hilarious) 1965 "After-Dinner Speech at the Screen Producers Guild Dinner" (pp. 54-58), which could only have been ghost-written, perhaps by the legendary James Allardice before he died. But even that contains a famous passage from English essayist Thomas de Quincey's "Murder As One of the Fine Arts" that Hitchcock soon made his own - something which Gottlieb is quick to point out in a footnote. And Gottlieb makes a still stronger case for the speech's inclusion in the book when, in his masterly section-introduction, he notes how the speech fits with the process of self-fabulation that Hitchcock had always engaged in. These particular fables, with their successive, unstable personae, 'link Hitchcock's world with that of Pirandello, Ionesco, and Borges' (p. 6). Quite so. For my part, I might have said, just slightly differently, that Hitchcock was here displaying how he'd absorbed the lesson of someone like Nietzsche,¹ that the fact of our own subjectivity is really all we can be certain about, and thus should make the most of. Even perhaps to the point of mocking it!

Anyway, before I list how this book confirmed hunches of mine concerning Hitchcock and his movies, let me further praise the job its editor has done. I'd previously read about half the items the book reprints, mainly those from the 1950s onwards. For instance, I'd once combed the files of the 'New York Times' in the Melbourne Public Library, and had triumphantly borne away both "Core of the Movies - The Chase" (dated 1950) and the above-mentioned "Murder - With English On It". But most of the 1930s material was new to me, and as Gottlieb truly says (p. xxii), that's what makes up a large proportion of the volume - not necessarily because Hitchcock did more writing then but more likely because it can be seen today to be about subjects that 'are the most significant and interesting'.

And how perceptive Gottlieb is about most of those subjects and the issues they relate to! Take the way he sees a connection between Hitchcock's supposedly light-hearted tribute to his wife, "The Woman Who Knows Too Much" (dated 1956, but containing anecdotal material from much earlier), and feminist critics' concerns about matters in the films themselves. Gottlieb suggests both that the Hitchcocks' relationship may have had its 'complex, troubled, and troubling' aspects and that '[t]he silent or silenced woman is a recurrent theme in his films' (p. 5) - and then he soon leaves us to get on with our reading of the actual texts.

Here's another example of Gottlieb's knowledgeable and perceptive editing. The 1936 article, "Close Your Eyes and Visualize!", is essentially Hitchcock's declaration of his intent to keep his pictures both fast-moving and of universal appeal ('I like my screen well used, with every corner filled, but with no arty theories clamping the action down ... my thrills are not horror thrills, but full-blooded, healthy stuff for which there is always an eternal demand' - pp. 247, 249). Not only does Gottlieb note that the article's title echoes Elinor Glyn's advice to amateur photoplay writers in the 1920s to truly 'visualize' their material, but he shows that the whole tenor of the article accords with that of popular script-writing manuals of the time (pp. 234-35). That's to say, Hitchcock was happy to identify himself with mainstream filmmaking principles, no doubt in order to master them and refine them.

I've said that 'H on H' confirmed hunches I'd had about the director and his films. If I now list some of those hunches, it's by way of showing how *useful* a book this is, making it, in my view, a worthy complement to Truffaut's famous 'Hitchcock'. I'll start with the fact that Hitchcock notes that he left school at 14, i.e., in about 1913, and that even then he was reading Buchan and Chesterton (p. 60).² This suggests to me the near-certainty that he had read Buchan's first two novels, 'Prester John' (1910), with its elements of Rider Haggard and Kipling, and 'The Power-House' (1913), with its ambiguous 'Nietzschean' villain; plus such Chesterton volumes as 'The Man Who Was Thursday' (1908), again with a 'super-man' villain, and 'The Innocence of Father Brown' (1911), with its whimsical figure of a priest-detective. As for Buchan's 'The Thirty-Nine Steps' (1915), Hitchcock tells us elsewhere in 'H on H' (p. 21) that he didn't read that particular novel for the first time until after the War, 'about 1919 or 1920'.

And here's a curious thing. Hitchcock remarks that he vowed then that if he ever became a director he would make a film of the novel. Yet in an article written just a year later than the first, in 1937, he says that he never thought of being a director until the day that Michael Balcon appointed him to that position (p.28). As I see it, these two statements aren't *necessarily* contradictory. In the first, Hitchcock is effectively telling us of a mere 'idea' he'd once had. Little more than a teenager at the time, and both an avid theatre-goer and a no-less-avid film-goer, he'd simply read the novel and thought to himself, 'this would make a good film', i.e., better than it would make a play. To which he'd appended the thought, 'I'll do it myself if I ever become a film director'. But that's hardly a definite statement of an ambition to direct ...

Hitchcock in 1920 seems to have been very aesthetically-aware. That was the same year in which he saw a stage-production of J.M. Barrie's 'Mary Rose' which he then remembered all his life and at one period was very keen to make the basis of a Hitchcock film. (The closest he came was with his use of green-tinting for the hallucination scenes in *Downhill*, 1927, and, 30 years later, when he chose the green neon sign in *Vertigo* to illuminate Judy's 'ghostly' transformation back into Madeleine.)

Another of my hunches was noted in 'MacGuffin' 7, where I speculated that likely influences on Hitchcock's *Suspicion* (1941), based on a 1932 novel by 'Francis Iles', were the films *Love From a Stranger* (1936) and *Night Must Fall* (1937). Well, Hitchcock had indeed seen both those films, and praises both Basil Rathbone and Robert Montgomery respectively for their portrayals of charming villainy (p. 88) - two models for the Cary Grant part in *Suspicion*.

In 'The MacGuffin' last time, when discussing *The Trouble With Harry* (1956), I invoked the formative period in the life of a young child when it's almost totally dependent on the mother. As noted there, the first six months are crucial. So I was delighted to read Hitchcock's 1963 'dialogue' with psychoanalyst Dr Frederic Wertham (author of a classic study of matricide),³ in which the director claims that his films trade on 'the fear which is within everyone', a fear he thinks identical to that which underpins the bond forged between a mother and her six-month-old child when she first says to that child 'Boo!' and then smiles at it (p. 149). Further, Hitchcock immediately proceeds to emphasise the importance in his films of humour (p. 150) - implying that this is the equivalent of the mother's reassuring smile.

Last time, too, I remarked Hitchcock's indebtedness to Romanticism. Of the nearly 50 pieces in 'H on H', perhaps the one I'm most grateful for is the 1960 "Why I Am Afraid of the Dark", translated for Gottlieb's book from the original "Pourquoi J'ai Peur la Nuit". This is where Hitchcock refers to his early love for Poe's stories. But now consider more particularly the following excerpt from the article:

[Poe] couldn't escape romanticism, because no one can escape the tendency of the era in which he lives. One mustn't forget that ... Poe went to school in England in 1818, when Goethe had already published Faust and when the first stories by Hoffman had just come out. This romanticism is perhaps even more apparent in the translation done by Baudelaire ... the French Poe. (p. 144)

In previous 'MacGuffins', I've invoked Poe (re *Vertigo*), Goethe's 'Faust' (also re *Vertigo*), and Baudelaire (re *North by Northwest*). As for Hoffman, he was of course an early exponent of what Freud called 'the uncanny'. In our next issue, I want to show a likely influence of Hoffman on *Rear Window* (1954) ...

However, a certain basic kind of suspense plot - 'that which weaves commonplace people in what appears to be a routine situation, until it is revealed ... as a glamorously dangerous charade' - comes from a 20th-century model. In one more 1950 piece for the 'New York Times', called "Master of Suspense", Hitchcock is candid about that. 'The spy stories of pre-war days fit these specifications perfectly', he says (p.123). No doubt he's thinking of stories penned by such authors as Buchan, E. Phillips Oppenheim, W. Somerset Maugham, Dennis Wheatley, Peter Cheyney, Graham Greene, and Eric Ambler ...

The Adelaide Bartlett case was far from being the only true-life crime to inform a Hitchcock film. In 'MacGuffin' 2, I speculated on the influence of the Thompson-Bywaters case on *Stage Fright*, and in 'MacGuffin' 12, I suggested that the model for barrister Anthony Keane (Gregory Peck) in *The Paradine Case* was the famous Sir Edward Marshall Hall. In truth, as early as 1937 Hitchcock was expressing a wish to film a celebrated trial, and citing the Thompson-Bywaters case as suitable (p. 260). And in the same 1977 piece, "Surviving", as he speaks of his early reading of Buchan and Chesterton, he mentions how he'd have 'really liked' to have been a criminal lawyer, though 'not, you know, the histrionic type like Marshall Hall ...' (p. 60).

On our Web Page, I suggest that an influence on the titles-sequence of *Torn Curtain* (1966), Hitchcock's spy thriller shot partly in Sweden, was his knowledge of a comparable passage in Ingmar Bergman's *Persona*, then also being filmed in that country. (The passage I have in mind is the famous one in Bergman's film showing the flaring into 'life' of a carbon-arc in a movie projector.) So let's note that in the entry Hitchcock wrote on "Film Production" for the 1965 edition of the 'Encyclopaedia Britannica', he quotes approvingly one of Bergman's tenets, that everything begins with the actor's face ('H on H', p. 218). There's no question that Hitchcock knew and admired his Swedish colleague's work (and, incidentally, that the admiration was returned).

Finally, concerning my hunches, let me refer again to our Web Page, where I suggest that Hitchcock astutely cast at least two gay actors in *Rope*. If you think such casting probably fortuitous, just consider that ten years earlier Hitchcock had written: 'I like an actor to play a part for which his personal experience in life has raised him. In this way he does not have to resort to cheap mannerisms and unnatural movements.' (p. 264) Hitchcock has many excellent comments to make on actors and matters of casting, and it's scarcely too much to say that these comments by themselves would justify any serious Hitchcock buff in owning a copy of this book.

As for the number of times something in 'H on H' illuminated for me a passage from one or other of the films themselves, I soon lost count. I'd say there were about 20 such times, actually. I'm thinking mainly of how an event in Hitch's own life can be seen to turn up later, transmuted, on the screen. The business mentioned in the Gottlieb interview of Peter Lorre's sending Hitch a crate of canaries: isn't that just a larger-scale version of Melanie's rather silly practical-joke with the lovebirds in *The Birds* (1963)? Or, for something a bit more momentous, consider this. In February 1937, you have Hitchcock publishing an article called "Search for the Sun" in which he defends the British studio-system against the charge that it discourages filmmakers from showing the real countryside. He refers in general terms to 'fruitless [and costly] excursions with large production units up and down the land in search of the sun' (p. 251) - yet that same year, himself goes on location to make what is literally the sunniest of his pictures, *Young and Innocent!* As noted in 'MacGuffin' 13, much of that film was shot on the flat uplands of Kent, and, after the opening scene, is consistently bathed in sunshine, especially in the scenes featuring young Erica (Nova Pilbeam). You have to wonder if the challenge of avoiding-the-cliché (compare the prairie scene of *North by Northwest*) wasn't already determining the content of some of Hitch's best work.⁴

A couple more foreshadowings. In 1934, the director was already toying with the idea of showing the raising and lowering of the Tower Bridge (pp. 170-71). As we know, he finally did it in *Frenzy* (1972).⁵ And if you thought the moment in *Vertigo* at Ernie's when Scottie has just seen Madeleine for the first time, and a wall-light behind her suddenly glows, is simply 'inspired', then you should recall how the Ivor Novello character in *The Lodger* (1926) is first introduced. As Hitchcock describes it, '[t]he housewife opened the door, and just then the gas came up with a full flood of light on this figure. ... You knew then that Jack the Ripper was in a London boarding house.' (p. 273)

What to make of that last item, involving two seemingly disparate films more than 30 years apart? To me, it's further 'proof' of what Hitchcock so often spoke of: the possibility of 'pure film'. Put simply - or philosophically - everything's ultimately *one*. Yet ask an audience to see whatever you want them to see, and if you're a good enough director, they probably will. The one becomes multitudinous again! Nonetheless, the unity of all things remains. As I suggested in 'MacGuffin' 8, that Kantian/Schopenhauerian idea seems definitely to inform a film like *Torn Curtain*. And I think once more of those respective titles-sequences in *Torn Curtain* and *Persona*, each with its sudden flaring *ex nihilo* of flame and light. Nothing but pure film! Or alternatively, the 'life-force'! In turn, I think of the matching sequence in *Lifeboat* (1943), where the sudden engulfing of the sinking ship's funnel in a great burst of steam and flame gives birth, as it were, to the very film itself. (Among the images of flotsam that follow immediately is that of a pack of cards spreading out ...)

Now, reading passages in 'H on H', I was struck by how often the most apt comparison seemed indeed to be with Schopenhauer - with, let's say, that philosopher's emphasis on the typically harsh way the world goes. For instance, Hitchcock in 1950 called the chase 'the final expression of the motion picture medium' (p. 125). That is, he was noting how there's something intrinsically dynamic both about the medium itself and about what it shows. In 1959, Hitchcock told the story of the king who when granted his wish to see the future, suddenly understood how much pain, misery, and

death lay ahead - along with the beautiful things - and immediately asked that the future be hidden again (p. 140). In 1963, Hitchcock remarked apropos *The Birds*, that 'nature can be awful rough on you' (p. 294). Yet that fact had never stopped him from seeing his job as 'making the audience suffer' (p. 272) because, after all, '[t]he basis of the cinema's appeal is [not rational but] emotional' (p.245). Suspense, he declared, 'has to do largely with the audience's own desires and wishes' (p. 272).

Those last few remarks were made in the 1930s. They show an intuitive understanding on Hitchcock's part of what would later contribute to his pessimism concerning a seemingly immanent, all-pervasive force that wreaks its own suffering in the world. The 1950 article "Master of Suspense" was something of a transitional piece in that respect. As Gottlieb notes, Hitchcock talks there of how film-making itself is an often harsh business, and that an aspect of Hitchcock's famous cameo appearances in his films involves 'a kind of humbling of himself, a momentary opportunity for him to be subjected to - in fact, "shot" and "hit" by - the cinematic weapons he usually wields' (p. 102). Gottlieb adds that these provide a 'startling reminder of the hostility and aggression that are intimately bound up with film-making (indeed, with all acts of photography, as Susan Sontag suggests in *On Photography*)'.

A couple of pages later, Gottlieb makes this observation: 'God is the director *extraordinaire* and, interestingly enough, works in Hitchcock's genre.' (p. 104) If that's true, it involves no appreciable slackening of effort on Hitchcock's part. As I began by suggesting, Hitchcock probably came increasingly to feel how the fact of our own subjectivity is all that - in this phenomenal world - we can be certain about. That, and the sheer weight and thrust of the world's presence. As this invaluable book shows, Hitchcock was a director capable of doing justice on film and, yes, in words, to both the philosophical and the pragmatic aspects of his craft. A certain simplification occurs in both mediums, but that, too, is part of Hitchcock's art. 'It takes so long, and so much work, to achieve simplicity', he said feelingly in 1977 (p. 62).

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Notes

1. Notice I say 'absorbed'. Hitchcock, the rather dandified and snobbish Englishman, was a child of his times - and for British intellectuals and their circle in the early decades of this century that meant a certain familiarity with Nietzschean ideas, notably the concept of the Superman/Overman. I do feel that even Hitchcock's penchant for the outrageous and the 'unthinkable' can be attributed, to some extent, to Nietzsche's 'influence'.

All of the above has been discussed here previously. A related matter is the widespread interest, in Britain and Europe, at the turn of the century, in notions of a 'life-force' and the 'élan vital'. Recently I learnt about a further aspect of that interest when I saw attributed to Andrew Lang (1844-1912), the scholar-friend of Rider Haggard, the idea that adventure stories attune people to an animal-like life-force that we share with our primate ancestors (Joseph Bristow, ed., 'The Oxford Book of Adventure Stories', 1996, p. xii).

Thus I'd surmise that Hitchcock's self-fabulation may be seen as a more-or-less instinctive response on his part to the need for 'adventure' in an age whose people had become increasingly 'sluggish and jellified' (his description). Not for a moment, though, do I suggest any *desperation* by Hitchcock personally. That's precisely why he could delight in - and mock - the whole rigmorole of self-creation ...

2. Rather significantly, he adds that he never cared much for Sexton Blake (the detective hero of boys' stories, who solved his cases with more brawn than brain) 'and the lower orders' - though he read 'all the real-life crime stories I could get hold of'.

3. Originally published as "The Matricidal Impulse" in a 1941 issue of 'Journal of Criminal Psychopathology', the work was reprinted in 1966 as 'Dark Legend: A Study in Murder' in popular paperback format. The influence of *Psycho* perhaps?

4. Years afterwards, Nova Pilbeam dutifully described *Young and Innocent* as 'quite the sunniest film I was involved with'! (Brian McFarlane, "The director who knew too much", in the 'Sunday Age', Melbourne, 26 April 1994) In referring to the prairie scene in *North by Northwest*, I have in mind Hitchcock's remark that the scene inverts the elements of a street-corner assignation on a rainy night shown in a film like Carol Reed's *The Third Man* (1949).

5. The titles-sequence of *Frenzy* took additional stimulus from Sidney Gilliat's *London Belongs to Me* (1948) - as noted in a previous 'MacGuffin'.

BLOOPERS

To start with, a couple of corrections to the article last time on *The Trouble With Harry*. That film was, of course, Bernard Herrmann's first for Hitch - please forgive my slip on p. 11 where I implied otherwise.

And on p. 17, I managed to mis-quote a line of dialogue. Young Arnie does *not* refer to the 'poor rabbit' (which 'should have carried a four-leaf clover'). What he actually says of the rabbit is: 'four rabbit's feet and he [still] got killed'. And then follows the four-leaf clover remark. However, I think that Sam's response, 'And a horse-shoe', certainly illustrates my point about the capacity of the artist to respond with a depth of sympathy that is endorsed by the film ...

My ears also played tricks with me on another occasion when (see 'MacGuffin' 11) I thought I heard in *Vertigo* Madeleine say of her recurring dream that it takes place 'somewhere in the night'. (When I listen to my videotape of the film, the line *still* sounds like that to me!) However, various people assure me that Madeleine is actually asking Scottie to take her 'somewhere in the light'. The clincher is that 'in the light' is how it's written in the script ...

Finally, when I was writing that article in 'MacGuffin' 11 on the 'sources' of *Vertigo*, my notes included mention of both the J.M. Barrie play 'Mary Rose' (which Hitchcock saw in London in 1920) and the 1956 film *The Search for Bridey Murphy*. But somehow I neglected to mention either of them in the article itself. And a couple of further 'sources' I would now definitely include if I were re-writing that article are the 1948 film *Corridor of Mirrors* (a likely influence, too, on Hitchcock's *Under Capricorn*, 1949) and the 1956 *Julie*, starring Doris Day and Louis Jordan, set on the coast of Monterey. I discuss the latter film, at least, on our Web Page, in the article called "Out of Hitchcock's Filing Cabinet".

Extract from 'World Film News and Television Progress (incorporating Cinema Quarterly)', Second Number, May 1936, p. 5:

HITCHCOCK, THE MAN KORDA CANNOT SIGN Says C.A. LEJEUNE

Alfred Hitchcock is Public Monument No. 1 of the British film industry. Visiting Americans demand to see him in the same breath with which they ask for St. Paul's Cathedral and the lawns at Oxford. They are always surprised - who wouldn't be? - with what they see.

Hitch is a vast mountain of a man in the late thirties, with snapping black eyes, a ruddy face, and a child's lower lip above a quantity of chins.

His nose is good, but you don't notice it. His hand is enormous, and engulfs yours when you shake it. He dresses mostly in black, and his face persistently wears an expression either sleekly malicious or faintly surprised.

Everybody likes Hitch. His heart is as large as a person. He is prodigiously generous, never forgets an old employee, and anyone can impose on him with a hard-luck story. When you eat with Hitch, you eat like a prince and drink like an emperor. He'll say, "What about a meal, kid?" and take you to the most refined and expensive restaurant in London. But he'll always go, if you'll let him, in his oldest clothes.

He has a tiny wife, who writes his scenarios, and a tiny, fairy-like daughter, who bobs an old-fashioned curtsy to you when you meet her. These two small persons rule his life.

Loves Melodrama

He loves music, mystery and melodrama. He likes to imagine all the people he knows in melodramatic situations. He gloats over the idea of an aeroplane dropping live bombs on the Aldershot [Military] Tattoo. Like the children in *The Brushwood Boy*, he "sets light to populous cities to see how they would burn."

On the set he's a sadist. He revels in spiritual de-bagging. Nothing delights him more than to take a film star with a good opinion of himself, work him until he sweats, and then publicly can the sequence. His language is fierce, and his humour rarely drawing-room. He respects nobody's feelings; but everybody respects him.

Hitch's genius is for draughtsmanship. He is an instinctive visualiser. His film scripts are minor works of art, every shot blocked on the margin of the page in rough design. When a script is finished, he loses interest in the picture. He would rather get on with the next job. The present one is already projected in his mind's eye.

When he talks to you, his broad, soft pencil sneaks out and sketches illustrations on the menu card or tablecloth. The underlining of his signature slips into a self-portrait, rudely revelatory. He can forge your signature in a moment, so that you wouldn't know it from your own.

He began his film career by designing titles - painting "Came the Dawn" in white letters on a black ground, or "One Week Later" in black letters on a white ground, with appropriate illustrative symbols. In twelve years he has made more good pictures than any other director in this country - and he looks like continuing to make them.

His favourite star is Jimmy Cagney, his favourite film *Eight Girls in a Boat*, and he is probably the only man left in England whom Korda wants, but can't persuade to sign on the dotted line.

Best Films of 1996

Here are three 'ten best' lists of films screened in Australia last year, compiled by three top film critics ...

Of special interest to Hitchcock fans may be Evan Williams's listing of *The Confessional*, directed by the Canadian stage producer Robert Lepage. Combining a modern story set in Quebec with glimpses of Hitchcock at work filming *I Confess* in 1953, the movie is considered by Evan 'a beautiful, mysterious film, worthy of Kieslowski'.

Six films are mentioned here more than once (but none is mentioned thrice): Jarmusch's *Dead Man*, Bertolucci's *Stealing Beauty*, Joel Coen's *Fargo*, Altman's *Kansas City*, Mike Leigh's *Secrets and Lies*, and Australian director Baz Luhrman's *William Shakespeare's Romeo & Juliet*.

Adrian Martin's list

Adrian is a film critic for the Melbourne 'Age', and has contributed to 'Sight and Sound'. His list is drawn from all sources, including revival-houses and television.

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|---|---|
| 1. Safe (Todd Haynes, 1995) | 6. Stealing Beauty (Bernardo Bertolucci) |
| 2. Gun Crazy (Joseph H. Lewis, 1949) | 7. La Peau Douce (François Truffaut, 1964) |
| 3. Valley of Abraham (Manoel de Oliveira, 1993) | 8. Crush (Alison Maclean, 1992) |
| 4. Dead Man (Jim Jarmusch) | 9. Fargo (Joel Coen) |
| 5. Heat (Michael Mann) | 10. The Brothers Skladanowsky (Wim Wenders) |

Tom Ryan's list

Tom lectures in Film at the Swinburne University, Melbourne, and is a film critic for the 'Sunday Age'. He did a post-graduate degree in Film under Robin Wood at the University of Warwickshire, England. Tom's list is confined to feature-length, first-release films which received local theatrical release.

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|---|---|
| 1. Fargo | 6. Vacant Possession (Margot Nash, Australia) |
| 2. The White Balloon (Jafar Panahi, Iran) | 7. Secrets and Lies (Mike Leigh, UK) |
| 3. Kansas City (Robert Altman, USA) | 8. W. Shakespeare's Romeo & Juliet (Baz Luhrman, USA) |
| 4. Stealing Beauty | 9. La Ceremonie (Claude Chabrol, France) |
| 5. Shanghai Triad (Zhang Yimou, China) | 10. Sense and Sensibility (Ang Lee, UK) |

Evan Williams's list

Evan's work appears in the 'Weekend Australian' and 'Quadrant'. He is an advisor to the Ministry of the Arts in New South Wales. A short review by Evan of the film *Theremin: An Electronic Odyssey* follows this item.

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|-------------------------------|--|
| 1. Secrets and Lies | 6. Le Confessional (Robert Lepage, Canada) |
| 2. To Die For (Gus Van Sant) | 7. William Shakespeare's Romeo & Juliet |
| 3. Dead Man | 8. Braveheart (Mel Gibson) |
| 4. Persuasion (Roger Michell) | 9. Casino (Martin Scorsese, USA) |
| 5. Kansas City | 10. The Pillow Book (Peter Greenaway, UK) |

'Theremin: An Electronic Odyssey'

HITCHCOCK FANS CAN SEE the origins of one of the director's most innovative musical experiments in a documentary, *Theremin: An Electronic Odyssey*, written and directed by Steven M. Martin. Premiered at the 1995 Boston Film Festival, the film is now screening in Australian art houses. Leon Theremin (1901-1993), a Russian physicist, developed his electronic instrument in the 1920s; the pitch was controlled by the player's hands moving through magnetic fields over what looked, in the early versions, like a wooden lectern or writing desk with two antennas. It was (is?) the only musical instrument to be played without being touched.

Its weird, plaintive sub-human sound quickly caught on in Hollywood. Miklos Rozsa first used it in Hitchcock's *Spellbound* (1945). Although Rozsa won an Oscar for his score, one Hitchcock authority, Donald Spoto, considered the film's music intrusive, observing that it established the theremin as 'Hollywood's official instrument to suggest psychosis.' The theremin was used the same year in Billy Wilder's *Lost Weekend* [and in Hitchcock's radio production of 'Malice Aforethought' - Ed.], and later by Hitch's favourite composer, Bernard Herrmann, in his score for Robert Wise's *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951). Another science fiction film, *It Came From Outer Space* (Jack Arnold, 1953), shot in 3-D, also made extensive use of the theremin.

The career of the inventor was no less extraordinary than his instrument. According to the producers of Martin's film, in 1928 Leon Theremin set up a studio in New York catering to high society patrons interested in his pioneering work, which concerned advanced electronic instruments, light shows, an electronic dance platform, and a colour television system. In 1938 Theremin was kidnapped from the New York apartment where he lived with his American wife, the black ballet dancer Lavinia Williams, by the NKVD (the forerunner of the KGB) and taken back to Russia, where he was imprisoned for 'anti-Soviet propaganda' in Magadam, a Siberian labour camp. Later he was sent to a military prison and set to work on top-secret military electronics, which culminated in his creation of the electronic bug. Theremin personally supervised the bugging of both the American Embassy and Stalin's personal apartment, and was awarded the Stalin Prize, First Degree, one of the USSR's highest honours.

Theremin later began teaching at the Moscow Conservatory of Music, but was thrown out for continuing his work in electronic music: electricity, said the Soviet authorities, should be reserved for the execution of traitors. From then on Theremin worked on routine assignments until his retirement, largely unaware of the influence of his instrument elsewhere in the world.

©Evan Williams, 1997

[Editor's note. Though Theremin's wife was Lavinia Williams, his most devoted disciple was the Russian-born violinist Clara Rockmore, herself the world's leading exponent of the instrument called the theremin. In his newspaper review of Martin's film, Evan Williams notes that it ends with Gershwin's 'Summertime' matched to old footage of Leon and Clara in their youth, creating 'an autumnal sweetness such as I have rarely seen in films'.]

South by Southeast: Hitchcock's 'Rich and Strange' (1932)

'I want some life. Life, I tell you.'

- Fred, in *Rich and Strange*

[T]he entire point of Rich and Strange ... has something to do with the extremes of life and death, and the acceptance of life and death on their own terms. The reactions ... by the Chinese are entirely appropriate to an Oriental philosophy, if not to polite middle-class Britons. What Fred and Emily see is the exact opposite of their own constant yearning, their dissatisfaction with their lot.

- Donald Spoto, 'The Art of Alfred Hitchcock' (1992), p. 33

'Is anybody or anything real, then?'

- Fred, in *Rich and Strange*

Simply as a drama, [Rich and Strange] is a marvellous mood piece. The two new loves, one gentle and understanding, the other uneven and rather tempestuous, but both plausible, are as real as one gets. ...

- Kirk Bond, "The Other Alfred Hitchcock", in 'Film Culture', Summer 1966, pp. 33-34

[Synopsis of the film. Fred and Emily Hill, an average young married couple who live in suburban London, inherit money and decide to take a world cruise. On board ship, the experience goes to their heads, as they each make new acquaintances. Fred ends up losing most of their inheritance when he's seduced by a fake princess. Meanwhile, Emily has become involved with the charming Commander Gordon, who is en route to his plantation in the tropics. When he disembarks at Singapore, Emily makes the painful decision not to accompany him, because she sees that Fred needs her. Re-united, the couple are further driven back together after their cargo boat is wrecked in the South China Sea. Rescued by a Chinese junk, they return home to England, having had their fill of romance and adventure.]

MORE THAN ONCE IN 'The MacGuffin', I've noted that a basic Hitchcockian effect concerns the use of ambiguity. *Rich and Strange* displays that effect in full measure. The ambiguity involved takes two main forms: contextual and structural. Let's start with the first kind. Early in the film, most of the scenes are played as light domestic comedy, with Fred (Henry Kendall) the disgruntled office worker/commuter, Emily (Joan Barry) his foil as a good little housewife - who, when not preparing her husband's favourite meal of steak-and-kidney pudding, toils uncomplainingly at her Singer sewing-machine. Yet suddenly the comic tone is interrupted by Fred's exclamation, 'the best place for us is a gas oven'. A jarring note of 'quiet desperation' has been sounded. Henceforth, we'll contemplate what happens more carefully. We'll ask ourselves: what is the real point of what we're seeing? The shipboard scenes surely aren't *just* providing another variant of light romantic comedy, are they?

Nonetheless, notice how cleverly Hitchcock, after sounding that discordant note, promptly restores the basal comic tone. He does it with a diversion, or, rather, several of them. No sooner has Fred uttered his 'gas oven' remark than Emily neutralises at least part of our own shock by saying that anyway the couple have a roof over their heads, 'and lots of things'. Then, with a clatter, the evening post arrives through a slot in the front-door. Wet-blanket Fred comments, 'it'll only be the gas bill', and while we're pondering *that* vaguely surreal touch, Emily chirrup another of her inadequate responses, 'Serve you jolly well right if it is, talking about gas ovens'. By this time our first startled feelings have been well and truly buried, even as they've seemed to be acknowledged ...

Now, as well as 'contextual' ambiguity - where the prevailing comedy is momentarily called in question - the film displays a definite 'structural' ambiguity. In effect, the latter is built on the paradox attaching to the familiar axiom, 'Blessed are those who expect nothing, for they shall not be disappointed'.¹ It's familiar, yes, but also, often, unquestioned. But not by Hitchcock! In fact, *Rich and Strange* provides an early anticipation of the 'Faustian' theme that's in *Vertigo* (1958).² And if Emily Hill is the good little housewife who 'expects nothing', Fred Hill is heard initially to positively demand 'life'; then, once he meets the Princess (Betty Amann), he's determined to have that life up to the hilt - that is, as far as his drab English upbringing will let him. Moreover, though Fred's really a bit of a baby - at times, indeed, a Harry Langdon look-alike - it seems clear that a part of Hitchcock is with him. They're namesakes, after all.³

During the middle part of the film, Fred's foil isn't so much Emily as the bespectacled old maid, Miss Imery (Elsie Randolph),⁴ whose costume for the ship's fancy-dress evening is that of Bo Peep, and who herself often looks as lost as her reputed flock. When Fred, dressed in sheikh's vest and jewelled armband, finds himself partnering Miss Imery in a dance, his behaviour is boorish - yet we understand how he's impatient to re-join the Princess, who's awaiting him in her cabin. Appropriately, his yearning has a sort of correlative in the film's own sensuousness, by which I mean the rhythmically-paced images of shipboard activity, of the sea, and above all of 'foreign parts'. As in *Vertigo*, we're being set up - seduced - for the moment when a price must be paid and our hopes finally dashed, in this case during a literal shipwreck.

And as Donald Spoto sees well, the Chinese scenes present us and the characters with the inverse of the 'great expectations' that are at play in the first two-thirds of the film. Significantly, the Chinese attitude to life still forms a *part* of life, and thus marks the defeat of Fred's hubristic attempt to, as it were, get the better of that life, to dictate its terms. What I'm remarking here is effectively an early instance of Hitchcock's 'philosophical pessimism'. This time I think of *Rear Window* (1954). Twice in the earlier film Commander Gordon (Percy Marmont) had asked Emily, 'Like to see a ship we were once passengers in?' Actually, both times they're still standing on the ship's deck, yet so much has happened since they first came on board that everything seems altered.⁵ It's as if they had stepped outside of themselves to look back with skinned eyes on where they had been and where they are now - precisely the sort of structural premise on which *Rear Window* is built. But, as in that film, a cautionary note enters. The second time that the Commander asks his question, it's clear to both him and Emily that matters between them have got dangerously out of hand. What had begun as a seemingly harmless shipboard flirtation, now, with Singapore in sight, threatens to sweep away Emily's marriage to Fred, whom she still loves, if more in a 'motherly' way than anything else. 'A wife is more than half a mother', she says, 'and I've been married to [Fred] for over eight years.'

So the whole situation here is, as I say, ambiguous. And once again, by *inverting* the initial set of assumptions (such as Emily's, as to the manner of her attachment to Fred), the ambiguity becomes a structurally-expressed one. Is lack of 'great expectations' - or its opposite - necessarily a good thing? Is wifely fidelity a simple, unquestionable matter? About the only sure answer the film comes up with is that 'life' is bigger, or more fundamental, than any of the people concerned.

* * *

If I were asked to nominate the single most impressive feature of *Rich and Strange*, I would say - though this is seldom remarked - that it's the soundtrack, especially in the first two-thirds of the film. Here we can see working the belief in seamless continuity that Hitchcock would later make perhaps his strongest suit in films like *Notorious* (1946), *Rope* (1948), and *Dial M For Murder* (1954). Posing for much of its length as little more than a photo-album of a holiday cruise - even down to the use of quasi-captions like 'Marseilles, the big ship bound for the Far East' and 'Fred' - the film combines music and sound-effects in a flowing, often subtle commentary. The alternating sensuous excitement and lassitude of a sea-voyage is here. So, too, is that sense of life as a 'passing parade' which throws up encounters with odd characters like those one may meet briefly at a party, as film theorist Siegfried Kracauer once remarked of Hitchcock's films in general. And each time one of the several wide-shots of the main passenger-deck recurs, the soundtrack knows what to do. Notice, for instance, how when the three women dressed as jockeys for the fancy-dress evening come striding by, all three abreast, the music picks up their rhythm, catching perfectly its faint absurdity.⁶

But there's any number of fine, pointed sight-gags in *Rich and Strange*, right from the first scene which clearly foreshadows *North by Northwest* (1959). It's home-time in Fred's office, and the stylised establishing-shot showing a looming clock in the foreground and rows of workers at their desks behind it, echoes the stage Expressionism of a play like Elmer Rice's 'The Adding Machine' (1923), which almost certainly had reached London.⁷ The workers' mechanical exit from the building, two by two, into a rainy evening and down the London Underground, is cleverly filmed - here there seems to be an echo of the recent work of René Clair (as 'MacGuffin' reader Leslie Shepard has suggested to me). And the ensuing scenes on the Underground emphasise the sense of mad, 'other-directed' rush that will motivate Fred to make his outburst about wanting more 'life' for Emily and himself. What he'll actually get, of course, is more of the same, only different.

Paris, when they arrive there, is as hectic and crowded as London. (The sweeping shot of a pissoir - just one more of the sights - with its row of shoes, neatly echoes the idea.) But by now Fred and Emily have adopted a tourist mentality, so for a time they see only the exotic side of all this. The film speeds up the views of traffic and well-known landmarks, and inserts close-ups of Fred and Emily's heads swivelling to take everything in. In a double sense, their heads are indeed being turned. But the pay-off to these shots will come later, on the Chinese junk, and it will be a grim one ...

That the couple are two innocents abroad is expressed in several sight-gags at the Folies Bergère. Afterwards, another type of innocence is implied by the gag in which husband and wife, both tipsy, prepare for bed. Fred stumbles and seems to Emily to be praying. She sinks to her knees and starts to pray herself. Noticing this, Fred prays too - for real this time. Thus the couple 'makes' itself, perhaps with rewards of which the two people are scarcely aware. Most definitely, the scene I've described has its special place in this film ...

But, in their very innocence, the two now drift apart. Again a number of sight-gags say much. On the fancy-dress evening, Fred and Emily find themselves for a time seated in adjacent deck chairs. Each is sipping a drink in a glass. Their body-language clearly shows how much each resents the nearness of the other. Their mutual antipathy finds expression, too, when everyone goes ashore at Colombo. When Fred's rickshaw happens to lock wheels with Emily's, the shaking movements of the two carriages suggests vehement hostility. But nothing is said, and doesn't need to be. The two people sit stiffly, in stony silence. Fade-out.

* * *

Structurally, *Rich and Strange* owes something to the first feature-film Hitchcock directed, *The Pleasure Garden* (1925), and anticipates several of his films to come. Thus, in *The Pleasure Garden*, you already have the voyage to the tropics which shows up some of the darker or more forbidden impulses of certain characters, not all of whom may survive to make the return-trip. Also, *The Pleasure Garden* introduces the trope of the phoney princess - with this difference, that there it's a phoney *prince* who beguiles the heroine's friend, Jill, back in London. (Interestingly, that unscrupulous fellow looks exactly like the bearded man we glimpse in *Rich and Strange* at the Folies Bergère, who pinches Emily on the bottom.)⁸ Meanwhile, the heroine herself, Patsy, has accompanied her no-good husband, Levet, part of the way on his voyage, with the understanding that he will eventually re-join her. At Lake Como, on what is in fact their honeymoon, she

remarks with delight on the local women in the town square with their babies, and we guess where her thoughts are tending. We'll hear a similar remark in *Rich and Strange* when Emily leans over the ship's rail at Port Said and comments fatuously to Fred on how for centuries 'all those people [have been] having their babies ...'. There are parallel scenes in *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1956) and even *Psycho* (1960) where, as noted in 'MacGuffin' 4, the money that Marion steals from Cassidy (a wedding-present for 'my sweet little ... baby', as he calls it), represents for *her* the baby she wants from Sam.

More broadly, if you're seeking to compare this, after all, very *Catholic* film with another, I can think of no more apt comparison than with Rossellini's very fine *Viaggio in Italia/Voyage to Italy* (1953). There, too, a childless English couple (Ingrid Bergman, George Sanders) experience a marriage-crisis when they travel abroad to inspect a property left them by a relative. They split apart for a time, each finding interesting new companions, but, following a key scene set amidst the ruins at Pompeii, they both realise how much they still need each other ... Even from that brief description, based on my viewing of the shortened foreign-release version of the film, the similarity to *Rich and Strange* is evident. The full-length, Italian-release version sounds even closer. Alexander (the Sanders character) becomes the lover of an exiled Russian countess, while Katherine (Bergman) has an affair with the head of the Mafia in Naples (compare Emily's affair with the wealthy plantation-owner, Commander Gordon).

That noted, let's now examine the last section of Hitchcock's film - the shipwreck sequence - to see what it's doing in the context of some of the things I've been describing, not least the film's 'structural' ambiguity.

* * *

It's scarcely stretching a point, I think, to compare the shipwreck and its aftermath to the Pompeii sequence in *Viaggio in Italia*: another scene of devastation, with a not-dissimilar sense of what was once here and what, by contrast, now remains. For in Hitchcock's film, the ship that suddenly begins to founder in the South China Sea doesn't in fact sink straight away; indeed, Fred and Emily find themselves next morning eerily alone on the still-floating vessel, after the order to abandon ship had been given but the couple had become trapped in their cabin. Though the sequence may well have found its inspiration in Buster Keaton's *The Navigator* (1927), Hitchcock soon dampens any excessive levity on our part by showing us, lying on the deck, the pyjama-clad body of an old man who hadn't survived the rush to the lifeboats (presumably he'd had a heart-attack).⁹

In other words, by this stage in the film Hitchcock is presenting us with life and death in the raw. When Fred had demanded 'life' back home in his row house in suburban London, he'd glanced enviously and longingly at a large painting on the wall, depicting a full-masted clipper-ship with a couple of fishermen in a rowing-boat in the foreground. That romanticised image of the sea corresponds to the romanticised image of a wind-blown desert we see on the wall of the realty office in *Psycho*, at which Marion glances early in that film. What neither Fred Hill nor Marion Crane initially comprehends, though, is that in a sense they're already part of life, if only they knew it. Here again we may detect Hitchcock's 'philosophical pessimism' working. The question arises: should either Marion or Fred ever have tried to 'run away' from their problems, of which boredom was clearly one of the most pressing yet also the most life-typical?¹⁰ Well, there can be no absolute answer to that, of course, which is precisely the point. *Rich and Strange* is probably the first Hitchcock film in which the notion of a life-force is pressed into play for dramatic or thematic purposes, though many Hitchcock films subsequently would do so (as several recent 'MacGuffins' have shown). The very title of *Lifeboat* (1943) was no accident in the corpus of Hitchcock's work.

Raw life is also stressed in what now follows. A not-very-romantic Chinese junk turns up, its crew concerned mainly with looting the sinking ship (a quintessential, less-than-flattering image of humanity). Their *particular* outlook is crystallised in a couple of incidents. As Fred and Emily, greatly relieved to be rescued, pass on board the junk, no-one seems to express the slightest interest in the couple's welfare or to welcome them. Even when, moments later, one of the Chinese' own crew becomes entangled in a rope-ladder thrown over the ship's side, and slowly drowns, no-one is able to reach him to save him; instead, they watch impassively, seemingly without feeling. (For what it's worth, I was reminded of a near-iconic image of modern-day Shanghai: viz. the street stalls with their mounds of writhing eels to which no-one seems to give a second glance. The American title of Hitchcock's film was *East of Shanghai*.)

Of course, Fred and Emily are horror-struck by this last incident, and as much by the impassivity of the Chinese onlookers as by the - almost equally impassive - death of the man who drowns. Pointedly, Hitchcock films the scene with quick, intercut shots of watchers and watched, in a manner anticipating the sequence in *The Birds* (1963) that shows the death of the salesman who drops a lighted match in a gasoline slick and blows himself up. There's the same sense of fascinated powerlessness to prevent what's coming, and similar shots of heads turning. Only, in this case, the heads are just those of Fred and Emily, who switch their horrified gaze from the drowning man to the silent watchers, then back again.

As I indicated earlier, I see these shots of turning heads as being the pay-off to the ones in the Paris sequence. There, Fred and Emily had behaved exactly like mindless tourists for whom everything was merely 'a show'. They had started to come to their proper senses only much later, with the defeat of their individual fantasies, of which Fred's, involving the fake princess, had been especially culpable. His line in the Singapore hotel, 'Is anybody or anything real, then?', is thus crucial. It marks his first grudging admission that he's not life's master but rather its servant. Afterwards, the film further breaks Fred down - and, in view of Hitchcock's alleged misogyny, notice that it's a male character we're talking of - when, trapped with Emily in their cabin on the sinking ship, he tells her, 'I'm scared, Em'.

As I say, Hitchcock now presents life and death non-romantically, and in the raw. 'Life' becomes not a show presented for our English couple but something that is *regardless* of them. They're certainly part of it, but it's indifferent to their presence - and on the Chinese junk, quite literally so. In a sense, life itself is what's 'rich and strange'. Yet, by that very fact, life has its own reality, and if only Fred and Emily could acknowledge that truth, they'd be well on their way to finding a degree of contentment. This is a philosophical point - basic, let's note, to the work of that most universal of philosophers, Schopenhauer - which would become gradually more integral in several later Hitchcock films, though always ambiguous. I believe it to give a 'mystical' shading to the endings of such films as *Rear Window* (when Lisa starts to read 'Beyond the High Himalayas'), *Vertigo* (the 'chthonic' nun), and *Psycho* (Norman in his 'Buddhist' robes), as discussed in previous 'MacGuffins'. But let's return to *Rich and Strange* and how Hitchcock insists on reminding us about the raw side of life.

It's there in the smallest things. Another pay-off to an earlier moment comes when Emily sits on a knot in the junk's planking - her bottom takes a beating in this film! And the ship's cat that had so much resembled their pet back home ends up being turned by the Chinese into a delicious chop-suey. (A matching verbal gag is heard in *Rear Window*.) Is nothing sacred, then? That question seems the obvious complement to Fred's in the Singapore hotel room. And the film, I think, answers it identically. Yes, there is something - life itself.¹¹ For now the film picks up again on the 'baby' motif. A baby is born to a woman on the junk's deck, in primitive circumstances. Emily's 'mothering' instinct is again aroused. And we take the hint - which is confirmed - that maybe there will be another baby in her life soon besides the once-infantile Fred, who does seem to have been matured a little by recent events.

Though *only* a little, and not without ambiguity. Listen to Fred's continuing xenophobia ('These Chinese breed like rabbits'). And his basic complacency when he compares being on the junk to yachting (here, the film cuts to a shot of one of the crew pushing on a massive tiller). In this, however, Emily is his all-too-obliging accomplice. In a sequence that anticipates *Lifeboat*, she exclaims brightly that she actually *likes* being 'shipwrecked'. And when Fred notes that they can tell their insurance company that the money he lost to the Princess went down with the ship, she immediately starts talking of the new 'clothes and things' they'll be able to buy. (Incidentally, the sort of 'pessimistic' insight into intractable, amoral human nature that Hitchcock gives us here has several precedents or parallels in English fiction: I'm reminded of incidents in Dickens's 'Our Mutual Friend', Conrad's 'Nostromo', and V.S. Pritchett's short story, 'The Fly in the Ointment'.)¹²

* * *

Rich and Strange has several separate close-ups of objects that, taken together, constitute a motif involving Fred. Early on, after the couple has received the news of their windfall, Fred tells Emily that now she can have some 'real clothes'. A cut to a shot of saucepans boiling over on the stove suggests the pair's distraction, but also Fred's pent-up anger on Emily's behalf. A little later, he learns that a sea voyage isn't all fun and games, and comes down seasick. A cut-in of several empty bowls as in a mist is eloquent (a similar, if more pedestrian, moment occurs in the 1933 film *Channel Crossing*). And, much later, in Singapore, there's a close-up of the Princess's dressing-table on which are arrayed several jars and containers - which Fred brushes angrily to the floor when he learns from Emily that he's been duped.

Fairly banal in themselves, such shots nonetheless help give us the sense of Fred's frustrations. Later on, as I've said, he'll arrive at a point where his essential egotism is broken down, if only fleetingly, and he'll admit to Emily that he's scared. It may well be that in that single moment the couple's marriage is saved for good, bringing them together as nothing else could have done. Structurally, at least, the moment comes at a point in the film roughly comparable to the famous 360° shot in *Vertigo* that briefly unites Scottie and Judy in total 'togetherness'.

Prior to that, there have been other structural parallels to *Vertigo*. If Fred's falling for the bogus princess anticipates Scottie's susceptibility to Madeleine (really Judy playing the part of Madeleine), then the perpetual spinster Miss Imery has an approximate equivalent in *Vertigo*'s Midge. Hitchcock is cruel to both of the latter, while recognising their pain. Consider Miss Imery's line to Commander Gordon (someone else who manages to snub her), 'What a perfect gentle knight

you are, Commander'. Or the self-mockery implicit in her fancy-dress character of Bo Peep, comparable to Midge's painting the parodic portrait of herself as Madeleine.

There's a memorable gag in which Miss Imery literally bears the weight of the males' relative indifference towards her. A couple of the men accompany her, at her bidding, to a carpet-stall in a back street of Port Said, then desert her when Emily exclaims because she's just seen Fred with the Princess. Miss Imery suddenly finds herself left to carry an enormous roll of carpet back to the ship alone - a metaphor, in effect, for her whole situation.

Not that Miss Imery is the only person with problems. There's a key scene that I've hardly mentioned so far, another 'vertiginous' one at that. One evening Commander Gordon and Emily find themselves in a part of the ship that, strictly, is off-limits to passengers. The Commander is enchanted because Emily has unthinkingly just called him 'Gordon' (really his surname, of course). He speaks a line that might have come from a novel by Hitchcock's 'mentor', John Buchan - 'Just one bloke to another [, eh]? - which clearly is meant to imply some sort of desirable situation, though scarcely one that could endure.¹³ (One thinks, too, of the 'idyllic' depiction of public-school life in the early scenes of Hitchcock's *Downhill*, 1927, scenes which aren't perhaps quite as satirically-meant as they may sound to us today.) Unsettled, Emily looks over the ship's side into the foam rushing past the prow, and speaks of feeling 'dizzy'. The Commander ventures a kiss, but Emily only asks 'Let's go back', a double-entendre underlined by a sudden shift in the (diegetic) sound from offscreen, of an accordion squeezed shut.¹⁴

'At-one-ness' is an ideal and a hope that Hitchcock's films (e.g., *Torn Curtain*, 1966) time and again hold out, albeit ambiguously.¹⁵ But the good Catholic in Hitchcock helps him affirm, just as often, 'only in marriage' ...

* * *

Not that any guarantees are given about that, either. The sailor whom we watch at one point swabbing the decks, and hear singing the lyrics of a popular song ('My wife won't let me'), seems to harbour a rather bitter taste concerning marriage - hence his spitting at the song's end. In its way, *Rich and Strange* is the complement (and inversion) of a novel like Sinclair Lewis's 'Dodsworth' (1929), another work in which husband and wife find during a sea-voyage how non-together they really are. The fact that Hitchcock's film deals with a different social class to the one in Lewis's novel, and finds the wife rather than the husband to have the greater staying-power, only underlines the general no-guarantees idea.

Nonetheless, the ending of *Rich and Strange* has its 'mystical' shading for those with eyes to see it, and may constitute nothing less than Hitchcock's statement of faith in the potential of marriage. I spoke above of how his couple 'makes' itself in ways that may be invisible to the two people at the time; I also tried to suggest how, if they were able to abstract themselves from their several present exigencies, 'life' itself might, as it were, redeem them. To end the scene set on the Chinese junk, Hitchcock inserts a drawn-out close-up of the couple embracing against a black background, with Emily's hair swept by a preternatural wind into an almost 'Botticelli' effect. Two or three shots of transparent clouds sweeping across the moon complete the sequence. Nothing could be less true, I fancy, than critic Richard Combs's description of this as 'one [sic] stock shot of rolling clouds'.¹⁶ In fact, Hitchcock is showing us the soul and *inner* life of his couple, before returning us and them to their mundane London suburb and their renewed bickering. *See also implication*

There's at least one precedent in Hitchcock's other films for this sequence. I'm thinking of the splendid moment in *The Manxman* (1929) when Kate, just before she attempts to drown herself, throws back her head to contemplate the ship's mast towering above her (the identical 'farewelling' effect Hitchcock gives Madeleine in *Vertigo*). From that, the film cuts to a close-up of Kate's composed, beautiful face, her blonde hair radiant, some strands billowing to one side. As I noted in 'MacGuffin' 18, you think of a religious painting by, yes, Botticelli - or indeed of Marion Crane's transfigured, upturned face, surmounted by an effulgence of water from a halo-like shower-nozzle, moments before she dies in *Psycho*. And in *Lifeboat*, at least one close-up of Constance Porter clearly aims for a similar, ethereal effect.

Dear reader, these effects aren't accidents on Hitchcock's part, but statements. Statements of his strongest, deepest intuitions, prompted, I dare say, by his almost Proustian commitment to rendering on film as much 'life' - both outer and inner - as he possibly could. All of which goes way beyond Fred and Emily's unthinking notion of that term's meaning. Let's not deny, or fail to respect, the full extent of Hitchcock's achievement, even in an early film like *Rich and Strange*.

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Notes

1. An axiom coined, I believe, by Jonathan Swift (1667-1745).

2. Cf. 'MacGuffin' 17. Hitchcock was familiar with both Goethe's 'Faust' (cf. S. Gottlieb, ed., 'Hitchcock on Hitchcock', 1995, p. 144) and no doubt Murnau's *Faust* (1926), and with the variant on the Faust story that forms the basis of Oscar Wilde's 'The Picture of Dorian Gray' (1890). Hitchcock had read the latter 'several times' (D. Spoto, 'The Life of Alfred Hitchcock', 1983, p. 264). (Thanks to Jason Rasmussen for having lately drawn the Wilde-connection to my notice.)

3. Spoto, pp. 132-33, gives fairly specific referents for the film in the Hitchcocks' own life, such as their own recent trip around the world.

4. I've taken the character's name (including its spelling) from the credits for *Rich and Strange* printed in the 'Monthly Film Bulletin', August 1975, p. 187.

5. Cf. the reference to 'transfer of affects' in *Spellbound* (1945).

6. They're hardly 'pretty maids all in a row', these three. Yet, if I'm not mistaken, there were *six* unattached females in this group at the start of the voyage, so that a few *liaisons* seem to have occurred ...

7. In John Grierson's 'Grierson on Documentary' (1966), p. 73, in referring to certain scenes in Hitchcock's *Murder!* (1930), he cites 'advanced play-writers' such as Rice, and also certain sound-techniques used on the BBC. Incidentally, Grierson's book contains a thoughtful, if (unduly?) harsh, discussion of *Rich and Strange* (pp. 74-76).

The protagonist of Elmer Rice's play is called Mr Zero - making him a quintessential Expressionist figure. Cinema influences on the opening of *Rich and Strange* may include German Expressionist films such as Wiene's *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (1919) and Murnau's *The Last Laugh* (1924) - for an account of Hitchcock's visit to the set of the latter, see Spoto, pp. 68-69.

8. He's also something of a look-alike for (literal) lady-killer Henri Landru (1869-1922) - though of course the bearded look was fashionable enough among the French *bourgeoisie* of the time. (Note, for instance, some of the wedding-guests we see at the start of Vigo's *L'Atalante*, 1934.)

9. The image is as eloquent of dire events as its counterpart in *The Birds*.

10. The philosopher Schopenhauer (1788-1860) 'thinks ordinary existence must involve the dual miseries of pain and boredom, insisting that it is in the very essence of humanity, indeed of the world as a whole, that it should be so.' (C. Janaway, 'Schopenhauer', 1994, p. 6) Of course, Hitchcock probably took the idea for beginning many of his films with a character feeling bored from British spy-thriller writers like Erskine Childers and John Buchan, who used it constantly. But my point is this: that just as Schopenhauer developed the ethical side of his philosophy to include the notion of a resigned coming-to-terms with life's suffering, so it is possible to read Hitchcock's films as allowing for a similar, 'oriental', outlook - albeit, as I say repeatedly in the present article, not without ambiguity.

11. Something else that recent 'MacGuffins' have emphasised is the belief that was particularly strong at the turn of the century in something called the 'life-force' or 'élan vital'. The idea permeated much art, literature, drama - and film. It isn't accidental, or fortuitous, that the lordly Sir John in *Murder!* sees his task as being to use Art to interpret and comment on Life. In some definite degree, Hitchcock went on to adapt that idea to his own purposes, starting with the making of a film like *Rich and Strange*. In the process, I suspect, he developed a strong sense of life as being almost an entity in its own right - a viewpoint I wish dogmatic post-modernists wouldn't forbid us ...

12. In spite of everything, the father at the end of Pritchett's story reverts to his old, calculating way. I'm reminded, too, of the millionaire Rittenhouse at the end of *Lifeboat* ... (NB: English man-of-letters, and admirer of Dickens, Sir Victor Pritchett, was a good friend of the Hitchcocks.)

13. In Buchan's 'Mr Standfast' (1919), Richard Hannay meets his future wife, Mary Lamington. One of her qualities, we're told, is that she had 'the strong, slim grace of a boy' (Chapter Five). By marrying her, Hannay may be said to keep some of his own boyhood and youth - a rare privilege, we're asked to feel. Likewise, in Chapter 12 of 'John Macnab' (1925), Sir Archibald Roycastle, a Scottish laird and future M.P., glimpses *his* future wife, Janet, after a rainstorm, and thinks she looks 'like an adorable boy'. Three pages later, he proposes to her, and is accepted. Subsequent books show that both marriages are successful (Hannay's especially). But my point is that the very British Buchan values *camaraderie* as much as sex ...

14. There's a comparable moment in Evan Hunter's original script for *The Birds* when Melanie suddenly becomes alarmed at where her new relationship with Mitch may be heading. She says: 'I'm frightened and confused and I ... I think I want to go back to San Francisco where there are buildings and ... and concrete and ... everything I know.' See Evan Hunter, "Me and Hitch", 'Sight and Sound', June 1997, p. 31.
15. I've no doubt that there's much of the womb about 'at-one-ness' ...
16. 'Monthly Film Bulletin', August 1975, p. 187. The idealising of the womb is probably again not very far away here.

Two lists

If you're like us, you always appreciate an authoritative list of 'best' or 'outstanding' anything! Here are two such lists which caught our eye recently. Author Craig Thomas has published 17 bestselling thrillers, including 'Firefox' (1977).

Craig Thomas's choice of classic thrillers

William Wilkie Collins's 'The Woman in White' (1860)
 Victor Hugo's 'Les Misérables' (1862)
 John Buchan's 'Mr Standfast' (1919)
 Raymond Chandler's 'The Big Sleep' (1939)
 John le Carré's 'The Spy Who Came in from the Cold' (1963)
 Frederick Forsythe's 'The Day of the Jackal' (1971)
 Hammond Innes's 'The White South' (1971)

10 stage thrillers

W.W. Jacobs's 'The Monkey's Paw' (1903)
 Patrick Hamilton's 'Rope' (1928)
 Joseph Kesselring's 'Arsenic and Old Lace' (1938)
 Patrick Hamilton's 'Gaslight' (1939)
 J.B. Priestley's 'An Inspector Calls' (1944)
 Frederick Knott's 'Dial M For Murder' (1952)
 Frederick Knott's 'Wait Until Dark' (1966)
 Anthony Shaffer's 'Sleuth' (1970)
 Ira Levin's 'Deathtrap' (1978)
 Ariel Dorfman's 'Death and the Maiden' (1992)

OUR BASIC OVERSEAS SUBSCRIPTION RATE is \$22 Aust. (\$18 US) for 4 air-posted issues every 12-15 months. For 4 surface-mailed copies, the rate is \$16 Aust. (\$14 US). Make drafts, etc. payable to 'The MacGuffin'. AUSTRALIAN SUBSCRIBERS please pay \$16 for 4 issues. THE BASIC OVERSEAS BACK-ISSUE RATE is \$6 (Aust. or US) per air-mailed copy (1-3 copies). Otherwise, \$5 (Aust. or US) per air-mailed copy (4 or more copies), \$4 (Aust. or US) per surface-mailed copy (at least 4 copies please). BACK-ISSUES IN AUSTRALIA are \$5 each. Some past 'MacGuffins' have featured *The Trouble With Harry* (issue 21), *The Wrong Man* (20), *Vertigo* (17, 11, 1), *Foreign Correspondent* (16), *Spellbound* (15), Thomas Elsaesser on "The Dandy in Hitchcock" (14), *Young and Innocent* (13), *The Paradine Case* (12), *Notorious* (10), *The Lady Vanishes* (9), and *Torn Curtain* (8). These are the issues most recommended. Write or email for more information. NB: issue 18 is permanently out-of-print.

ODD SPOT: THE LONG MEMORY

One more indication of Hitchcock's 'almost scientific' approach to preparing his films concerns the memorable wink Blanche (Barbara Harris) gives the camera at the end of *Family Plot* (1976), a film about kidnapping and diamonds.

As noted in previous 'MacGuffins' (11 and 16), a director whose work Hitchcock admired, and occasionally borrowed from, was William Dieterle, who came to Hollywood from Germany at the start of the sound era. And one of Hitchcock's most-admired *actors* in early sound films was the debonair William Powell (see Sidney Gottlieb, ed., 'Hitchcock on Hitchcock', 1995, pp. 90-91).

In 1932, Dieterle directed Powell in a film called *Jewel Robbery*, whose plot suggests a variant on the 'Raffles' stories. Powell's co-star was Kay Francis, who plays the noblewoman who falls in love with Powell after she finds him robbing her safe.

At the end of the film she gets her man. Whereupon, she looks directly at the camera - and winks.

[Thanks to Steven L. DeRosa who suggested this 'Odd Spot'.]

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