



Newsletter of the Film/Alfred Hitchcock Special Interest Group

The MacGuffin

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EDITORIAL

First, a welcoming message to new readers. If you even half-way like what you see in this issue, perhaps you'll recommend us to your film buff friends. We're a growing concern, but it's safe to say that the growth will take a little while.

In the meantime, I guess that leaves the rest of us on a moderately cosy basis. Which is my nice way of saying that subscriptions, and accompanying letters, haven't been as numerous lately as I'd hoped. But thanks to those of you who did write. You know who you are. People like Don Gilbert in Illinois. Don sent in a review from the 'Chicago Tribune' of a new novel by noted author Stanley Elkin. The book's title? 'The MacGuffin'!

As the review explains, a MacGuffin is Alfred Hitchcock's term for something that exists solely to move along the plot. Elkin suggests it could be "whatever got slipped into Cary Grant's pocket ... or that Jimmy Stewart picked up by mistake when the girl switched briefcases on him". Yes, and let's recall that our newsletter is aptly named 'The MacGuffin' if it facilitates our enjoyment of watching movies.

So ... some good news. We've several new contributors this issue. To those of you who already know Irene Radek from reading her lively film column in the Mensa 'International Journal', she needs no introduction. But did you also know that Irene writes for the Canadian Mensa magazine 'MC²', where she doubles as its Entertainment Editor? She's a genuine film enthusiast with a wealth of experience - and I'm elated that she will be contributing 'Radek Reviews' regularly to these pages.

Also in this issue is an authoritative introduction to books available in English on the Japanese cinema. Its written by an academic, Freda Freiberg, who is no stranger to film archives around the world, including Japan. (For readers who'd like an introduction to Indian cinema and the books available, there's a thumb-nail sketch of that topic in our 'Film Reviews' section, which this issue is devoted to Asian films.)

And my thanks to Lisa Beglinger, editor of 'BookworMs', the newsletter of the American Mensa Bibliophile SIG. From that publication I've 'lifted' Lisa's review of 'Hooked' by critic Pauline Kael. It seemed fitting to do so in the light of Ms Kael's recently-announced retirement (see 'News').

Hitchcock fans are catered for by two items: a review of Lesley Brill's fascinating book, 'The Hitchcock Romance', and the first of an occasional series of articles on real-life murder cases that inspired Hitchcock films - this time the Jack the Ripper case and Hitchcock's silent classic, The Lodger.

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In the first 'MacGuffin' I said that our newsletter has minimal philosophy, and gave my reasons (among them, my wariness of abstract principles). I think that's still true, but in preparing this issue I've noticed a certain editorial tendency which I'll try and share with you. In a word, it's this. I prefer filmmakers, and critics, to acknowledge and respect the reality of the world, rather than turn their backs on it. Fine, you say. But what is that reality? Well, at the risk of sounding melodramatic, I think it involves what Hitchcock (in talking of people's complacency in The Birds) called "the catastrophe that surrounds us all".

For instance, you've probably noticed that May has been a particularly bad month for natural disasters - so

much so, that organisers of relief appeals have been talking of "compassion fatigue". But such disasters represent only a small part of the human - and animal - suffering that occurs every day. What I'm trying to say in limited space is that realism seems to me akin to what the great writer Thomas Hardy called "pessimism", namely, "what is really only a reasoned view ... deduced from facts unflinchingly observed". And it involves precisely the acknowledgement of reality I mentioned above. I think it's Hitchcock's brand of realism, as it was the philosopher Schopenhauer's - and I think it's exemplary.

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Enough of that. As you read this 'MacGuffin' you may see its application to some of the points made. Write and let me know your views. And note that Irene Radek would also like to hear from you about her column.

Our next issue will feature Psycho. It should break new ground. Now, I hear there's a new book out about the making of Psycho. Though I haven't seen it yet, I'd welcome receiving a review - say, just a few lines of description and a general impression. Any takers?

Finally, a note to overseas subscribers or, rather, intending overseas subscribers. I've had to introduce the option whereby you can receive your newsletter by either air or surface mail. If you choose the latter, the subscription rate remains the same as before. For details, see inside.

To everyone, good viewing.



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LETTERS

Christopher Brookhouse, 'Hitchcock Annual', P.O. Box 540, Gambier, Ohio 43022, USA

I am looking for serious articles about any aspect of Hitchcock's work. I am open to almost any approach.

Articles, of any length, should be submitted on hardcopy. Accepted work must be provided on disk for preparing camera-ready copy. At the moment I have one accepted piece.

Any help from your readership will be appreciated.

(Editor's note. This sounds exciting! I've already earmarked the price of my subscription.)

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V. Sarada Holt, Bordentown, New Jersey, USA

Thank you for 'The MacGuffin'! I was pleasantly surprised to see my article in there, and I liked the whole publication. I thought it was fairly well-balanced, actually.

The Academy Awards were last night. I can't stand Award ceremonies. The dancing, singing and bad jokes are not worth staying up for. And they usually only nominate and award things which are relatively mainstream. I haven't seen most of the nominees or winners. I do want to see Dances With Wolves, though. I was pleased that a ten-minute student film won Best Short Film. It gives me hope!

(Editor's note. Speaking of awards, Sarada mentions that she's won a valuable scholarship to attend Drew University. Well done, Sarada! I bet everyone's beaming at your place!)

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Don Gilbert, 255 S. West Ave, Elmhurst, IL 60126, USA, (708) 941-7348

I think your 'MacGuffin' is terrific! Hope you can keep it up by receiving many subscribers.

You may be receiving letters/articles from me when I can catch up with a multitude of tasks. I have almost all of Hitch's movies on VHS tape. What do you think of his 'Australian' film, Under Capricorn (Bergman and Cotten)?

Suggestion: you might publish a list of members' names, addresses, phone numbers, by way of encouraging correspondence among ourselves.

(Editor's reply. Thanks, Don. I think Under Capricorn, despite some perfunctory scripting, is under-rated by many people. But Lesley Brill's recent book on Hitch, reviewed this issue, should help correct that. As for your other point, though it's not regular policy I'd be happy to publish addresses, etc., where people indicate that they're agreeable.)

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NEWS

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

Hand over the cash ...

Hitchcock enthusiasts are familiar with double agent George Blake, whose escape from Wormwood Scrubs prison and flight to Moscow in 1966 were the basis for the screenplay The Short Night. In 1980 Hitchcock was preparing to film the screenplay when he died.

There have been numerous books about the Blake case, and at least one completed feature film (John Huston's The Mackintosh Man, made in 1973). The latest book is called 'The Blake Escape: How We Freed George Blake and Why' by two friends, Patrick Pottle and Michael Randle. In payment, they received £30,000 from their publisher.

Now the British courts have ruled that the money constitutes "a benefit of the offence" and must be forfeited. The decision is in line with a 1977 New York direction which required crooks who write books to give their royalties to the victims of the crime (its most recent ruling coming down hard on Mafia man Henry Hill, whose 'Wiseguy' was filmed by Martin Scorsese as GoodFellas).

Vale David Lean (1908-1991)

David Freeman's screenplay of The Short Night (see above) was published some years ago with a suitable introduction by its author. Perhaps Robert Bolt may be persuaded to do likewise with the screenplay of Nostromo, now that its intended director, the celebrated David Lean, is dead.

Joseph Conrad's pessimistic masterpiece (1904) was the work on which Lean wanted to end his career: it would have been his first film since A Passage to India in 1984. Sets had been built at Nice, most of the \$US45 million funding was in place, three directors including Arthur Penn were being paid to keep their diaries open should Lean's health fail during filming. Sadly, Lean became ill in January with the film still in pre-production.

The best Lean Films (Brief Encounter, Great Expectations, Lawrence of Arabia) are themselves minor masterpieces of imagination and dark - but not noir - vision. Critics who see in them only his, and Bolt's, painstaking craftsmanship overlook that simple fact. An important creative partnership has ended.

A critic retires

Afflicted with what she calls "a bum heart", Pauline Kael has retired, age 72, after serving more than two decades as film critic on 'The New Yorker'.

Besides concern over her health, Kael cited the current state of the American film industry as a reason for her getting out now: "I was not eager to see another Oliver Stone movie".

Although there are still many fine film critics writing in America, the situation as far as public influence goes is now likely to see a further shift from the print media to the television reviewers, notably Gene Siskel and Roger Ebert, who reach the most people with their "two thumbs up, two thumbs down" brand of movie endorsement.

Pauline Kael's 1989 book, 'Hooked', is reviewed below. Here are a couple more of her post-1989 pronouncements.

On Robert De Niro in Awakenings: "He does the tics and jiggles well. It's in the quiet moments that he's particularly bad. People get the idea that someone is a great actor and it takes them decades to shake it off."

On this year's Academy Award nominations, and Dances With Wolves in particular: "I don't think I've ever seen a worst bunch of candidates [for Best Picture] ... Dances With Wolves is a nature-boy movie, a kid's daydream of being an Indian. Costner has feathers in his hair and feathers in his head."

There goes that rare commodity, an independent thinker.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Kael, Pauline: 'Hooked' (E.P.Dutton, 1989)

'Hooked' is an anthology of film reviewer Pauline Kael's work, taken from the pages of 'The New Yorker' circa 1985-88. Her book came to me serendipitously, as an overstock bargain in my local bookstore; I recognised Kael's name from Harlan Ellison's 'Harlan Ellison's Watching'. Mr Ellison expresses a lot of respect for the lady in his eclectic, quirky, and endlessly fascinating book, so I thought, why not? Why not indeed? While Siskel and Ebert bicker on like a couple of quarrelsome married folk, Ms Kael expresses some surprising, less often voiced insights into popular culture, as portrayed on the big screen. Ruthlessly, she shoots down such mega-hits as Dirty Dancing (a shallow, masturbatory coming-of-age fantasy for girls), Fatal Attraction (watch out for those mean, crazy, single career gals), and The Colour Purple (an expurgated, no-guts adaptation of the original novel, that succeeds only in completely vilifying the male gender). It is with genuine surprise that I note Ms Kael is 72 years of age, indicting myself of ageism, I'm sure, but her writing is so very topical and fresh that the "image" it inspired for me was more that of a thoughtful baby boomer. I also note, with some sorrow, that Ms Kael has recently retired from regular reviewing in 'The New Yorker', after 23 years of faithful service. It's like making a new friend and then finding out she's leaving town.

Lisa Beglinger

Brill, Lesley: 'The Hitchcock Romance: Love and Irony in Hitchcock's Films' (Princeton University Press, 1988; hardcover)

When Hitchcock told a BBC interviewer,¹ "reality is something none of us can stand", was he being a romantic or a realist?

Hard to say, but I'd suggest both. On the other hand, I can't see Lesley Brill arguing anything but one way. Professor Brill, like Francois Truffaut, believes that Hitchcock was "essentially a romantic".

He points out that many of Hitchcock's characters seek a lost innocence, though he would distinguish between the "romantic" and the "ironic" films:

In the majority of [Hitchcock's] works, the conventions of happy fairy tales ... lead to conclusions in which central lovers live more or less happily ever after. In the ironic movies, romantic expectations are raised only to be disappointed.

By "ironic", he means simply "cynical" or "not romantic": thus, from the start, questions of realism or truth-to-life are conveniently excluded. (A small flaw in a delightful book, it might seem, but one with consequences.) When Brill does turn to the real world, he usually covers it in an elegant phrase or two.

For instance, it's revealing that he particularly likes The Trouble With Harry (1955), which we're told is the one Hitchcock film to exclude "the stained and vulnerable condition of humanity". We're reminded that the characters in this pastoral comedy live in a near-Edenic state where even the troublesome - and dead - Harry Worp is a "benign" corpse. Just a warp in life's woodwork, so to speak.

Still, Harry's case is also illuminating in other ways. To this reviewer, the film fits snugly into an English pastoral tradition. Its cheery spirit gives it a position, vis-à-vis Hitchcock's other work, not unlike the relation of the country scenes in Dickens's 'Pickwick Papers' to the rest of that tale, filled with law courts, prisons and genuinely ironic misunderstandings.² Further, at times in both works hints of renewal and resurrection fill the air. Brill notes of Harry that even sheriff Calvin Wiggs "restores antique automobiles - brings them back, as it were, to life".³

Appropriately, the events of the film take place in New England. Brill believes they express the essential dream behind all Hitchcock's work, a dream of people complete and fulfilled, and justice prevailing without the rigidity and inaccuracy of law.⁴ He easily explains why Hitchcock needed to make only one such parable of an unfallen world: "Virtue, as diverse thinkers have argued in various ways, has few forms; error has many."

Now, a key film to dwell on "error", as opposed to "virtue", is Vertigo (1958). This of course is a very "ironic" work indeed. No renewal or resurrection here: all signs of its possibility have become just further reminders of "the irremediable human condition". We are back in the (to me, Schopenhauerian) world of suffering and limitation. Thus, on the role of art and its analogues in Vertigo, Brill notes:

Most two-dimensional art - the "Portrait of Carlotta" and Hitchcock's Vertigo, say - have the same constraints as a conventional silhouette; it can show only one side of things, 180 or 360 degrees.

Brill means that art can show only surfaces - even when, say, the Vertigo camera is suggestively tracking around the mysterious Judy/Madeleine (who is also in a sense both "Carlotta" and Kim Novak). He adds that the function of mirrors in the film is to "remind us of the other side. They warn us of the incompleteness of what we can see directly."

Again this is Schopenhauerian, through and through. As it's an important point, I'll let Dr Oliver Sacks ('Awakenings') put the matter expertly:

Schopenhauer's thesis is that the world presents itself to us under two aspects - as Will and [Representation] - and that these two aspects are always distinct and always conjoined; that they totally embrace, or inform, one another. To speak in terms of either alone is to lay oneself open to a destructive duality, to the impossibility of constructing a meaningful world ...

Happily, as Sacks brilliantly shows, words like "plan" and "design", with their duplex meanings, have the power to unite hidden structure and immediate intent - though some scientists may not own it. Brill, also brilliantly, tells us how Scottie in Vertigo strives to know the truth but is blocked from his "profounder knowledge" by ratiocination: "what he discovers deductively gives him only another surface understanding". Audiences sense the solution, that Scottie should "accept a loving intuition, but both times [when that appears imminent] the chance is snuffed by an immediately subsequent event". Brill's conclusion is sombre: "Nothing seems possible in Vertigo, and only nothing."⁵

It's not without bathos, then, that round about here Brill falls into the same trap as Scottie (and the scientists mentioned by Dr Sacks). I hinted earlier at the book's conceptual flaw. Now, because of Brill's obligation to his theoretical framework (adapted from Northrop Frye), his "profounder knowledge" momentarily deserts him and he attributes Vertigo's tragic outcome to mere Hitchcockian perversity: the director on this occasion was making an "ironic" work, the polar opposite of "romance".

Other Vertigo commentators, like Robin Wood and Tania Modleski, fall back on psychology to explain what the film is ultimately about. It's likely that theirs is a more vital approach than Brill's, but I want to stick my neck out and suggest that all these specific explanations can be subordinated, in a relevant and real sense, to Schopenhauerian metaphysics - and that's especially my feeling after reading Brill's book.

Let me put it like this. It's well and good that a particular interpretation (Wood's)⁶ shows how birth trauma lie at the root of Scottie's inability to accept Madeleine - and the "loving intuition" Brill says she holds out - but where does that leave us? Still out in the cold, surely. We must watch from afar as the great universal theme which Dr Sacks calls "tribulation" is raised only to be explained away - precisely the sort of thing Madeleine would protest against.⁷ On the other hand, not only does Schopenhauer provide a comprehensive explanation of "tribulation" which is empirically based and ethically considered - and looks to me the product of a sensibility very like Hitchcock's - but it's remarkable, in fact, for bearing directly on Vertigo and Hitchcock's work generally.

Quite obviously, I should illustrate all this with numerous and detailed examples. In fact, I have already gone some way to doing so in earlier issues of 'The MacGuffin', and in parts of this review. Here I can only assert that Brill himself time and again describes Hitchcock's work in Schopenhauerian terms. A last illustration will have to do. When Brill's discussion reaches Marnie (1964), he reverts to the theme of art, this time in its curative and harmonising aspects:

What Hitchcock's movies represent is not the flux of ordinary life but the essential meaning underlying that flux, which can be comprehended most universally in the intensifications and stylizations of art.

Regular 'MacGuffin' readers may straight away have spotted how this formulation echoes Schopenhauer's distinction between phenomenon and noumenon, Representation and Will - and (if not straight away!) how it proceeds to recommend something very like his cognitive approach to aesthetics, his theory of forms ...

More to the point, the experience of watching Marnie may indeed put us in touch with an intuition that is clearly eluding the film's characters, and to which both Mark Rutland (in the film) and Schopenhauer respond with their respective calls for "compassion".

* * *

But, as I say, Brill is more committed to Northrop Frye than to Schopenhauer. (Let me be clear. I doubt that he has even read the latter. Certainly I know some professional philosophy lecturers who haven't.) Which raises another matter. Brill insists that while the "romances" display the true Hitchcockian spirit, the "ironic" films merely conceal it. Here I feel that his evidence is slight, even wishful, and that once again he has been ill-served by an either/or approach. There was always a dark side to Hitchcock, just as there was to Dickens. For both artists, it took the form of a "fascination of repulsion", an obsession, with evil ...⁸

It's when Brill treats of The Lodger (1926), in what I take to have been the earliest-conceived part of his book (published separately in at least two previous versions), that you can see the wishful element emerge. This time, he advances his singularly unhelpful theory of a "Persephone myth" running through Hitchcock's work, by which he appears to mean little more than that Hitchcock sometimes linked his heroines to flower imagery: hence (it's suggested) the director conceived the character named Daisy in The Lodger, the blossom design on Eve Kendall's wallpaper in North by Northwest, Madeleine's posy in Vertigo. Brill asserts that the "mythic subfoundation of The Lodger ... the Persephone myth ... testifies to the underlying romantic structure of the movie", but it's far from being clear. And, of course, the association of flowers with female characters can be seen elsewhere (for example, Mai Zetterling's apartment in Alf Sjöberg's Hets). I wish he had taken Occam's razor to the whole conception.

My interpretation of The Lodger is indicated in a separate article (see pp. 15-20). It's time to set about correcting any impression I may have given that Brill's book is anything less than substantial, scholarly in the best sense, and fresh. Reading it was a pleasure, especially for someone who shares its author's liking for certain films sometimes dismissed as being "old-fashioned" or "women's pictures"! By the vigour of his insight into Under Capricorn (1949) and I Confess (1953), in particular, Brill has redeemed them from their unjust reputations as "failed Hitchcock". At times, just a well-turned sentence or two helps do the trick. In Under Capricorn, Hattie and Sam "must overcome not only their personal pasts but the societal past that persists in the infant nation of New South Wales". In I Confess, "Ruth Grandfort must discover not that she loves [Father] Michael, but that she loves Pierre and that her place is with her husband." The latter perceptive comment, on the film's ending, more than compensates for a misleading point Brill makes about Father Logan being denied a straightforward movement "since the opening sequences". In fact, as a Catholic friend of mine once pointed out, there's a crucial scene in the church some distance into the film in which the priest faces down Keller, the murderer, while in full stride. It says everything needful about Father Logan's essential probity and the other man's corruption.

Brill mis-names a couple of characters (from Rope and To Catch a Thief), and twice mis-quotes dialogue. By coincidence, the latter occasions are similar. When Keller taunts Father Logan at the end of I Confess, in terms which Brill says evoke Christ, the pathetic man asks: "What has happened to your friends? They mob you, they call at you!" For "mob", Brill substitutes "martyr". And in Marnie, after the free-association game, Marnie does not exclaim (as Robin Wood's Hitchcock book also has it), "Oh, God, somebody help me." She simply asks, movingly, "Oh, can't somebody help me?"

Whatever its flaws, Brill's remains perhaps the most meritorious and unassuming of all the critical studies of Hitchcock so far. Definitely one for readers of 'The MacGuffin' to own and enjoy.

K.M.

Notes

1. Huw Wheldon, in a discussion reported in 'The Listener' that dealt principally with The Trouble With Harry.
2. "Irony" is defined in Chambers Dictionary as "a situation or utterance (as in a tragedy) that has a significance unperceived at the time, or by the person involved"; "a condition in which one seems to be mocked by fate or the facts".
3. The Hitchcock film seems to allude to 'Pickwick' by having an elderly character constantly address a younger one as "Sammy" - shades of Mr Weller and son. It's worth noting that 'Pickwick' was Dickens's first book, the remarkable 'The Mystery of Edwin Drood' his last. Both invite thematic comparison with Hitchcock's Harry and Family Plot respectively, using the sort of analysis Brill applies to those films.
4. Compare Schopenhauer's concept of "eternal justice", as opposed to "temporal justice", which I described in an article on Vertigo in 'MacGuffin' 1.
5. Perhaps Brill should have recalled that in Marnie Mark Rutland (Sean Connery) mis-quotes some lines from Emerson, part of a passage which reads, "So nigh is grandeur to our dust,/ So near is God to man ..." To which he might compare, with Scottie and the Vertigo audience in mind, the famous last page of Schopenhauer's 'The World as Will and Representation', Vol. 1, which reads in part: "we freely acknowledge that what remains after the complete abolition of the will is, for all who are still full of the will, assuredly nothing ..."
6. Wood's 1983 article, "Fear of Spying", reprinted in 'A Hitchcock Reader' (1986) as "Male Desire, Male Anxiety".
7. Madeleine in the film protests only - or so it seems - against "explaining away" Carlotta's reincarnation in herself. In fact, I think the viewer feels something much more comprehensive is at stake.

8. The phrase "fascination of repulsion" is Dickens's own. I should point out that Brill somewhat eases up on the "Hitchcock was a romantic" line by the end of his Vertigo/Psycho chapter. I can accept the following: "Hitchcock, like most of us, must have fervently hoped that rebirth in love should be the way of things, and dreaded that it might not be."

Erratum

I apologise to readers, and the author of the book, for an error in my review last issue of Professor Praver's 'Caligari's Children'. By mistake, I said that the book draws no connection between The Cabinet of Dr Caligari and the works of the writer, E.T.A. Hoffmann. In fact, it makes the connection in some detail. I mis-read my 2-month-old notes.

K.M.

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FILM REVIEWS

(Future issues of 'The MacGuffin' will carry brief reviews of non-current films. To set the ball rolling, we look this time at three Asian movies. The first of them is itself an introduction to the wonderful world of the Indian cinema.)

'Cinema Cinema' (1979)

Krishna Shah's 2½-hour compilation of clips from Bombay movies provides an introduction to Indian film history that is undeniably entertaining. The director himself appears at the start to note that India turns out "the most films in the world. Every year 550 films are made for an outlay of 880 million rupees".

Shah calls Bombay "India's Hollywood". (He should know. He has worked in both places.) He adds: "India's Hollywood has all that America's Hollywood has. Film stars, sex, glamour and wealth. You'll find jealousy, gossip and, most importantly, the audience. 70 million viewers every week ..."

The 'gimmick' of Shah's film is to show us a 'typical' Bombay audience reacting to the various clips. And react they do. At times some of the spectators become almost as volatile as an Indian (or Pakistani) sports crowd.

But the films are the thing. We learn all the usual facts. The typical Indian movie can be four or five hours long, and include song, dance and comic segments whose relation to the film's storyline is minimal. There may be many such 'interludes' in a given movie - one film had 60 songs. On the other hand, Indian films are made in diverse genres which are often based on overseas models. Until recently, there was no kissing allowed in Indian films.

Importantly, the audiences are well versed in the ancient myths and stories that underlie many of the movie plots. They also bone up on their favourite stars and directors in the various fan magazines and serious film journals.

One thing I missed in Cinema Cinema was any commentary on Indian filmmaking's 'rules' and codes. Just as with India's music, so with its cinema, there exist recognised 'moods' and shifts of narrative tone. The performers use a quite definite language of expression, gesture, costuming, etc., which means that western viewers may need some help to appreciate the true craft involved.

K.M.

* Here's an update on the statistics in Krishna Shah's film. In 1990, some 948 feature films were produced in India, a figure that doesn't include documentaries and TV films. More than half of the total, about 500 films, were made in Madras. Bombay's share in production appears to have slipped a bit.

★★ Readers who would like in-depth information about Indian cinema are referred to such publications as Eric Barnouw and S. Krishnaswamy's 'Indian Film' (2nd edition, 1980), Paul Willemen and Behroze Gandhi's 'Indian Cinema' (British Film Institute dossier), and Andrew Robinson's recent biography of India's leading director, 'Satyajit Ray: The Inner Eye' (Andre Deutsch).

'My Memories of Old Beijing' (1982)

Made about a year before the first 'modern' Chinese film, Yellow Earth, this one (d. Wu Yigong) couldn't be more different. Or could it? Certainly a nostalgia piece, as its title implies, it nevertheless reflects a freedom that Chinese cinema hadn't always known - or reached for.

An old woman, Lin Yingzi, remembers the Beijing of her childhood: the camels in the street, the reputedly mad lady sorrowing for the baby daughter who was taken from her, the thief hiding in the overgrown grounds of a deserted house. But behind these details others are implied, some tragic. References to student demonstrations and bloody government intervention eerily anticipate the recent events of Tiananmen Square.

Altogether, the film manages to be both multi-levelled and warmly evocative, one of the most appealing about childhood since Hollywood's To Kill a Mockingbird and the best of the British Dickens adaptations. Winner of the Grand Prix at the 1983 Manila Film Festival.

K.M.

A Taxing Woman (1987)

A divorcée invests her considerable energies in her job as an Inspector for the Japanese National Tax Agency. A fun film, which I couldn't turn off (watching it on TV). Has some of the entertaining sadism and seamless construction of Rear Window: we watch the tax lady land both small fry and big fish, the latter not without a struggle. Another of the film's likely forebears is Kurosawa's High and Low whose pace and verve (and name of a major character) it shares. It's a further fine study of contemporary Japanese mores by Juzo Itami, son of famous director Mansaku Itami.

K.M.

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Japanese Film: The Basic Books

(Editor's note. Here's an expert description of the major books on Japanese cinema available in English, with an indication of the usefulness, and limitations, of each. A list of the books follows the article.)

The Japanese film industry is immensely indebted to author Donald Richie for the work he has done to popularise and elucidate Japanese cinema abroad. For two decades (from 1959-1979) the literature on Japanese film was dominated by his publications on the industry, its products, and his favourite directors (Ozu and Kurosawa). Longtime resident of Tokyo, aficionado of both traditional and avant garde theatre in Japan, and a Japanese film buff, he is now a familiar personality at international film festivals, presenting retrospective packages of Japanese films and introducing unknown new Japanese directors to eager audiences. Many of us first encountered Japanese cinema through a combination of festival screenings and Richie's books; it was his particular enthusiasms that guided the acquisition and distribution of Japanese films in the English-speaking world up to the 1980s.

Richie's first major publication, 'The Japanese Film: Art and Industry', co-authored with Joseph Anderson, remains the standard work in English on Japanese film history. The book is in two parts. The first part offers a chronological account of the Japanese industry from 1900-1960. For the last three decades (1930-1960), chapters on industrial history in a particular period are interspersed with chapters describing

the films themselves. The second part provides a series of essays on the content, technique, directors, stars and audiences of Japanese film. These essays constitute a general introduction to the classic Japanese cinema for the uninitiated western viewer. As a whole, the book provides a great deal of information on industrial history, based on empirical but undocumented research, in the form of a continuous readable narrative; an introduction to the major Japanese film personalities (up to 1960); and capsule descriptions of a great number of films. The revised version, published in 1982, contains two appendices, in the form of essays by the two authors, and an extensive bibliography. Anderson's appended 'thoughts' cover three topics: the role played by the benshi, the narrator who accompanied silent films; some reasons for the distinctive flavour of movies made at the Shochiku Company's studio in Kamata; and the effects of television on the film industry. Richie's appended essay attempts to update the book by offering a summary account of Japanese film production in the two decades (1960-1980) after the original book was published.

Other Richie books of the 60s and 70s were less concerned with history than with (i) explicating the cultural differences which may produce barriers to the western viewer's appreciation of Japanese film; and (ii) promoting the international status of Kurosawa and Ozu as great film artists. In his attempt to make Japanese cinema more accessible, Richie functioned as a populariser and promoter rather than a scholar, so some of his earlier pronouncements may now make Japanese studies (and cinema studies) experts cringe. He sometimes sounds patronising towards Japanese people and Japanese culture; and his liberal humanist approach to cinema, especially his praise for the realism and universal truths of Ozu and Kurosawa, now carries an anachronistic ring.

During the 70s in the United States and Britain, feminist film criticism emerged as a forceful challenge to traditional approaches to the cinema, and in 1976 the American feminist Joan Mellen published 'The Waves at Genji's Door' which surveys the Japanese cinema from an ideological perspective. It remains the only book on Japanese cinema to critically examine the films' representation of women, and offers a provocative challenge to the almost universal acclaim of Ozu and Kurosawa by drawing attention to the patriarchal ideology in their films. The book, which describes and discusses many films by many different directors at great length, is organised around themes - the representation of Japanese history, the Second World War, the family, women, political protest - and the work of particular directors - Kurosawa, Mizoguchi, Naruse, Imai, Hani, Imamura, Ozu, Ichikawa, Oshima. The author reads Japanese cinema as social comment, assessing films and directors on a radical-progressive-conservative scale, according to where they stand in relation to traditional Japanese society and its values. Her readings of films are very polemical; some critics have found them reductive, for she does not allow for different and varied viewer responses in different and varied historical and social conditions. Like the Japanese New Wave directors, whom she particularly admires, she is very quick to identify and excoriate feudalistic, militaristic and ultranationalistic tendencies in Japanese society and culture.

However, Mellen's work was soon overshadowed by that of Noël Burch, whose 'To the Distant Observer' (1979) constitutes the most ambitious re-writing of Japanese film history and the most impressive theorisation of the Japanese cinema to date. Influenced by post-structuralist French cultural theory, and owing a particular debt to Barthes, the author reads the Japanese cinema as 'other' to the mainstream western cinema, in its preoccupation with surface rather than depth, with decentered rather than centered composition, with presentational rather than representational action. He relates this 'other' filmic tradition to a 'unique' Japanese aesthetic tradition, and a uniquely homogeneous culture. Unlike Anderson and Richie, who tend to read Japanese film history as showing a gradual improvement from primitive beginnings to full artistic maturity in the 50s, and then steady decline following the introduction of television, Burch locates the Golden Age of Japanese cinema in the late 30s and early 40s, the time when Japan was most isolated from the West and its films least contaminated by western codes of filmmaking.

Although he propounds a theory of the essential difference of Japanese cinema as a whole, Burch singles out the familiar masters (Ozu, Mizoguchi, Kurosawa and Oshima) for special attention. But he concentrates on the formal rather than the thematic components of their work, and in the process perversely dismisses some of their acclaimed masterpieces in favour of his own revised list. His book is impressive - and unique among the histories of Japanese film - in two ways: (i) in its rigorous application of a (contemporary western) theoretical framework; and (ii) in its close attention to the formal construction of particular films. At the same time, it shares with neo-formalist criticism generally an obsession with how films are constructed, and a corresponding lack of interest in what the films are about. Furthermore, Burch's radical

aesthetic politics would seem to fit comfortably with an isolationist nationalist politics, and with all the associated arguments about the essential difference and uniqueness of the Japanese (people, language, culture and society).

By the 80s, viewers and scholars in the West began to question the practice of academic orientalism, and to express the desire to hear the voices of native informants. Richie and Mellen quote extensively from interviews with Japanese directors in order to align their readings of films with authorial intentions, but do not give much credence to Japanese film critics. Burch claims that the very notion of theory is alien to Japan (Preface, p.13) and only occasionally draws on indigenous views to support his argument. Audie Bock is the sole western critic who has made extensive use of Japanese critical literature. For her 1978 book, 'Japanese Film Directors', a survey of the lives and work of ten major Japanese directors from three generations, she researched the leading Japanese film journals ('Kinema Jumbo' and 'Eiga Hyoron') and consulted a large number of Japanese books. (Apart from giving a voice to Japanese criticism, Bock's book is a useful reference on another count: it provides a detailed filmography for all the directors she covers.) Her choice of directors is wider than the usual canon, embracing a diversity of filmmakers like Naruse, Kinoshita, Ichikawa and Shinoda, as well as the familiar list of great masters.

The only Japanese film critic who has been translated into English is Sato Tadao. Now almost a national treasure, Sato is the most prolific and most respected of postwar film critics in Japan. His 'Currents in Japanese Cinema', published in 1982 in Gregory Barrett's translated and edited version, is a collection of essays, largely from his 1970 publication, 'Nihon Eiga Shiso-shi', on a great many themes and genres in Japanese film. A film buff with wide tastes and generous sympathies, Sato writes in an impressionistic and journalistic, rather than an academic, style. In this book, he tends to read films as indices to social trends and reflections of Japanese society and culture. Widely read and self educated, Sato promotes himself as a supporter of popular culture, a man of the people, in contrast to élitist academic critics. Unfortunately the academic critics have not been translated into English so readers outside Japan have not had the opportunity to compare his work with theirs.

Keiko McDonald, who teaches Japanese literature and film at the University of Pittsburgh, gives an exegetic reading of 12 Japanese film classics from the 50s and 60s in her 1983 publication, 'Cinema East'. Designed for use with American university students, her discussion focuses on cultural information designed to elucidate the 'foreign' aspects of these films, and make them accessible and enjoyable. She offers a detailed exposition of the films' narratives, themes, symbolism, social significance, sources (many of her chosen films are literary adaptations) and ultimate meanings. She positions herself as a native informant with the key to the correct interpretation of each film.

Sato's enthusiasm for the New Left and the films of Oshima is shared by David Desser, an American academic who recently published a book on the Japanese New Wave cinema of the 60s, with evocative chapter headings borrowed from film titles. Desser is concerned to bring historical specificity to his account of the New Wave, locating it in its social context and explicating the political allusions and significances of the films. He criticises Burch for his over-emphasis on film form, and propounds the need to analyse the radical content as well as the radical form of New Wave films.

However, the last word emanates from the formalist camp. David Bordwell is probably the most systematic and most prolific scholar today on the history of film form. Some time ago he published journal articles on the formal idiosyncracies of the films of Mizoguchi and Ozu; now he has produced the definitive study of Ozu's work. Alongside the analytical rigour of his arguments and his exhaustive attention to formal detail, Richie's and Sato's studies of Ozu pale into a waffle of biographical anecdotes and woolly responses. Bordwell's work is formidably precise and systematic. As a neo-formalist, he shares with Burch a preoccupation with close formal analysis, but disagrees with Burch's culturalist thesis. Bordwell links Ozu's work to the racy international popular culture of Taisho-period Japan (1912-1925) rather than to a high cultural and purely Japanese aesthetic tradition; and finds him a unique artist rather than a representative Japanese figure. He stresses Ozu's formal playfulness, and dismisses his thematic material (nostalgia for the past, the impermanence of things) as rehashed clichés rather than meaningful philosophical or spiritual statements.

Doubtless the debates on Ozu will continue, as his work seems to provide an endless source of fascination for film scholars. For my part, I hope that the existence of an Ozu industry, and the preoccupation with the 'great masters', the artist-directors, will not preclude research and publications on other popular Japanese films and on other aspects of the prolific Japanese film industry, which remain under-researched.

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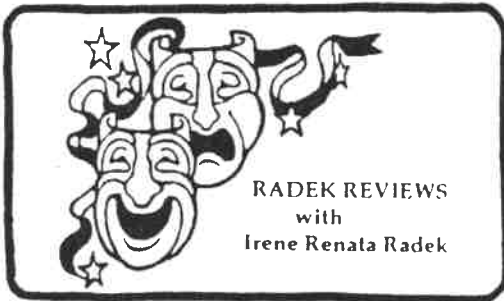
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The allusiveness of Psycho; classic Hollywood composers; book reviews (e.g. 'Acting in the Cinema'). Plus all the usual features, including 'News' and 'Radek Reviews'.

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1. "SILENCE IS GOLDEN" Jonathan Demme's The Silence of the Lambs evokes the silence of the audience - a hypnotic, horrified silence overwhelmed by the atrocities of mankind. Based on Thomas Harris's novel, Silence is darkly deranged, weirdly wonderful, with a performance by Anthony Hopkins that will surely go down in movie history.

Chief Crawford of the Behavioural Science Unit at Quantico, Virginia's FBI Academy, assigns trainee Clarice Starling to solicit the help of imprisoned psychiatrist/murderer, Dr Hannibal "The Cannibal" Lecter, in finding clues to the

identity of serial killer Buffalo Bill. Bill's predilection for skinning his young overweight female victims is akin to Hannibal's cannibalistic tendencies.

In a memorably mesmerising performance, Anthony Hopkins (The Bounty) creates the epitome of evil - a demented devil with a deceptively urbane side. If Hannibal didn't regularly spout monstrous obscenities, he'd seem perfectly in place at high tea with the Queen Mother.

An undeniable argument for the death penalty, Hannibal dines on his victims, necessitating a horrendously barbaric mouthpiece and restraints whenever humans are within his gluttonous reach.

The obvious (but wrong) choice for Hannibal was Jack Nicholson, but Nicholson could easily have made Hannibal into a joke ... "Heeeere's Hannibal ...!"

Jodie Foster (Oscar winner for The Accused) creates Clarice with equal doses of vulnerability and tough confidence, alternating easily and honestly between the two extremes. Foster's only problem is her tendency to mumble (a fairly common malady for actors lacking a theatrical background); occasionally Clarice's dialogue is all but lost.

FBI boss Jack Crawford is played with warm intelligence by the oft-menacing Scott Glenn (the guy who drank the worm in Urban Cowboy). Cinema's FBI-guys are usually portrayed as bumbling cartoon cutouts so it's refreshing to see Glenn creating a 3-dimensional human of considerable charm.

Ted Levine (Betrayed) portrays ghoulish transvestite serial-killer Buffalo Bill. Levine looks innocuously like the guy next door when he wants to but his transformation into bloodcurdling Bill absolutely makes your skin crawl. And inspires you to take a closer look at your till-now benign neighbour ...

The Silence plot twists and turns like a terrifying carnival ride - the seemingly obvious becomes the totally unpredictable. It's anything but the now-commonplace and tediously over-used just-when-you-think-it's-over-someone-gets-grabbed ending.

The relationship between Clarice and Hannibal fascinates. You can almost feel Hannibal penetrating her mind, teasing her thoughts and memories with his piercing vision.

On the downside, the Silence sound mixers will definitely not bring Oscar home for this one. In various vital scenes, ominous rumbling and melodramatic humming obliterate whatever dialogue Foster's mumbling hasn't already obscured. (Try to see Silence with someone who's read the book.)

If you can remember that the corpses, cannibalism and ikky bugs are only special effects, The Silence of the Lambs is well worth seeing for its entrancing characters created by a very talented cast and for the

fascinating way director Jonathan Demme (Married to the Mob) keeps his audience steadily off-balance and collectively spellbound.

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2. "DR JEKYLL AND MR CLEAN" Joseph Ruben's Sleeping With the Enemy will keep you up at night. Though some of its scenarios are a little too convenient, this is a surprisingly tight and talent-filled romance/thriller full of scary suspense and disquieting romance. Based on Nancy Friday's bestseller, Enemy is a praiseworthy showcase for new talent - and a great argument for staying single.

Sweet, submissive Laura Burney (Julia Roberts) is married to obsessively fastidious Martin (Patrick Bergin). After 4 years of torturous mental and physical abuse, Laura plans her own 'death' and daring escape to the Midwest where she will start a new life. That is, if she can break the chains of her past ...

I'd never been overly impressed with Julia Roberts's acting ability but, as Laura/Sara, Roberts shows true ability in creating a character with whom we can sympathise and for whom we can cheer. Her metamorphosis from fearful battered wife to brave new independent is believably gradual and poignant, achieved in gentle, tentative steps.

However, director Joseph Ruben's decision to have Roberts virtually reenact the famous Pretty Woman costume change montage is imaginative cop-out. In last year's megahit, Roberts tries on high fashion to the tune of "Pretty Woman" as beau-to-be Richard Gere looks on; in Enemy she tries on theatrical costumes to "Brown-Eyed Girl" as beau-to-be Kevin Anderson looks on. It's a light-hearted and very welcome 'intermission' within an otherwise emotionally charged film, but the concept is getting a mite overworked.

Irish actor Patrick Bergin (Mountains of the Moon) is Laura's totally sinister psycho-hubby, Martin. Bergin's so adept at portraying evil (especially with those chilling ice-blue stares!) that Martin seems almost subhuman. And, since it's hard to believe that any human would share Martin's complete lack of redeeming qualities, it's difficult to understand why Laura ever married him ... Could such overwhelming evil remain completely hidden for the entire duration of their courtship? And what about his obsession with cleanliness and order? The guy is Dr Jekyll and Mr Clean! Is love THAT blind?

Conversely, Enemy's good guy is the good-natured, small-town drama prof Ben, portrayed with charming ease by fresh film newcomer Kevin Anderson (small part in In Country). Anderson creates an instantly likable character who is gentle, funny and yes, even sensitive without being a doormat. And, since Anderson is not the typical romantic lead, he comes across as markedly more real and more identifiable.

It's refreshing that Ruben possessed the courage to hire virtual unknowns, Anderson and Bergin. When novices are this talented, they can greatly benefit a film as it's easier to believe in the reality of characters portrayed by unknowns whose real-life preferences and peccadillos aren't featured in the daily news.

Just as Enemy's good and bad guy are unqualified opposites, so are the locations. When Laura is a prisoner in her Cape Cod home, the screen is saturated with cold blues and icy whites. The Burney house, all sharp angles and clean glass, stands completely alone on a barren beach with a turbulent inky ocean beyond. The atmosphere is cold and lonely - just like Laura herself.

But when Laura leaves for Iowa, the colours, like her life, suddenly become warmer and happier: the sky is gold and turquoise, the trees and grass a soft summer green. Laura's cosy cottage is surrounded by similarly welcoming homes - one of which even contains her handsome prince. No subtle symbolism or cinematography here - but the drastic use of colour works well to set Enemy's extreme moods.

Now the bone of contention: since Martin is so obsessed with Laura's every move, how did she manage to squirrel away enough money to buy a bus ticket, clothing, food - and pay rent and deposit on her new home (even if it is a surreal \$700/month!)?

Besides, if I relocated to an unknown town, my neighbours would undoubtedly be a reclusive old spinster with 120 cats (all of which would mistake my lawn for their litter box) and a pack of Hell's Angels who'd rev their Harleys and play AC/DC at full volume 24 hours/day.

Anyhow, what's wrong with this picture? Laura's smart enough to plan a rather complicated escape, yet silly enough to think that a gold ring will flush down the toilet ... oh-kay.

Nevertheless, Sleeping With the Enemy is an alternately sweet and suspenseful study of opposites: good and evil, warm and cold, built upon solidly honest performances. And, of course, a most unforgettable moral (especially for spouse-seekers): Cleanliness is really next to craziness.

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['Radek Reviews' welcomes correspondence. Write to either 'The MacGuffin' (address on back page) or direct to Irene Renata Radek, 3 Louisa Drive, Guelph, Ontario, Canada N1E 4T4.]

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Hitchcock's 'The Lodger': A Theory

[Synopsis of the film. To the shabby but respectable home of Mr and Mrs Bunting in London's West End comes a gentlemanly lodger, seeking quiet. The city has lately been disturbed by a succession of atrocious 'Avenger' murders. All the victims have been blonde girls, and all the murders have occurred in a comparatively small area. Indeed, as further murders are committed, it begins to look as if The Avenger is moving towards the Buntings' very street. Meanwhile, The Lodger has become friendly with the Buntings' daughter, the fair-haired Daisy, notwithstanding that she has a boyfriend already, a policeman named Joe. Joe starts to feel jealous. The day comes when he arrests The Lodger on suspicion of being The Avenger, then hears that the murderer has been caught elsewhere. Daisy marries The Lodger.]

According to biographer Donald Spoto, Hitchcock was prevented from ending The Lodger (1926) "on the ambiguous note he had hoped". It seems the studio bosses wouldn't countenance their star, matinee idol Ivor Novello, playing a villain. So not only does the film's conclusion differ significantly from the novel's, a scene has been added in which the real murderer is reported (though not actually shown) caught "red-handed" in another part of the city.¹

In other words, the film is supposed to establish that The Lodger and The Avenger are two different people. Certainly, most audiences and critics feel it does just that. They accept, like Spoto, that the ending as it stands is unambiguous.

Well, this article will take a contrary view. For a start, I ask the reader to consider the effect of the added scene. There's a movie axiom which says that whatever is shown on screen is real, and whatever is not shown is 'unreal'. The thinking behind it isn't rational, exactly, but it makes emotive sense. By not showing the alleged real murderer, and relying on a mere verbal report, Hitchcock (I suggest) allows some of the doubt that has attended The Lodger to remain.²

Now, it's true that the studio bosses were pleased with the film's so-called 'happy' ending, in which The Lodger turns out to be rich and marries Daisy. And the fact that through a window a neon sign still flashes its message, "Tonight Golden Curls" - a message which has previously foreshadowed the murders of blondes by The Avenger - perhaps only seems to add new ambiguity. (William Rothman feels that it constitutes an ironic reference to the characters' wedding night and "the mystery of the sexual act".) On the other hand, audiences of the time would certainly have noticed the similarity of The Avenger's crimes to those of the infamous Jack the Ripper, and might have been expected to recall the widespread theory that the Ripper was a 'toff', a member of the upper classes ...

Before proceeding, I should say something about the film's commentators. Their attitude is very cautious. First, none of them (to my knowledge) allows the possibility that Hitchcock hoodwinked his producers and that The Lodger, the Novello character, is indeed the wanted murderer, as he is in Mrs Belloc Lowndes's novel.

Second, no Hitchcock critic (again, to my knowledge) has noted and explored the suggestive analogues with Shadow of a Doubt (1943),³ which is in many respects Hitchcock's American version of The Lodger - but a version made for a benign, non-interfering producer, Jack Skirball.⁴ Watching Shadow, the audience becomes aware that the principal character (Joseph Cotten) is the so-called Merry Widow Murderer. The film's police, though, hear that another suspect has died while running away from arrest, and conclude that he is the guilty party. Ergo, Joseph Cotten must be innocent!

A third point. Hitchcock aficionados know, but sometimes forget, how devious the director could be, not just in dealing with troublesome producers (like The Lodger's C.M. Woolf and Michael Balcon) but in making points in his films by sleight of hand, as it were. On occasion, he'd use a form of near-subliminal suggestion. Spoto records of The Lodger that Hitchcock spent a lot of time on a particular shot that involved showing Novello with a flower pot behind him, the inference (as I read Spoto) being that the effeminate character is a 'pansy'. So much for not compromising the image of the star - Novello in real life was homosexual. More crucially, I think the "Tonight Golden Curls" sign at the end of the film works similarly, raising or confirming doubt about The Lodger's innocence.

Notice I stress the ending's ambiguity. I am not saying that The Lodger is or is not 'The Avenger', only that we can't be sure. That is already more than most audiences and critics have allowed.

* * *

To see better what Hitchcock was doing in The Lodger, it helps to know something about the Jack the Ripper murders. We've noted the likely frisson induced in the film's first audiences when they learnt of The Lodger's being an aristocrat, not so say rich. Here, then, are some further matters in the Ripper case.

There were at least five murders, all of them occurring in 1888 in London's East End. All the victims were prostitutes. When found, each woman had been mutilated and had had her throat cut. The murders took place at night; all but one occurred in the street (or rather, in the typical dingy alley or yard of the Whitechapel district). The murderer's clean escape after each killing suggests he was familiar with the area's cobwebby street-pattern.

Although the case has never been solved, many theories about the killer's identity have been proposed. And the police did make arrests. One person arrested and then released was a shoemaker named Pizer, apparently the "low-class Polish Jew" whom the head of the C.I.D. (Sir Robert Anderson) claimed in his memoirs was the Ripper. Perhaps more information about this particular suspect is due to come to light soon when Scotland Yard's files on the Ripper are made public.⁵

Meanwhile, one engaging theory has long been around. It goes back to, of all people, Rasputin, who is said to have written that the Ripper was a Russian doctor named Pedachenko. Apparently, this man of known homicidal tendencies was sent from Russia to England by the Tsarist authorities in an attempt to embarrass the British police. (Shades of Conrad's 'The Secret Agent'!) According to the same source, Pedachenko was aided in his murders by a friend named Levitski. Further, an issue of the 'Ochrana Gazette', the journal of the Russia secret police, later mentioned Pedachenko's death after his return to Russia, and stated that he had admitted murdering five East End women.

If five is the correct number of the Ripper's victims, then three other women killed in similar circumstances between 1899 and 1891 were prey to a Ripper imitator. Colin Wilson ('Encyclopaedia of Murder') says, "it is well known that the most appalling murder cases seem to provoke imitators".

As for the notion that the Ripper was a medical person, it fits the reported facts: namely, that the killer carried a shiny black bag (or similar) and that he carved up his victims with considerable skill. But that still leaves several suspects. The painter Walter Sickert once took a room in the East End and was told by his landlady how she suspected her previous tenant: the tenant had been an aristocratic young medical student who was subject to brainstorms and seemed to be in hiding from his family. A recent British TV version of the Ripper story, starring Michael Caine, plumped for another name, that of Queen Victoria's chief physician, Sir William Gull. The programme implied that Gull was a true 'Jekyll and Hyde' figure, and reminded its audience how in 1888 R.L.Stevenson's popular story of that title, and a play based on it, had just come out.

Many incidents added to the sensation of the murders. A citizens' vigilante committee was formed; persons suspected of being the murderer were hounded in the streets (especially if they carried a black bag); letters purporting to be from the Ripper ("I am down on whores") were sent to a London news agency. A prominent citizen of the East End, George Lusk, received a letter "From Hell" accompanied by a piece of a murdered woman's kidney. This gruesome detail is mentioned in Hitchcock's Frenzy (1972) where, though, the speaker gets it wrong and says that the kidney was sent to Scotland Yard.

* * *

Practically all the above details play some part or other in Mrs Belloc Lowndes's novel and in Hitchcock's film. For now, what may throw most light on Hitchcock's intentions is how he used the details in conjunction with invented touches of his own (or of the novel). Take the possibility that the Ripper had an accomplice. The film, but not the novel, contains a crucial scene which hinges on just such a notion. I mean the flashback to Novello's sister's coming-out ball. On this fatal occasion, we see Novello dancing with his sister at the exact moment an unseen person's hand, across the crowded floor, throws a switch. The lights go out, only to return almost immediately - but now the girl is dead and a card from 'The Avenger' is found near her body.

Clearly, the killer is not the person who doused the lights.⁶ I'll deal in a moment with who that person may be, or may represent. The main idea is this: the logical suspect for the killing is the Novello character himself, the person who in two senses was closest to his sister when she died ...

Hitchcock always said he liked stories with plenty of psychology. Well, half way through Mrs Belloc Lowndes's novel there's a letter to the press which purports to come from a member of the public calling himself 'Gaboriau' (after the French inventor of the roman policier). The letter is headed "The Avenger: A Theory", and for my money provides the likely inspiration for the film's flashback scene. The writer argues as follows. The Avenger, far from being "the usual type of criminal lunatic" whom the police are looking for, is more probably someone who "comprises in his own person the peculiarities of Jekyll and Hyde". Probably he "is a quiet, pleasant-looking gentleman who lives somewhere in the West End of London", but someone with "a tragedy in his past life" - "a dipsomaniac wife", say - who now lives "maybe with his widowed mother and perhaps a maiden sister". To these latter he is doubtless respectively "an excellent son" and "a kind brother".

Catching from the above its faint whiff of incest (about the same, let's say, as prompted Orwell to comment on the "incestuous" families in Dickens), Hitchcock responded with a full-blown psychology. But then, Freud

was in the air: 1926 was the year both of the German film, Secrets of a Soul (d. G.W.Pabst), about a knife phobia, and the London stage melodrama, 'The Lash', in which a forgotten childhood trauma provides the solution to a present-day mystery.⁷ That is, I think we may see in The Lodger not just a brother's jealousy of his beloved sister, whom he murders, but the psycho-pathology of a son driven to madness by his guilty promise to his mother on her deathbed to hunt down 'The Avenger' - himself!. All this, more than thirty years before Psycho!

Moreover, there seems plenty of evidence in the film for what I've just suggested. For one thing, the first murder occurs inside the Novello character's own home - not on the streets, scene of the subsequent killings. And it's interesting that the killer already calls himself 'The Avenger', something which suggests an irrational frame of mind. Following the scene at the mother's deathbed ("My mother never recovered from the shock ..."), the film cuts pointedly to a schematic shot of The Lodger in the present, addressing Daisy. His face is divided by shadow, one side illumined and the other in darkness. For a similar effect, in similar circumstances, you can't help thinking of the parlour scene in Psycho between Marion and Norman ...

Novello portrays The Lodger as neurasthenic - jumpy, verging on possible religious mania - if also seemingly gentle and inoffensive. It's not unlikely that either Mrs Belloc Lowndes or the filmmakers conceived the character with Ernest Renan in mind. Renan, the author of the popular 'Life of Jesus', was featured in a psychological study by Albert Mordell, first published in 1919.⁸ In a chapter called "The Oedipus Complex and the Brother and Sister Complex", Mordell suggests that Renan's extreme attachment to his sister explains "the gentleness, the moral tone, the kindness we find in his writings", and adds that Renan's "love for his sister was a great factor in his making his Jesus somewhat effeminate". We're further told that Renan "emphasized Jesus' love of flowers, his indifference to the external world, his obsession with ... a mission in life."

Now, commentators on The Lodger have long pointed out a certain Christ-symbolism in the film, but what I'm suggesting is that such symbolism emanates within The Lodger's psyche. His sister represents for him an ideal of innocence and purity, which is surely why, in shots of them together, her hair is radiantly backlit in a way that goes beyond any simple plot-emphasis on its blondeness.⁹ (It anticipates, in fact, the way Marion in Psycho looks just before her murder.) Accordingly, we may surmise that his dancing with her at her coming-out ball places him in an intolerable bind, though one which he has foreseen. Not wanting to lose her to another, he arranges with an accomplice to kill her. She will be a sacrificial victim.

The question must be asked, who is the accomplice? In Psycho it is 'Mother', but at a naturalistic level that presumably doesn't help us here. At that level, for anything we find out, we might as well call the accomplice Levitski, after Pedachenko's offside in the Rasputin manuscript. On the other hand, at a figurative level, I think it easy to agree with William Rothman that the accomplice, or doppelgänger figure, represents the film's audience. The hand that throws the light-switch at the coming-out ball is our hand, for as Freud said of the Oedipus complex, we are dealing with a universal phenomenon. Psychologically speaking, each of us would be prepared to contemplate any sacrifice to regain what the Oedipus struggle takes away from us, something blissful associated with the mother ...¹⁰

In Hitchcock, sisters and mothers are linked. Emma Newton in Shadow of a Doubt is both actual sister and emotional mother to Uncle Charlie, the Joseph Cotten character. (Her very name, Emma, implies both roles, for the letter 'em' in Hitchcock invariably stands for the virginal, Madonna-like image of woman that he, a Catholic, revered.)¹¹ In The Lodger, the Novello character's aged mother is already dying when he sacrifices his sister; doubtless he had hoped, in some mad way, to thereby save his mother as well as keep his sister for himself. But of course he loses both women. Now begins a further irony. As 'The Avenger', he must have seen his sister as a (potential) betrayer, perhaps someone who like the original woman in Eden could be held responsible for mankind's fall, its loss of bliss ... After killing his sister, his failure to restore that vanished state condemns him to repeat the crime, over and over. His only compensation is that he thus manages to further his Christ-like "indifference to the external world" and need for "a mission in life" - even as the mission leads him, like Oedipus, back to himself. (The murders gradually approach the Buntings' street.) Meanwhile, to the workaday world, he appears as gentle a person as his sister, or his mother, ever was ...

The film's Christ-symbolism is usually seen as reaching its height when a mob, a vigilante group, seizes Novello and attempts to 'crucify' him after his police handcuffs catch in some railings. (The police had arrested him on suspicion, as in the Ripper case they arrested suspects like the man Pizer.) By the time the police reach him again, he is barely conscious. A shot of his battered body, a concerned Daisy standing over him, seems to some commentators to invoke religious representations of the Virgin attending the dead Christ: a pietà image.¹² Paradoxically, if there's any redemptive note implied, it's a two-way matter. Thus if the mob are redeemed at all by this would-be Christ, their blood-lust, like The Avenger's, sated for the moment, the Novello character may to some extent be redeemed by the great suffering inflicted on him by the mob. Further, not forgetting that he could be guilty of murder, there still appears to be an arbitrariness to his suffering. In fact, the shot I've just described anticipates parts of Hitchcock's The Birds in which a vengeful force-of-nature descends from a clear sky, seemingly with little provocation by the individual victim. So, more ambiguity.

My principal argument, remember, has been that The Lodger may or may not be The Avenger. When the stolid policeman named Joe (in the novel, Joe Chandler, which tells us something) gasps, "My God, he is innocent", the commentators line up to tell us that at this point Hitchcock bowed to his producers and reversed the novel's ending where The Lodger is indeed the murderer, though he goes free. They make no mention of how The Avenger appears to have an accomplice. (Obviously, I am speaking here of the film's naturalistic level.) For all we know, those two may have alternated murders (a variant on the swapped murders in Strangers on a Train). Or the man caught "red-handed" may have been a mere imitator of The Avenger.¹³

Finally, The Lodger marries Daisy, but the audience is entitled to ask (as the question is posed in Spellbound), will he make love to her or will he kill her? It's the last of the many mysteries in the film, though not the ultimate one. That ultimate mystery goes to the very heart of things - to quote the novel, "the infinite misery, the sadness and strangeness, of human life" - and would take (I suggest) a philosopher like Schopenhauer to formulate it. Verbally, that is. As for Hitchcock, he'd now planted the seeds of such master works as Vertigo, Psycho, The Birds ...

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Notes

1. Spoto quotes Hitchcock: "We had to change the script to show that without a doubt [the Novello character] was innocent. So I just never even showed the real murderer." Just?
2. Naturally, in The Wrong Man (1957) the innocent Henry Fonda does finally confront his guilty 'double'.
3. William Rothman certainly notes some of the analogues (e.g. the similar ambience of The Lodger's coming-out ball and Shadow of a Doubt's motif of dancing couples) but he concludes merely: "Shadow of a Doubt goes further than The Lodger when it reveals that Uncle Charles is a killer like the Avenger, not innocent of killing like the lodger". Needless to say, I can't accept this formulation of the difference between the two films.
4. It's worth noting that Shadow of a Doubt borrows several details from Mrs Belloc Lowndes's novel: e.g. the main protagonist's carelessness with money; comic scenes involving two characters discussing detective stories. The woman's reaction is especially dwelt on at such times.
5. According to one source, "Scotland Yard's files on the case will be made public in 1992 but they are expected to cast little new light on" The Ripper. Actually, the makers of the recent TV mini-series (see text) appear to have jumped the gun, claiming to have based their conclusions on what they found in these files.
6. It's instructive to note how the commentators avoid admitting this. See especially Maurice Yacowar's 'Hitchcock's British Films' where he praises the film's "subtle distortions of time", and refers in a

disembodied way to "the hand [lowering] the switch" - but never (plausibly) identifies whose hand it could be.

7. See M.W. Disher, 'Melodrama: Plots That Thrilled' (n.d.).

8. A. Mordell, 'The Erotic Motive in Literature'.

9. I'm reminded at this point of how Hitchcock once said that his mother used to refer to him, when he was a boy, as her "little lamb without a spot".

10. It isn't always necessary to invoke Oedipus in such circumstances, of course. Equally pertinent to Rothman's view of Hitchcock's audience is Thomas De Quincey's description of certain Roman spectacles: "Now, if merely to be present at a murder fastens on a man the character of an accomplice, - if barely to be a spectator involves us in one common guilt with the perpetrator; it follows of necessity, that ... the hand which inflicts the fatal blow is not more deeply imbrued in blood than his who sits and looks on ..."

11. On occasion, 'em' could also stand for Magdalen, the fallen woman who is redeemed. But usually, in Hitchcock, the reference is made jokingly (as in Torn Curtain: "Them religious books is in a 'ell of a shambles, Magda").

12. In the 1950s Hitchcock denied the scene is intended to suggest Christ being taken down from the cross. But a decade later, on being quizzed by Truffaut about the same possibility, Hitchcock went along with it: "Naturally, that thought did occur to me". He clearly had the pieta in mind when filming one of the Cuban scenes in Topaz (1969), and reprised it in the film's end-title montage of human suffering.

13. An idea that Hitchcock possibly took from The Cabinet of Dr Caligari which, in turn, seems to have had Jack the Ripper as one of its inspirators.

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ODD SPOT: ONE IDEA LEADS TO ANOTHER

Alfred Hitchcock liked to nudge his audiences by giving his films unexpected details - these sometimes taken from newspapers of the day. For instance, Blackmail (1929) climaxes in the Egyptian Room of the British Museum, thus invoking then-current stories of pharaohs' curses, and the like. Sure enough, the scene includes a man's death: that of the blackmailer, Tracy, who is far from being the film's guiltiest character, though. Audiences are left with a "bad taste" which was to become almost a Hitchcock trademark.

It's also typical of Hitchcock that the germ of the scene probably originated years earlier in his reading of Mrs Belloc Lowndes's novel of The Lodger. The novel climaxes at the top of a great staircase inside Madame Tussaud's waxworks in London. The "curious, still, waxen figures" suggest to the startled Lodger "death in life" - much as the Egyptian statues and mummies startle the characters in Blackmail. Certainly it was an idea which haunted Hitchcock, for he afterwards filmed variants of it in the climaxes of Saboteur (1942) and North by Northwest (1959).

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