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The MacGuffin

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EDITORIAL

'The MacGuffin' is supposed to be two things: a forum for serious study of Hitchcock and his films and a place for ordinary intelligent filmgoers to read and write about films in general. My thought has all along been that these two things are compatible and may overlap.

That's why, if you see yourself as an "ordinary" filmgoer, I'd really like to be hearing from you - either about the Hitchcock film you watched on TV last night or about any film, or film-related topic, that you've thought about lately. We need more "ordinary" content.

Letters will be especially welcome. Which reminds me that Don Gilbert won the letter prize that was offered last time. Hope you've found time to read it, Don.

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About this issue. Ron Conway has written a most interesting letter describing Warner Brothers' Movie World in Queensland, which he visited soon after it opened. And Irene Radek's column reviews the Madonna film Truth or Dare. Among Irene's several scathing, intelligent criticisms of Madonna, she raises the possible effect on impressionable kids of seeing and hearing their idol's 'anything goes' behaviour. Quite so. Yet I couldn't help thinking, as I read Irene's review, that Madonna sounds exactly like the performer that our 'postmodernist' age - in which all forms of sincerity are questioned - either deserves or requires. That's to say, a lot depends on your point of view. Coincidentally, I've been reading Jeffrey Masson's controversial 1984 book, 'The Assault on Truth', which alleges that Freud himself couldn't face a certain possibly widespread phenomenon of childhood. Read what Irene writes about Madonna's relation to her father and you'll understand. My point is that perhaps Madonna may be a liberating figure, after all. Her very name ... What do readers think?

Speaking of postmodernism, it's something that's also discussed in James Naremore's book, 'Acting in the Cinema', which includes an admiring chapter on Martin Scorsese's The King of Comedy starring Robert De Niro and Jerry Lewis. Personally, I think Scorsese's film is one of the key movies of the '80s. See the review of Naremore's book in this issue. There's also a review by Freda Freiberg - following up her article last time on Japanese cinema - of the new book on Kurosawa by Stephen Prince. Freda criticises Prince for omitting to consider Kurosawa's work in its 'industrial' context ...

And there's a long article on Hitchcock's Psycho. It isn't about the experience of watching that film in the cinema so much as about what Hitchcock, in his detachment, may have felt was at issue under the film's surface.

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For reasons of space, some items - including the 'special films' segment - have been held over until next time. Also next time, I'll try to publish a contents index for issues 1-4.

Welcome to our several new readers, mainly from Australia for a change.

To everyone, good viewing.

LETTERS

Ronald Conway, Hawthorn, Victoria, Australia

I'd thought from the publicity about Warner Brothers' Movie World at Oxenford, Queensland, that it must be broadly identical with Disneyland or Luna Park. Actually, the location includes a fully functioning movie studio with state-of-the-art resources for picture-making. Episodes from the recent revival of Mission Impossible were made there, as was most of the Bryan Brown film, Blood Oath. Sets used in that production still remain; the nearby wooded hillside doubled for its Indonesian jungle shots. Part of a planned feature on The Phantom is to be filmed at Movie World on a budget expected to approach that of Batman.

The lot at Oxenford embraces not only a full street-and-a-half, plus two plazas of shops, restaurants and warehouses, but has five fully operational sound stages. Stage No.5 is the largest in the Southern Hemisphere, and is equipped with a huge 'tank' for sea scenes, complete with wind-machines and dump-trucks. It also has a small compound with well-cared-for animals. So in most ways Movie World is a smaller but more up-date version of the Universal-International lot in Hollywood, and performs a similar function for both serious movie-making and putting on shows for tourists.

At \$29 Australian per adult visitor, Movie World now generates most of its own maintenance revenue. If that admission price sounds exorbitant, you should know that it covers admission to at least six separate short shows; you can spend the better part of a day there without once becoming bored. Shops 'flogging' movie items, especially Looney Tunes material, are perhaps rather too much in evidence, but you're not forced to buy their wares. Three fascinating indoor technical set-ups deal with applied 'effects', such as post-shooting of sound-effect synchronisation, the creation of on-screen illusions such as Superman's flights through the air, and part of the actual full-scale and model constructions used in the recent World War II film, Memphis Belle. Excerpts from most of Warner's 3-D films of the '50s can be seen down the street, with viewing glasses and a filmed introduction by Ernest Borgnine. There are displays of stunts by experts and an amusing 'cave of horrors' with full-sized 'Gremlins'.

The proximity of Movie World to the Gold Coast, the Pacific Ocean and the backdrop of the Lamington National Park gives it access to almost every kind of outdoor location. As production costs continue to rise in the U.S., I'll be surprised if in the coming decade this Queensland locale doesn't become a major centre of film production. Movie World is certainly worth one visit - maybe two if you are still young at heart. By car, it's only 45 minutes from central Brisbane.

* * *

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

I liked your thoughts on The Lodger ('MacGuffin' 3) very much ...

(Editor's note. It's letters like these that keep us going! Don't forget that Christopher is seeking serious articles on Hitchcock, of any length, which should be submitted to him "on hardcopy".)

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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.)

Hollywood taking over the world

European cinema is in crisis and attendances in Western Europe have been falling off steadily. The trend has been apparent for some time - American director John Landis lamented it publicly last year at the Edinburgh Festival - but now noted film commentator Gilbert Adair has given details in an article for England's 'Guardian' newspaper.

It seems that Western European audiences, with the exception of the French, are preferring the American product to the homegrown one, and are turning away from any indigenous work in their droves. Adair doesn't exactly say so, but it's likely that the European film and TV producers themselves are partly to blame. With the approach of 1992, they are concentrating on turning out what William Fisher in 'Sight and Sound' (Autumn '90) has called "Europudding" - consortium-funded product whose main ingredient is an anodyne (preferably historical) subject, seen as being easier to peddle (if not consume) across EEC boundaries.

In Eastern Europe, according to Adair, the situation is even worse, "given not merely the sudden, quota-free pervasiveness of Hollywood movies but also the no less sudden withdrawal ... of the state subsidies on which film-makers used to depend."

Moreover, "it now tends to be perceived of Europe that no country can be expected to boast more than one major director at a time: Almodovar in Spain, Kaurismaki in Finland, Kieslowski in Poland, Angelopoulos in Greece, Oliveira in Portugal, von Trier in Denmark, Greenaway in Britain."

* * *

Canada, too, has film industry problems. In a recent letter, our columnist Irene Radek attributes some of them, at least, to "the nationalistic obsession (both governmental and that of the so-called 'artistic' community) with inserting ludicrously large amounts of Canadian content into every artistic endeavour", thereby killing "any spontaneous intelligent creativity".

* * *

At least Australia appears to be holding out against total American domination. Melbourne film critic Keith Connolly writes: "Australia is certainly doing a lot more than most European countries to provide a working environment for its film-makers, and this is evident by the number of very good and original films entered in this year's Australian Film Institute awards." Speaking of which, notable offbeat features this year include Proof and Spotswood, both shot in Melbourne.

Noted film educator dies

A feature of Professor Arthur Knight's film classes at the University of Southern California were the Friday night guest appearances by leading Hollywood personnel, among them Alfred Hitchcock. Professor Knight, author of 'The Liveliest Art' and a regular film reviewer for various media, retired in 1985 after serving 25 years on the USC faculty.

His students at USC included directors John Carpenter, Richard Franklin, Randal Kleiser, George Lucas and Richard Zameckis.

Sadly, in July Professor Knight died in Sydney, Australia, where he'd been living.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Prince, Stephen: 'The Warrior's Cinema: The Cinema of Akira Kurosawa' (Princeton University Press, 1991; paperback)

It's now 40 years since Rashomon won the Grand Prix at Venice and the West discovered Kurosawa. Although he is probably the only Japanese film director whose name is widely known and whose work is regularly screened outside Japan (nowadays on television rather than cinema screens), since 1965 there had been no comprehensive study in English of his work. Granted, there had been volumes of articles on the significance of Rashomon and thousands of reviews of individual films (at the time of their release) but no comprehensive survey until now that incorporated the methodologies of '70s and '80s film scholarship.

Stephen Prince's book covers all the films directed by Kurosawa, generally but not always in chronological order of production. It also includes finely argued appraisals of the influences on Kurosawa's work: his alleged humanism and the American Western. It traces various stages in the director's career, under different historical and personal imperatives, stressing in particular the major shift from his early postwar optimism to later disillusion and despair. If this account sounds familiar, Prince's treatment of it is not: he argues from a close reading of the texts that many of the films display unresolved cultural and aesthetic tensions and that in them competing voices jostle for attention. While he applauds the formal dynamism, heroic sensibility and social commitment of the late '40s and '50s works, he identifies a political weakness in Kurosawa's reliance on the isolated autonomous self that prefigures the later decline into pathetic pessimism.

Prince's approach is a neat combination of interpretation - the hermeneutic tradition - and formalism. He gives detailed attention to the narrative, thematic, ideological and formal construction of the films, drawing on other critics' interpretations as well as the type of formal analysis performed by scholars like Noël Burch and David Bordwell. (Unfortunately, the close analysis in this book lacks visual illustration.) Prince argues that Kurosawa's distinctive use of the telephoto lens, multicamera filming and cinemascope composition form "a coherent visual system ... The attributes of this system - the two-dimensionality of space, the analytic treatment of movement, the dialectic between space and motion, and the conversion of time into space - challenge the continuity codes and the stable, centered spaces of the Hollywood cinema." However, Prince also concludes that "the subversive potentials of this visual system ... are recouped and reorganized [i.e. modified] by narratives that substitute ethical dilemmas for political ones and displace structural relations of power onto individual personalities." (p.175)

Although Prince argues that Kurosawa's cinema is instructive in that "it clarifies the limitations of a particular kind of political filmmaking" (p.31), the trajectory of Prince's own narrative does still tend to reproduce a story of heroic individual endeavour ending in tragic failure - which is not only the theme of both Kurosawa's films and his life story but also a feature of the Romantic conception of the artist. It is very difficult to avoid falling into the trap of representing the artist as tragic hero in the case of Kurosawa but it is even more difficult if you confine yourself to his life and films. Though Prince discusses the Kurosawa texts with reference to Japanese culture (bushido, Zen Buddhism, Noh) and Japanese history, as well as to Dostoevsky, Brecht, Eisenstein, Hollywood codes, modernism and cubism, a certain hermeticism remains. What is missing is the industrial context: how Kurosawa reworked and/or redefined the generic conventions of the local film industry; how his work relates to that of his professional peers, contemporary Japanese directors and predecessors; intended and actual audiences for his films at home; the place of stars in his cinema; the dramatic historical changes that the Toho company underwent during his employment with them. By removing Kurosawa and his films from their industrial context, Prince leaves us with an isolated artist hero who overdoses on Dostoevsky novels, silent film classics, Hollywood westerns, Zen and the art of samurai sangfroid.

Despite its astute appraisals and impressive analyses, despite its felicities of style, there is little here to tell us why and how Kurosawa films might have a strong appeal to popular audiences, not just to intellectuals and film scholars. There are hints, such as when Prince writes of Rashomon that "the flamboyance of the imagery" contests with "the hysteria of the performances" (p.134). But overall Prince is not interested in film as an interactive social practice, as popular culture, as a site of cultural production and consumption. He, like Noël Burch, may find Ikiru a Kurosawa masterpiece but to popular audiences it is not identifiable as a Kurosawa film because it doesn't star Toshiro Mifune, it isn't a samurai movie, and it is not full of action. The quintessential Kurosawa movie is marked by extravagant acting and bravura camerawork. The characters in a Kurosawa movie do not simply walk and talk; they strut, glower, bluster, thunder, cringe, splutter, snort, titter, snigger, simper and cower. The stories, too, are far removed from everyday domestic and work routines; they are histrionic encounters between heroes and their adversaries - villains, witches, Nature, Fate and Evil - designed to test their masculine strength and stamina, and to display their superiority in character and swordsmanship to the astonished audience in the film and the delighted audience in the cinema. However, without the presence of Mifune, the Kurosawa movie is bloodless (figuratively speaking). No other actor, in Japan or Hollywood, can match his staggering performances of swaggering machismo.

Naremore, James: 'Acting in the Cinema' (University of California Press, 1988; paperback)

Mid-way through Charles Chaplin's The Gold Rush (1925), everything stops for the famous 'dance of the bread rolls'. Part of a dream in which Charlie imagines he's entertaining The Girl (Georgia Hale), the dance is that of two bread rolls manipulated like feet at the end of a pair of forks held by Charlie. Its effect is both delightful and complex. But Professor Naremore is up to describing every nuance. For example:

As usual, there is a comic distance between [Charlie's] shabby appearance and his grand theatrical manner, but more specifically, he gets laughs out of the contrast between the high seriousness of his face and the jazzy, cartoonish look of his dancing "feet". Besides foolishness, there is considerable wit in the performance, which contains a number of clear reversals or sudden changes of dancing style, all of them executed with graceful dexterity.

In its show-stopping effect, the Chaplin scene may be said to stand for the bravura that Hollywood producer John Houseman associated with star quality. With Katherine Hepburn in mind, he once listed bravura as the extra something that audiences expect from stars besides beauty, intelligence and energy. In turn, every star role needs these peaks. In George Cukor's Holiday (1938), such a peak arrives when Hepburn and Cary Grant together perform an elaborate double somersault.

The Chaplin scene further derives its effect from the expressive discrepancy between Charlie's face and 'feet'. Broadly speaking, much of its bravura results from the performer, in classic theatrical style, doing two things at once. When Naremore turns to Hitchcock's Rear Window (1954), he singles out Thelma Ritter (playing James Stewart's nurse/masseuse) for a similar accomplishment. Typically, we watch her "not only making a bed but delivering long comic speeches that provide important exposition. (Throughout all this, Stewart plays the straight man, looking bored or pained ...)". As Naremore says, Ritter here executes "everything with a gusto and strength somewhat different from her other Hollywood roles", which may remind us that Hitchcock movies often draw no hard and fast distinction between stars and character actors (vide Lifeboat).

Further, it clearly doesn't matter that Chaplin's soulful face and the insouciant bread rolls may seem to make unconnected, even contradictory, statements. Naremore is alert to how audiences have "learned to read certain types of expressive incoherence as a sign of psychological complexity, so that [typically] the dual faces of the actor function much like irony or ambiguity in written language". In D.W.Griffith's True Heart Susie (1919), during its engagement-party sequence, Lillian Gish uses a fan as if it were a film 'wipe' in order to pass between her 'private' and 'public' expressions. And in Jean-Luc Godard's Breathless (1959), the Jean Seberg character similarly (if more subtly) presents us with one expression while reading a newspaper article, and quite another when she looks up. At this point her face assumes "the mask of a sweetly pretty Midwestern girl", able to speak a lie with barely "a shadow of unease to break her calm".

A variant on the idea of expressive incoherence - and duplicity - is contained in the famous 'Kuleshov effect': "anyone who has ever worked at a movie-editing table knows that a wide range of meanings or nuances ... can be produced through the cutting". From this it's but a step to the "fetishistic" performing of Marlene Dietrich in Joseph von Sternberg's Morocco (1930), where the audience waits, deliciously tantalised, "for what is promised but neither revealed nor exposed" (Bill Nichols). Here's Naremore: "The laziest gal in town, [Dietrich] was sexy precisely because of the way she threatened to expose the illusion of the performance." Certainly, when Hitchcock did expose it, in Stage Fright (1950), by shooting Dietrich's act from a stage hand's perspective in the wings of the theatre, the effect was intentionally comic, and demystifying.

Speaking of theatre, there's an additional aspect of the bread rolls scene, which concerns its pathos:

Most of all, the scene derives its pathos from Chaplin's saddened, highly sensitive visage above the dancing forks. It sets him against a dark limbo that functions like the background of a puppet theater, with his head spotlighted by a circle of light so that his face becomes a central part of the drama.

Naremore sees that Chaplin in this scene is really three people, with Chaplin himself occupying the apex of a pyramid which consists also of the character he plays and the performer that the character imagines himself to be ... All told, it's "as if Chaplin were simultaneously putting on an act and revealing the essence of his soul". But, then, that's theatricality in a nutshell. In both life and in the movies, to put on an act is to present one's character; and all actorly emotion is either witnessable or it's nothing. At least, Naremore is happy to quote the French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-61) to that effect: "Anger, shame, hate, and love are not psychic facts hidden at the bottom of another's consciousness: they are types of behaviour or styles of conduct which are visible from the outside. They exist on this face or in these gestures, not hidden behind them". Regular 'MacGuffin' readers will recognise here an idea of Gilbert Ryle (1900-76) whom I quoted when writing about Stage Fright a couple of issues ago. My point now being (in part) how much the Chaplin scene anticipates Hitchcock's film about the emboldening power of theatre ...

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There's much more to Naremore's book. The paradox involved in 'duplicitous' role-playing receives its due in the final chapter, which deals with Martin Scorsese's The King of Comedy (1983). Naremore describes the restaurant scene where, out of focus in the background, an extra named Chuck Low mimics Robert De Niro's every gesture: "In effect, Low acts just like De Niro, who is acting like a man who is acting like a show-business personality." To those offended by some of Scorsese's "bent pleasures" in shocking his audiences, or otherwise making them sit up, this bizarre episode doubtless provides further ammunition. On the other hand, Naremore's assessment of The King of Comedy may just be nearer the mark: "A modernist (and sometimes postmodernist) film, it continually makes use of parody or pastiche, foregrounding the work of performers and playfully undermining every form of behavioral sincerity." Co-starring Jerry Lewis, it's a film at once of the theatrical Chaplinesque tradition and a reflexive pronouncement on that tradition.

Now, I don't know Naremore's reaction to the new film Truth or Dare/In Bed with Madonna (Alex Keshishian, 1990), but you may find a clue in the section of his book called "What is Acting?". "Unplotted theatrics can partake of acting," he writes, "as when rock musicians like Madonna and Prince develop a persona that has narrative implications; but to be called an actor in the sense I am using, a performer [need only be] ... embedded in a story." To a degree, that gives Chuck Low or Madonna equal status with Robert De Niro. We seem to have arrived at a new era of surfaces, authorised by philosophers like the already-quoted Merleau-Ponty (whom Godard read). Indeed, Naremore comments that the same argument of Merleau-Ponty about all emotions being witnessable "could be made in semiotic terms, forcing us to abandon the notion of a Stanislavskian 'subtext.'"

I do have a few problems with Naremore's book, perhaps related to what I've just said. It's obvious that the author writes perceptively. And, in a sense, thoughtfully. Yet long descriptive passages go by that only paraphrase the surface of the film in question. You read them expecting an insight which isn't there. Even the enthusiastic coverage of Chaplin's bread rolls scene ends before the significance of the theatrical metaphors, so well spelt out, can be investigated. What, if anything, is implied by "a dark limbo that functions like the background of a puppet theater"? Whence, figuratively speaking, comes the spotlight that illuminates Chaplin's saddened face? Surely the answers would bear directly on the scene's pathos?

And does Cary Grant in Hitchcock's North by Northwest (1959) really perform any sort of "homage to Chaplin" in a couple of the Chicago scenes, notably in the station washroom where he must use a lady's razor? His giving himself a Hitlerian/Chaplinesque 'moustache' here is already a matter of interpretation; its being a homage, high speculation. (The scene itself, by the way, derives from Graham Greene's 'The Confidential Agent'.)

Lastly, I suppose everyone who reads this book will wish that certain favourite actors weren't omitted. I would like to have seen some 'foreign' actors covered (apart from the book's passing references to Laurence Olivier). Also, say, Mickey Rooney (not least for his Bill films made for TV). And Ingrid Bergman - though we've already had Robin Wood and others do that splendidly. To be fair, Naremore apologises for having to eliminate such people as Barbara Stanwyck and the negro actor Richard Pryor, the latter seeming "to me more gifted than Chaplin but whose best work has been done in concert films".

Need I add that this is a basic text for anyone who's even slightly interested in the performance aspect of American movies and, as such, is fully recommended?

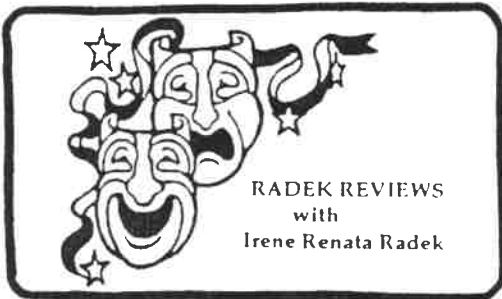
K.M.

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COMING ATTRACTIONS

The book and the film: Hitchcock's Number 17; classic Hollywood composers; book reviews (e.g. 'Hitchcock's Films Revisited'); the production process illuminated. Plus 'News', 'Radek Reviews', etc. Additional items are solicited.

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"MADONNA'S MOCKUMENTARY" Last night I saw Madonna's Truth or Dare (d. Alex Keshishian) and a preview for Mannequin on the Move ... or was that the other way around? It was really hard to tell. Truth or Dare (or In Bed with Madonna as it is more appropriately named overseas) is a self-serving look at Madonna's 1990 Blonde Ambition world tour with a mixture of black and white backstage footage trying hard to look spontaneously artsy and colour concert footage trying hard to look innovatively provocative.

After sitting through this 2 hour commercial shot/directed by 26 year old video-director Keshishian, I don't recall more than a hint of honest spontaneity. Not surprising, since there is no room for such honourable qualities when one is actively manipulating the press and public - Madonna's greatest skill.

The only apparent 'truth' seems to be that Madonna is a spoiled, vulgar shrew who's frantically trying to be today's Marilyn Monroe - a misunderstood little girl/sex goddess. Instead, Madonna comes across as a steroidal, manufactured Marilyn clone, tough and angry like a sexual Robocop.

To wit: we get to see Madonna - who claims she absolutely does not care what people think of her - sulk and rant about some poker-faced guys in the audience. If there is truth in hypocrisy, it's here in spades!

'Media Manipulation' 101 at the University of Madonna teaches that being offensive and irreverent attracts a lot of attention. However, it seems to ignore the fact that the line is very fine between art for art's sake and fabrication for shock value. Madonna U. specialises in the latter. Why else her Jesus t-shirt, the sacrilegious mix of sex and religion in the church-set performances of "Like a Prayer" and "Live to Tell", and her pre-show 'prayer circles' (please God, help me to mock you in public ...)?

And how about my personal choice for Madonna's most repulsive remark to date: "Build an altar to me in your home and worship it daily" ... the scariest aspect is that I think she really means it.

Madonna also seems to believe that it's shockingly admirable to insult fellow celebrities like talk-show super-host Oprah Winfrey and Zsa Zsa Gabor whom she openly calls a "cochon". (I think it's time for Ms Gabor to head back to court - only this time as plaintiff.)

And who better to ridicule than Oscar-winner Kevin Costner (Dances With Wolves), a sweet unassuming guy who makes the grievous error of describing Madonna's show as "neat". "Anyone who thinks my show is 'neat' has gotta go", the Grande Dame announces after making an exaggerated gagging gesture behind Costner's departing back. Real class, Madonna, and again, it's commendable that you really don't care what people think ...

Furthermore, Madonna manages to publicly emasculate then-boyfriend, Hollywood legend Warren Beatty, by ordering him around and calling him a "pussy" and an "asshole". In what is probably the MOST truthful

fragment of Truth or Dare, Beatty zeros in on Madonna's complete lack of interest in off-camera existence: what's the point of doing or saying anything if it's not for the camera?, he jeers, reading her mind. I wanted to applaud for the only time during the entire film.

Though Truth or Dare focuses heavily on Madonna's family, I doubt very much that they feel honoured. Brother Chris who tours with Madonna comes across as dimwitted, like the rest of her entourage. Other brother Marty (whose alcoholism Madonna discusses at length but without depth) dashes in to visit his beloved sister at her hotel but arrives after she's retired. It seems a mite convenient that Keshishian hung around in Madonna's hallway after boss-lady had gone to bed just in case Marty did show up so he could film Marty not being able to get into Madonna's room. If this scene weren't prearranged, I'm sure Mr Director would've found something better to do - like sleeping or at least turning off his camera ...

Madonna's father gets an onstage "Happy Birthday" complete with his 'daring' daughter bowing at his embarrassed feet. Then, in conversation with her No.1 stooge, actress Sandra Bernhard, Madonna jokes that her Dad sexually assaulted her as a little girl. Ha, ha, Madonna, I'm sure your father will really appreciate your rapier wit - not to mention the respect you show him, now filmed for posterity.

Finally, Madonna visiting her mother's grave strikes me as the most staged segment of Truth or Dare. Mrs Ciccone's wayward daughter even admits that she hasn't paid her respects since she was a little girl ... so why does she do it now? Mr Beatty knows ... As Madonna lay prostrate upon her mother's grave, I kept expecting the earth to move as an offended Mrs Ciccone spun around below. What's that Biblical quotation, Madonna (since you're such an authority on religion), "Take heed that ye do not give alms before men, to be seen of them"? ...

In a squirmingly pathetic scene, Madonna's childhood friend is interviewed about her famous friend's claims that they experimented sexually with each other as children. After this public humiliation, Madonna's minion seeks her out and begs Madonna to be her unborn child's godmother! After promising to name the baby after her (I pity the babe if it's a boy!), this sad sack pleads with Madonna to bless her unborn child. Just the thought that someone would actually consider Madonna worthy of blessing her unborn baby makes my skin crawl ... the kid'll probably make Rosemary's Baby look like Heidi.

Another major Madonna cause is the Gay Movement - an already controversial area filled with potential shock value. So maternal Madonna pats herself on the back for mothering her poor "emotionally crippled" (!) dancers (all but one are gay), and giggles when told that her makeup artist was raped the night before. Who did you say was emotionally crippled, Madonna?

Madonna claims that Truth or Dare is "a celebration of love, life and humanity". But what exactly is she celebrating? Terminal vulgarity? A dancer exposing himself and 2 men soul-kissing at her command? Trying to seduce a married man in front of his wife? Or how about simulating oral sex with a bottle? Such activities may be part of some degenerate's life but they have nothing to do with love and very little to do with humanity.

"I do not endorse a way of life but describe one", she announces to Italian reporters when the Vatican cancels 2 of her concerts. But, Madonna, all the little Madonna wanna-bes will want to emulate you, their heroine, so by describing your way of life you cannot help but endorse it.

So where exactly is the truth in Truth or Dare? Watching makeupless Madonna slurping soup with a plastic cup on her head? Wow. Madonna flashing her breasts for the camera? You could see more in the recent 'Playboy' spread. How about her employees' laudatory voice-overs? Yeah, right. They sound more like scripted testimonials by submissive sycophants who, lacking lives/minds of their own, fasten onto their esteemed Queen Bee for identity. Besides, it's career insurance.

However, if you're a major Madonna fan and if sincerity is not vital to you, the music is great and most of the concert footage is quite entertaining (though a little too risqué for young, impressionable minds) - even though much of Madonna's singing sounds exactly like the recording (ergo, it's taped) and looks lip-synched ("Express Yourself", "Vogue", "Keep It Together"). It's virtually impossible for anyone to sing so steadily and clearly whilst dancing and contorting with abandon. Even the best singer's voice would be detrimentally affected and, as Madonna herself admits, she's just not that good a singer.

And there's more than a hint of humour when Madonna's back-up singers, Niki Harris and Donna Delory, imitate the lamb-like vocal bleatings of singer Belinda Carlisle. But there again Madonna attempts to make herself look 'good' by insulting the competition. Petty.

The name of a film company in the film's opening credits, 'Propaganda Films', says it all. There's just no room for truth or spontaneity in Madonna's carefully planned career. Madonna admits that she's "just interested in pushing people's buttons" - consequently there is no art here, just audience manipulation and pure calculated hype.

One of Madonna's lackeys claims she's just like "a little girl lost in a storm". Hardly. Madonna is a tough, shrewd businesswoman contriving her own tempest for which she has drawn herself a detailed navigational map. My conclusion: save your \$\$ and rent Spinal Tap instead. It's considerably more fun and probably a lot more honest.

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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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Contributors to this issue

Freda Freiberg, author and academic, lives in Melbourne, Australia. She's an authority on Japanese film history, especially the work of Mizoguchi.

Ken Mogg, a freelance writer, edits 'The MacGuffin' and enjoys watching Hitchcock movies.

Irene Renata Radek is film reviewer for 'Mensa International Journal' and for Canadian Mensa's 'MC²'. A talented actress, she graduated from the American Academy of Dramatic Arts in Los Angeles. ('The MacGuffin' hopes to report on that prestigious institution in a forthcoming issue.)

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The Dark Side of Genius: Hitchcock's 'Psycho'

The entry in 'The Oxford Companion to English Literature' on the 'metaphysical' poet Henry Vaughan (1621-95) says that he "was seized with the idea of childish innocence, and the child's recollections of pre-natal glory". Vaughan's 'The Retreat' begins:

Happy those early dayes! when I
Shin'd in my Angell-infancy.
Before I understood this place
Appointed for my second race,
Or taught my soul to fancy ought
But a white, Celestiall thought ...

The poem was published in the two volumes collectively called 'Silex Scintillans' (1650, 1655), making it contemporaneous with John Milton's sonnet known as 'On His Blindness' (1652). The latter begins:

When I consider how my light is spent
Ere half my days in this dark world and wide ... ,

and it ends on a consoling note, the famous line, "They also serve who only stand and wait."

My unlikely purpose in this article is to show not just that Alfred Hitchcock had Milton's sonnet in mind when making Psycho (1960), but that the very imagery and themes of the film echo those used by Milton - and, no doubt inadvertently, Vaughan. In effect, that Hitchcock's film provides a modern commentary on Milton's poem.

The film signals the connection in its opening scene, set in a Phoenix hotel bedroom. When Sam Loomis (John Gavin) tells girlfriend Marion Crane (Janet Leigh) that he resents having to pay off debts to "people who aren't there", she reminds him, "I pay, too. They also pay who meet in hotel rooms." The faint but unmistakable echo of the last line of Milton's sonnet is clearly apt, not least because it underlines the element of waiting which the scene itself seeks to establish: Sam's debts will take at least two years to pay off and until then marriage to Marion is out of the question.

But also, besides various ironies, the line hints at a broader picture for Sam and Marion's problems. In Milton's sonnet the poet has to be reminded by a personified Patience of the true nature of God's kingdom on earth. In the film the allusion to Milton carries a more oblique reminder of the same thing. Hitchcock uses an identical procedure in Marnie (1964) when Mark Rutland misquotes one of Emerson's 'Voluntaries'. The well-known Emerson passage, with its emphasis on Duty, begins: "So nigh is grandeur to our dust,/ So near is God to man ..."

And again, there had been a foretaste in The Trouble With Harry (1956). As Lesley Brill has pointed out, the earlier film suggestively quotes part of a Shakespeare sonnet ("Let me not to the marriage of true minds/ Admit impediments" - Sonnet 116). But note a paradox. The myopic Doctor Greenbow, stumbling about the autumnal New England countryside reciting poetry, pays no heed to the beauty around him. Nor, most of the time, do the film's two couples whose "true minds" are obviously busy elsewhere. Thus once again Hitchcock posits a more objective, or more poetic, viewpoint than any of his characters attains, or has time for.

* * *

Discussing The Trouble With Harry with Truffaut, Hitchcock specified a use of counterpoint as the means by which that film elevates "the commonplace in life to a higher level". Likewise, in Spellbound (1945), notable for its flirtation with Salvador Dali and surrealism, reality is heightened both photographically and via the use of certain motifs. Dark lines in the lather on a shaving-brush, dark lines on a linen table cloth, above all, dark lines on a field of snow - these marks of trauma accrue a rich meaning from scene to scene. And the symbolism of several of the objects - from a man's cut-throat razor to a glass of milk - is nicely Freudian. But that still leaves the colour white largely unaccounted for. In fact, it never is fully explained in the film. Instead, Hitchcock literally dazzles us with shots of gleaming bathrooms and vast snowfields, and then abandons us to our own devices, as it were.

Now, regular readers of 'The MacGuffin' know how closely I feel Hitchcock's temperament and general outlook approach those of the German philosopher Schopenhauer (1788-1860), whose historical place is between two other German thinkers, the rigorous and ascetic Kant and the poetic Nietzsche. Concerning genius, Schopenhauer said his principal criterion was a capacity to always see the universal in the particular. In contrast, the normal person recognises only the particular, for that alone "has interest for him, has reference to his will [i.e. his personal drives and concerns]". One of the things Schopenhauer felt most bars the normal person from genius is a lack of imagination.

Let's return to Psycho and its likely affinities with Milton's sonnet called 'On His Blindness'.

* * *

Milton wrote his most famous sonnet in the year he became totally blind. In Psycho, everyone is blind. That's to say, blindness in the film serves as a metaphor: the characters are both un-seeing and mortal, and all around them lies "this dark world and wide". Further, they manifestly partake of what Schopenhauer characterised as blindly-striving, predatory Will.

One 'character' is almost literally blind from the start, and that is the dead 'Mrs Bates' with her empty

eye-sockets and grinning skull. Another character, the highway patrolman, who might be Marion's conscience, wears dark glasses that suggest a blind man's; yet his professional stare at Marion in her car blinds her, i.e. confuses her, as surely as do the headlights of oncoming cars during her long drive to Fairvale. In turn, those unblinking lights evoke "the cruel eyes" that Norman Bates (Anthony Perkins) associates with mental institutions. So do his own eyes when they study Marion through a spy-hole in the motel wall. Importantly, Hitchcock turns the tables on us with the bathroom murder, not least because during shooting he insisted on using "blinding white tiles".

Both murders in Psycho are virtual blindings. As Marion is stabbed in the shower, her eyes close and her mouth opens in a succession of screams and gasps. Dark blood splashes on the white porcelain and is washed down the drain; a close-up of the plughole echoes the close-up of Marion's initial scream. In turn, the shot of the plughole dissolves to a close-up of one of Marion's now staring, but un-seeing, eyes. As for the private detective, Arbogast (whose first name, curiously, in both the original novel and Hitchcock's film, is Milton), he dies after being slashed by a knife which travels the length of his face, passing directly across his left eye. In this, there's an anticipation of the death of the farmer in The Birds, both of whose eyes are pecked out.

When Arbogast had entered the Bates house he'd removed his hat and exposed his balding forehead - a gesture not just inviting of what followed but reminiscent of someone entering a church. Thus, just before their respective deaths, both Marion and Arbogast appear at their most vulnerable - and innocent. Such innocence goes with the blindness motif. Even Deputy Sheriff Chambers and his wife fail to imagine Norman Bates as anything but a harmless young man. At one point we see the Chambers couple come out from attending a service at their local Fairvale church; among other members of the congregation is a myopic-looking man who for the remainder of the scene stays chatting with the pastor on the church steps.

If that scene could almost have come from David Lynch's Blue Velvet (1986), which is another film about psychotic violence and small-town complacency, so could the scene set in Sam Loomis's hardware store where a customer comments on a brand of pesticide, "They don't tell you whether it's painless" - then buys it anyway.

As played by John Gavin (Imitation of Life, Spartacus), Loomis is the epitome of practical seriousness, what the Romans called gravitas. Most of Fairvale's citizens have that quality. We may also see it in Lila Crane. However, its opposite is given no exact representative in the film - though Marion and Norman come closest - and may be summed up as the quality of imagination. That's to say, it's something which Schopenhauer regarded as "an indispensable instrument of genius". Round about here you start to grasp how crucial the blindness theme is to Hitchcock's film.

If gravitas, writes Schopenhauer, "presupposes that the intellect does not forsake the service of the will", i.e. is always concerned with practical self-interest, the condition of genius is its capacity to unfetter the intellect from the will "in order to follow its own ends". Moreover:

In this way, it often leaves the will very inopportune in the lurch; and ... the individual so gifted becomes more or less useless for life; in fact, by his conduct we are sometimes reminded of madness.

Which may return us to Milton. Now, we don't know that as his blindness worsened the poet ever approached madness; on the contrary, A.N.Wilson's 'Life' speculates that with his "inner sense of his own righteousness" he stood firm. Nevertheless, what the sonnet itself records are Milton's feelings of waste and of being made "useless", inducing in him "fond" thoughts. And it's to this condition that the poem addresses itself when it counsels an almost supra-human "patience". The point for Psycho-analysts is that Milton's sonnet is about a cruel blow that in many people might be expected to cause despair, even madness, but that in his case spurred him to resume his writing, to affirm an exalted religious faith, and eventually to produce 'Paradise Lost' and 'Paradise Regained' ...

* * *

In Hitchcock's wartime Saboteur (1942) the blind Philip Martin calls policemen "unimaginative", implying that he's something of a surrogate for the filmmakers. But he also advises the young hero, whose name is

(Barry) Kane, to "go and do the things I cannot do" - for instance, woo the girl, who happens to be Philip Martin's niece, by foiling a nest of fifth columnists. There's an implicit Oedipal paradox here, just as in Psycho where it has literally driven Norman crazy. To act or not to act. Milton's sonnet, too, turns on this dilemma. A key passage (lines 9-11) sets side by side the two halves of a central Christian paradox: (1) that God insists on man's engaging in the work of His kingdom, (2) that God needs nothing man can do or give. Hence the sonnet's conclusion:

" ... His state
Is kingly: thousands at his bidding speed,
And post o'er land and ocean without rest;
They also serve who only stand and wait."

Milton is saying that there are two orders of angels. Thousands of the most common kind speed about the world in obedience to God's commands. But the highest orders merely "wait" upon Him, in the two senses of 'stay expectant' and 'attend'.

Marion Crane and her sister Lila are like the lower order of angels. Clearly not because the two of them are obedient - they aren't - but because they will not "stand and wait". As Lila says, "Patience doesn't run in my family". Time and again, the script stresses as much. Whereas Loomis is "all for" respectability - which simply "requires patience, temperance ... hard work" - Marion one day yields to impulse and absconds with \$40,000 of her boss's money. After her murder, her sister comes searching for her in Fairvale and is trailed by Arbogast. The scene in which Lila and Sam await Arbogast's return from the Bates Motel both begins and ends with virtually the identical line, Lila's asking "are we just going to sit here and wait?"

In visual terms, too, the film more or less depicts Marion and Lila as angels. Marion dies beneath a rounded shower nozzle (another effect that Hitchcock insisted on) which bestows on her a halo. Earlier, as she had conversed with Norman in his parlour, she had sat under a picture showing a cluster of ascending angels. A close-up of the picture, at the start of the sequence, had been especially proleptic: it had shown one of Norman's stuffed birds, a black crow with menacing beak, poised alongside, as if waiting to strike ...

As for Lila, every time she visits the Loomis store the film goes out of its way to photograph her beneath a cluster of garden rakes. The result is a nimbus-effect about her head. On the Saturday night when she and Sam wait for Arbogast, cigarette smoke hangs in the air around her (but not around Sam). Back-lighting catches her hair. The rakes appear in the background, as usual. In effect, Lila is given an effulgence, as in certain religious pictures, though the exalted effect is simultaneously played down by the circumstances: Marion's and Arbogast's ominous disappearances, the claustrophobic store room setting, Lila's rather plain hair-style and the severe cut of her tweedy suit ...

All this 'quoting' by Hitchcock's film is surely neither meaningless nor just irony. Rather, what it suggests is an elusive, though intentional, sense of meaning which has connotations of the numinous (such as Dali often employed). Implicit, too, is a possible Miltonic triumph to come. It's time we looked at the sonnet in its entirety.

* * *

Milton's poem, full of paradox, intimating both mortality and immortality, begins with a long subordinate clause (the first six lines):

When I consider how my light is spent
Ere half my days in this dark world and wide,
And that one talent which is death to hide
Lodged with me useless, though my soul more bent
To serve therewith my Maker, and present
My true account, lest He returning chide,
"Doth God exact day-labour, light denied?"
I fondly ask. But Patience, to prevent
That murmur, soon replies, "God doth not need

Either man's work or his own gifts. Who best
 Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best. His state
 Is kingly: thousands at his bidding speed,
 And post o'er land and ocean without rest;
 They also serve who only stand and wait."

Anticipating Psycho, the early part of the poem makes play with references to money and notions of worth. Milton invokes the parable of the talents. He asks, in effect, whether because of his blindness and his seeming inability to return interest on his "one talent", God will impose on him a living death, that of a hired labourer who must physically toil to ensure even a day's wage. (Not all of this, one supposes, accords with orthodox Puritan teaching.) Wrapped in both inner and outer darkness - and likening his soul to a flame without substance - the poet more than ever longs to present his "true account". Seeing this, and anticipating his cry of despair - or chagrin - Patience reminds him of the true nature of God's sovereignty.

One can imagine each of the principal characters in Psycho taking Milton's poem to heart. For the moment, let's consider Marion and her possible motivations. Foremost among these is surely her wish to be married and to become a mother. As Hitchcock told Truffaut, Marion is "a perfectly ordinary bourgeoisie". Not a genius - nor an artist nor a saint - she's just a 27-year-old single woman for whom boyfriend Sam may represent her last chance to attain respectability. Above all, Sam may represent her only chance to mother a child and realise her "one talent". As Marion packs a suitcase before fleeing with the \$40,000, the camera notes the family pictures on the wall. The most prominent, adjoining the clothes closet, is a photo of a baby (presumably Marion herself). For her, then, the stolen money already represents having a child, and secure parenthood. After all, it had belonged to the oil-lease man, Cassidy, who had boasted about "buying off unhappiness" by purchasing a house for "my sweet little girl ... my baby".

In her right mind, Marion knows that "buying off unhappiness" isn't as easy as it sounds. Nevertheless, her whole environment invites risk-taking and speculation (as in the parable of the talents). The very pictures on the real estate office walls - vibrant vistas of rivers and deserts - are arousing, and imply the possibility of a better life. One day, Marion finds that she is prepared to overlook some essential distinctions, such as between honesty and dishonesty. Losing "patience", she takes the money and runs. Later, like Milton after he'd had his "fond" thoughts, she appears to regain her senses, and sits at the desk in her motel room to present her "true account", i.e. work out how much she must raise to repay the full amount stolen. But for her, it's too late.

As if to underline the finality of Marion's death, Hitchcock doesn't spare us the sight of her body wrapped in its makeshift shroud of a shower curtain and, nearby, the money wrapped in its own shroud of newspaper. The latter package carries the further pathos of being like the baby that Marion never had. As their shared coffin - the \$700 car - sinks into a stinking swamp, phrases like "filthy lucre" must seem appropriate.

Elaborating Freud's concept of 'Character and Anal Eroticism', Ferenczi once called money "odourless dehydrated filth that has been made to shine". Even so, Ferenczi's 'shocking' comment sounds almost Puritanical, and it's interesting that Marion's bloody murder in the gleaming motel bathroom is ambiguous. From a Miltonic perspective, we must hope that Marion died in a state of grace. Perhaps in the end she really did find the innocence, or redemption, she sought. (Likewise, we'll need to consider below the possible religious connotations of Norman's last appearance in the film.) From another perspective, Marion is a sacrificial victim. In Hitchcock's The Lodger (1926) the murdered sister has a comparable function, allowing the story its apparent happy ending when the brother marries the look-alike Daisy. In fact, my 'overall' interpretation below of Psycho simply shifts the happy ending to a context beyond the film.

But to sum up this stage of the argument, consider again the snowfield scenes in Spellbound, set in a place called Gabriel Valley. Site of one man's murder, the snowfield also allows another man's eventual redemption. The predominant activity in these scenes is skiing, symbolising the possibility of both death and re-birth. So it shouldn't surprise us to learn that the allusion to the archangel Gabriel in the valley's name is ambiguous. Sometimes seen as a figure of death, Gabriel was more frequently thought of as one of God's chief messengers. Milton makes him the chief of the angelic guards placed over Paradise ...

* * *

I want to focus now on Psycho's ending and a contention of critic Robin Wood. Wood, much influenced by another psychoanalytic text, Norman O. Brown's 'Life Against Death', once wrote that "there can be no Heaven corresponding to Hitchcock's Hell". Well, he may be right, and certainly Milton's (Hitchcock's?) "dark world and wide" implies Satan's supremacy on earth. But let's not forget that poems, like films, are by and large made by creative people. The very act of creation may give the artist the taste of Heaven that - in this case - Robin Wood would deny him.

Further, Schopenhauer suggests that an artist, especially one of genius, may gain special insights into general truths. In writing 'On His Blindness', Milton not only quelled his "fond" murmurings, he awakened his mind to the actuality: "Who best bear his mild yoke, they serve him best." Granted, there's an element of the patrician about Milton, and very little modern "rage". (Again it could be Hitchcock I'm describing.) Yet the 'truth' of the sonnet is indeed the right one for the poet, as history showed. And the final note of submission is something more again.

Now, the ending of Milton's sonnet prefigures the even more profound submissiveness and stillness one finds in the poet's later works, especially 'Samson Agonistes' with its famous last line:

And calm of mind, all passion spent.

My interpretation of Psycho's last scenes is that they provide a parody of the 'Miltonic' ending - though the film isn't prepared to settle for just that.

Consider first the scene with the psychiatrist. While he is declaiming on Norman's case history, we may glimpse behind him: a set of old-fashioned filing cabinets, a stilled electric fan, a framed photo of a motor-cycle cop (without goggles), a map of the county. Each object counterpoints an ingredient of an earlier scene, and the effect in each case is demystifying. To take an instance, the contrast between a stilled fan here and a whirring fan in the opening scene practically sums up the general effect, for it signifies the change in the film's weather from sensual autumn heatwave to pre-winter cold.

Notice how a cold wind blows through the second half of Psycho (and, unabated, through The Birds, Marnie and Torn Curtain). At the end of the scene with the psychiatrist, a policeman comes to ask if he may take a blanket to Norman in his cell. Norman, unlike Lila a moment earlier, "feels a little chill". Further, here's how the film's screenplay describes his bare room: "The walls are white and plain. ... The room has a quality of no-where-ness, of calm separation from the world." The screenplay reiterates the word "calm" when it continues: "Calmly, Norman places the blanket over his shoulders as if it were a cashmere shawl."

Patently, what this scene represents is the triumph of Freud's death instinct. Like a black hole, the "Mother half" of the character has swallowed up the "Norman half". And it's fitting that, just as the plain white room provides a variant of the gleaming bathroom where Marion died, so Norman's blanket carries a reminder of her shower-curtain shroud.

But once again alternative readings are possible. Norman's cell with its "calm separation from the world", and Norman himself draped in a blanket, have further connotations. The character becomes in the end like a religious hermit or a Buddhist monk. The film had earlier twice referred to Norman's "hermitting". And the Buddhist connotation becomes the more compelling when Norman says he isn't "even going to swat that fly" - picking up on the remark by the customer in the Loomis store, clearly, but also bringing to bear an extra dimension which I've already suggested passes irony.

* * *

Historically, Schopenhauer may have been the first to see how the Christian notion of dying to the world in order to live and the Buddhist notion of 'annihilation' both find an analogue in the liberating abandonment of self that great art may bestow. On this insight he based much of his brilliant Weltanschauung which embraces philosophy, aesthetics and ethics. I have to say that until I read Schopenhauer, and thought further about Psycho, I never understood what Hitchcock meant when he once commented, "Everything's

perverted in a different way". Now I think I understand. And I think Schopenhauer can show us the fullest relevance of Milton's 'On His Blindness' to Psycho.

In Vertigo (1958) Madeleine constantly leads Scottie away from the world's rush to pockets of stillness where time seems suspended and eternity is almost palpable: in a church, an art gallery, an ageless forest. In North by Northwest (1959) Hitchcock parodies the same idea, for whenever Thornhill leaves his familiar offices and streets he finds himself exposed to danger (which, it's hinted, may represent 'the enemy within'). Psycho combines elements of both the earlier films. As I've previously written ('MacGuffin' 1), Vertigo's Scottie, a man of action, can't accept Madeleine's offered solution to "the world riddle", for he is neither artist nor genius nor saint - those people whom Schopenhauer suggests may have the necessary self-abandonment. (However, I dare say that an action-genius, whether a crack racing driver or a dervish, might also qualify.) Likewise, Marion, the "perfectly ordinary bourgeoisie", and Norman, who proves to be mad, respectively fall short of, and parody, the quality of genius that someone like Milton knew himself to possess and in adversity found so consoling. Note that the latter's "patience", approaching a saint's, bestowed on him at the moment of writing his poem a quietude inseparable from wisdom.

For the rest of us, even Schopenhauer can only offer, outside the experience of art, the indefinite prospect of a time when our wills may be turned fully around, thereby halting the world's blind striving, suffering and cruelty. Some of Psycho's black-white reversals, and its turning upon its audience, may intimate the same idea. But it's a mark of Hitchcock's intelligence that present-day inequity remains to the fore in this richly realist film.

* * *

Have I in any way refuted Robin Wood's contention that there can be no Heaven corresponding to Hitchcock's Hell? It's worth remembering that Hitchcock always tried to give due weight to the importance of action in the world, as you might expect of a director making films about extroverted Americans. One of his main themes, as I wrote in 'MacGuffin' 2, is "the dangers of merely watching". Yet there remains a sense in which the worldly heroes of Saboteur or North by Northwest are very limited. It has to do with the split in the director between realism and romanticism. The same 'Newsweek' article that quoted Truffaut's remark that Hitchcock "is essentially a romantic" also quoted Hitchcock himself on how, once he's at his desk,

... I can be anywhere. I can create the wildest things without being wild. Maugham travelled to Malaya, James Jones to Hawaii. With me, it's imagination, it's supposin'.

Well, The Trouble With Harry is the one Hitchcock film in which Heaven visibly touches the earth, and in practically every respect it's the inverse of Psycho. By the film's end, after suitable collusion between the resident "genius", artist Sam Marlowe, and a benign millionaire (who presumably earns his money from something more ennobling than oil), all concerned are granted their modest requests and, at the same time, a measure of happiness. A sense of renewal fills the air (though winter is surely coming): during the course of the film, everyone seems to grow younger. Everyone, that is, except the already dead, universally detested Harry. Thus the film represents the defeat of the death instinct in love (by the film's couples), in the practice of good works (by the millionaire), and in creativity (by Sam Marlowe and Alfred Hitchcock).

However, the film's setting is New England, after all, the home of the Puritan settlers. Throughout the film, the local church steeple may be glimpsed in the background and the peal of its bell heard. An element of religious faith is not excluded from Hitchcock's film any more than it is from Milton's 'On His Blindness' (though its exact function is ambiguous in both). So let a last word be that of another poet, the American-born T.S. Eliot (1888-1965), for whom "the faith and the love and the hope are all in the waiting". Eliot, influenced by Schopenhauer and Eastern religious thought, ends his 'Four Quartets' by describing the ideal that awaits "all our exploring":

A condition of complete simplicity
(Costing not less than everything) ...

'Psycho' man, 76, dies in mental home

The real-life 'Psycho'-killer: Ed Gein

NEW YORK, Thurs., AP. — Ed Gein, a farmer whose grisly slayings reportedly inspired the movie "Psycho", died today at a psychiatric institute.

Gein, 76, was found innocent on the grounds of insanity in his only trial, and spent almost all his life after his 1957 arrest in mental institutions.

The events leading to Gein's arrest began in November, 1957, when relatives of Bernice Worden, 58, realised she was missing.

Gein's battered utility had been seen near Mrs Worden's store twice that day, and a county deputy drove to Gein's farm to ask if he had noticed anything. No one was home.

He returned later at the side of the house saw Mrs Worden's body hanging by the heels, decapitated, and dressed like the carcass of a deer.

Authorities found preserved human heads and lampshades and chair seats made out of human skin. One room was boarded off — it had belonged to Gein's mother, who died in 1945. The room was as she left it.

Police accused Gein of robbing the recently-dug graves of women, who like his mother, died in middle age. They found a death mask of a woman who had disappeared three years before. Both she and Mrs Worden were believed to have resembled Gein's mother in his view, authorities said.

Robert Block, the author of the novel on which Alfred Hitchcock's 1960 thriller "Psycho" was based, lived about 80 km from Gein and based his book on the episode, according to the Milwaukee Journal.

The choice item on the left appeared, misprints and all, in the Melbourne 'Herald' on July 27th, 1984. Continuing our occasional series on crimes that inspired Hitchcock movies, the following additional facts are perhaps the ones bearing most directly on Hitchcock's Psycho and its successors like Jonathan Demme's The Silence of the Lambs.

Ed Gein worked the family farm at Plainfield, Wisconsin. (In Psycho, Norman Bates resides near 'Fairvale', California.)

He was universally liked in the area, and much in demand as a baby-sitter. Colin Wilson ('Order of Assassins') describes him as being of "mild appearance and gentle manner".

He'd lived alone since the death in 1945 of his highly dominant mother, who had been something of a religious maniac and who made her two sons stay away from women.

After the deaths of his mother and his brother within one year, Gein sealed off his mother's room, lived in a small part of the farmhouse and neglected the farm itself.

He took to reading books on the human body, and developed a morbid interest in female anatomy. (When Lila Crane explores the Bates house in Psycho, she opens a book containing pornographic pictures - at least, that's what it contains in Robert Bloch's novel.)

One night, after seeing a newspaper report on the burial of a local woman, Gein went and dug up her body and reburied the empty coffin. (In Psycho, it's his mother's body, of course, that Norman exhumes - or, rather, steals before burial.)

Able at last to satisfy his sexual curiosity at close quarters, Gein took to robbing graves on a regular basis - about one a year, usually at the time of the full moon.

It was but a step from grave-robbing to procuring fresh bodies by murder. Gein's first victim was a 51-year-old woman whom he shot dead in 1954. In 1957 he killed another victim, a woman who ran a local store.

That woman's son was none other than the local Deputy Sheriff. It was he who found her body.

A search of Gein's farm revealed the gruesome ornaments of his perverted pastime. There was, for example, a tom-tom covered with human skin. (This may indicate why Norman in the novel is fascinated with a certain passage from 'The Realm of the Incas' by Victor W. Von Hagen).

Also found were waistcoats of skin, which Gein had worn next to his body. (Such a trait is given to 'Buffalo Bill' in The Silence of the Lambs, where it is explained as a case of the killer wanting to become his victims. On the other hand, noting that both of Gein's murder victims were elderly women, Colin Wilson speculates that "the murders were intended as some kind of act of revenge against his mother".)

Besides murder, grave-robbing and necrophilia, Gein admitted to cannibalism. In December 1957 he was sent to an institution for the criminally insane. The Gein farm at Plainfield was burned down by locals, who regarded it as a place of evil.

K.M.

THE NIGHT SHIFT

(Editor's note. The following trip down memory lane is reprinted from 'Vampire', published by the American Mensa Vampire SIG. Specifically, it was printed there - in a "Gallery of Horror" - in the June 1991 issue.)

June is a warm month in the South, though the nights are still cool enough to be comfortable. June is a month of many traditions. It is the month of marriages, summer vacation, and once, the start of the Drive-in Movie season.

How many memories I have of the Drive-in, and how those memories punctuated the seasons of my life from childhood to youth, to young adulthood.

- A memory of an early night with my parents; the taste of coke, the smell of popcorn, the whirring of cicadas in the summer trees, the traditional lighting of the Pic to drive away the real bloodsucker of the night - the obnoxious mosquito. Perhaps you Northerners have never heard of, or even had the need of, the Pic, but it was a wonder to me; a coil of some unknown green substance that perched upon an aluminum stand. When lit, it would burn for hours driving away the pesky bugs and mixing with the many other odors forming the primal smell of Drive-ins. And then the movie would start and Godzilla would begin to eat Tokyo. But I was safe in the back seat with my cap pistol. Eat hot lead you big lizard! It was the Drive-in!

- A memory of another night with my first real date; a zombie movie was showing, but we only saw the first half-hour of the film, for a huge walking fog rolled in wrapping everything in its wet whiteness. But we talked and laughed and listened to the audio, and had a great time anyway. It was the Drive-in!

- And memory of yet another night with my first serious date; "Dracula, Prince of Darkness" was showing with the great Christopher Lee strolling through the film saying not one word. And this movie also went largely unseen, not because of inclement weather, but because it is almost impossible to watch a film from the back seat of a parked car. It was the Drive-in!

- Last memory of a summer night, driving into my favorite spot slightly behind and to the right of the concession stand; a good strategic location for pit stops and refueling, while keeping a good view of the screen. It had been a long time since I had been there, but I still knew the right moves. I didn't exactly know what was playing, but it was "Dracula something-or-other." I didn't care. It was a clear night, I was with the love of my life, and it was the Drive-in! The movie started and I was shocked to see it was Dracula in triple-X. I soon found that skin flicks were the only thing being shown there now. The shock cut through my denial and I admitted to myself what I had known all along. The Drive-in was dying, and the X-rated movies were its last grasp for survival. In the end, it only postponed the inevitable.

They are all gone now, abandoned to rot and decay, or paved over for parking space. They were swept away by multi-cinemas, VCRs, and rising property taxes and real estate costs. All gone, and a part of me has left with them as well.

But wait! Here in the paper I've found a listing for a Drive-in movie. It says, "Now showing ... on the Night Shift."

Dennis Tallent

.....



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'MacGuffin' 1 included articles on Hitchcock's Vertigo, plus an account of the director making Family Plot.

'MacGuffin' 2 included articles on Kubrick's A Clockwork Orange and Hitchcock's Stage Fright.

'MacGuffin' 3 included articles on Asian Cinema, 'The Hitchcock Romance' and Hitchcock's The Lodger.

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ODD SPOT: NOT THE WHOLE STORY

(Be warned: this item isn't for the squeamish. The information comes from Professor Peter Singer's 'Animal Liberation', 2nd Edition, and from other sources.)

In 1985, Dr Donald Barnes resigned from the US Air Force and blew the whistle on several grossly cruel experiments being performed with monkeys at Brooks Air Force Base, Texas.

In 1987, Hollywood director Jonathan Kaplan based the plot of his film Project X on the experiments, suggesting that they were of dubious validity and graphically showing the use of a flight simulator to expose chimpanzees to lethal doses of radiation.

But the reality is worse:

1. The simulator is also used to test exposure to the deadly nerve gas Soman, said to have caused terrible agony to troops in the First World War.
 2. In order to operate the simulator correctly, the monkeys receive preliminary training involving hundreds of electric shocks.
 3. The shocks continue during the actual experiments - even when the animals are nauseous and dying.
- * One other thing cinema audiences didn't see. During the film's making, the principal chimp had his back broken, reportedly by his trainer, and was 'put down'.

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