Newsletter of the Film/Alfred Hitchcock Special Interest Group

The MacGuffin

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LETTERS

(No 'Editorial' this time, just a lot of what I think is exciting reading - starting with these informative letters. Thanks to all our contributors. Good viewing - Ken.)

Aurelia Di Camillo, Pordenone, Italy

I didn't succeed in opening a Hitchcock SIG in Italy, but fortunately I read about yours! I will like very much to be able to exchange information about Hitch with you and the others of your SIG.

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Professor Thomas Elsaesser, Film and Television Studies, University of Amsterdam, Netherlands

Many thanks for your interest; as you see, there is a book of the [1980 Hitchcock] Conference. Enjoyed reading 'The MacGuffin'.

* * *

Charles Barr, School of English and American Studies, University of East Anglia, Norwich, England

Yes, I was at the 1980 Rome Conference, and well remember listening to the papers by [Claude] Beylie and [Jean] Douchet (among others). The Conference was trilingual, with earphone translations, and was curiously devoid of screenings - there were no films (as part of the event), and the organisers had laid on no visual aids, though at Douchet's insistence a 35mm projector was specially brought in to show an extract from Family Plot to illustrate his paper.

Thomas Elsaesser and I used to collaborate [at East Anglia] on a big course called "Hitchcock: English and American", fitted obviously to the nature of this school of studies; Hitchcock work now tends to be less intensive and to be subsumed under other topics, e.g. studies of silent film form or of a specific decade, although the contribution that any Hitchcock film makes to such courses is always vivid and important.

What would be particularly interesting [to see in 'The MacGuffin'] is a comparative survey of the way various courses in Britain and elsewhere have used, and do use, Hitchcock. The British Film Institute is about to launch its own MA film course, and plans to begin it with a substantial study of Hitchcock in terms of the various critical approaches. (Week 1 - the humanist approach - Robin Wood - etc etc.)

(Editor's note. My thanks to both Thomas Elsaesser and Charles Barr for responding to an enquiry about their participation in the 1980 Rome Conference - see 'Letters' in 'MacGuffin' 5. Professor Elsaesser has kindly sent us an Italian-language copy of his paper, "Il dandy in Hitchcock", this being how the paper was published in the subsequent book of the Conference. Very generously, Charles Barr has forwarded the English text of his own paper, "Hypnagogic Structures: Hitchcock's British period", and it appears below. For the record, the book of the Conference contains in Italian all the papers that were given; it's called 'Per Alfred Hitchcock', is edited by Edoardo Bruno, and was published at Montepulciano, 1981.)

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Professor Lesley Brill, Department of English, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan, USA

I have indeed enjoyed reading 'The MacGuffin': a genuinely intelligent publication of interested amateurs that takes into account film studies to a considerable degree without deferring to its uniformities, its fads and fashions.

Hitchcock is taught at Wayne in virtually all introductory film courses and at higher levels in courses on single (or a few) directors and on film theory. I do only a little teaching here because of my administrative duties, but I have taught a graduate course on film theory and authorship that divided its movies between Hitchcock's and John Huston's - the latter an ongoing passion that I hope to address in writing one of these years.

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Adrian Martin, Brighton, Victoria, Australia.

It was interesting to hear your comments on Bordwell's 'Making Meaning' [reviewed in this issue - Ed.]. I think I had two real problems with the book - I felt them as almost personal insults! The first is Bordwell's premise that all film criticism is basically 'institutional' - written by the academy, for the academy - which makes it all a pretty easy target for satire, as well as fair game for critique. Yet, even much of what he quotes as examples was written as labour of love stuff in struggling magazines, by 'freelance intellectuals' - stuff that probably never got anyone a job or promotion in any university anywhere. For Bordwell, there's 'journalism' - dismissed in about half a page - and then there's 'academic criticism', but nothing in-between. Yet so many people, projects, magazines happen in that free-thinking space between. 'The MacGuffin', for one!

The other thing I disagree with strongly is Bordwell's hostility towards any type of interpretation. Reading pieces in 'The MacGuffin', I am reminded again of how fertile and creative an open, speculative approach to interpretation can be. Bordwell's narrowly formalist approach, on the other hand, seems hardly like a holistic attempt to grasp films and the cinema-going experience - it just leaves out so much. Bordwell - like his even stricter colleague Noël Carroll - is obsessed with what can be 'proven', with empiricism, with collectively establishable and verifiable facts. I know what kind of excess on the other side he's reacting against, but I think he goes too far as well. Bordwell seems to paint any 'theme' or interpretation whatsoever as the analyst's sorry projection or hallucination into the film at hand. Yet themes (or ideas, symbols, meanings, motifs, whatever) are NOT just the coinage of analysts; they are part of the material that artists work with, shape, intuit - part of what drives them to make their art in the first place. So that's my instant rave on 'Making Meaning'!

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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.)

Chabrol's latest - was it inevitable?

Claude Chabrol (Le Boucher) is filming 'Madame Bovary', the classic novel by Gustave Flaubert about a provincial woman's passions. Isabelle Huppert plays the ill-fated Emma Bovary.

On location in Normandy, Chabrol admitted to 'Film Comment' (September-October, 1991) that he'd been foolish over the years to make so many potboilers, thinking at the time his direction could surmount the scripts' insufficiencies. It sounds like a backdown by the former film critic, who wrote a bold essay, "Big Themes, Little Themes", arguing that a director's personal style alone matters. Oddly enough, he may have found the idea in Baudelaire's essay on 'Madame Bovary' where Flaubert says, "I shall be able to show convincingly

that all subjects are equally good or bad according to the way they are treated, and that the most commonplace can become the best".

'Madame Bovary' has been filmed twice before: by Jean Renoir in 1934 and Vincente Minnelli in 1949. Alfred Hitchcock called Emma Bovary his favourite character in fiction.

And from Scorsese - expect the unexpected

After the stridences of Cape Fear, Martin Scorsese has announced that his next project will be an adaptation of Edith Wharton's Pulitzer Prize-winning 'The Age of Innocence', a story which begins in New York in the 1870s. Ellen Osenka, a former local society girl, has left her titled Polish husband abroad because of his dissipation. She meets Newland Archer, a young lawyer engaged to her shallow cousin, May Welland. Archer and Ellen experience a true communion of minds, yet he feels constrained not to break his engagement. Later, Ellen's family, dreading scandal, enlist Newland to persuade her against divorcing her husband. Her future ruined, she goes to live in Paris.

Scorses's producer, Barbara De Fina, says of the project: "It's about missed opportunity, which is a perfect subject for Marty. It's about repression."

* Meanwhile, Cape Fear's teenage actress, Juliette Lewis, has been featuring in the tabloids. Apparently, her 'innocent' image in Scorsese's film - dressed in white - doesn't at all match the reality - which concerns her appetite for drugs and living with older men. (Or does it? See the film.) The daughter of an actor who regularly appears in Clint Eastwood movies, she ran off three years ago with another actor. Now, aged all of 18, she's living with Thelma and Louise hunk Brad Pitt ...

An international reputation

Director Paul Cox (Man of Flowers, Vincent, A Woman's Tale) has gained acclaim around the world since coming to Australia from Holland in 1963, aged 23, and settling in Melbourne. His work has received elaborate analysis, as well as praise, in such publications as 'Film Quarterly' and 'The Village Voice'. Writing in the latter, Andrew Sarris called Vincent - The Life and Death of Vincent van Gogh (1987) "the most profound exploration of an artist's soul ever to be put on the screen".

Recently, the Film Critics Circle of Australia gave Cox a special award. Taking time off from his several current productions, he flew up to Sydney to receive it. Now, as some of us know, Cox doesn't mind having a grumble, so he used the opportunity to tell the assembled critics that the only city in the world where A Woman's Tale (1991) was put down was, you've guessed it, Melbourne.

It's only fair to add that the same week saw the 10th birthday celebrations in Melbourne of Film Victoria, a government film-funding body that has helped start or further the careers of several of Australia's most successful filmmakers, including Cox, Fred Schepisi (The Devil's Playground), Bruce Beresford (The Getting of Wisdom) and Jocelyn Moorhouse (Proof).

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Hypnagogic Structures: Hitchcock's British period

(Editor's note. This is the complete text of a paper given by Charles Barr at the Hitchcock Conference held in Rome, Italy, on May 6-8, 1980. Sadly, Hitchcock had died on April 29 at his Hollywood home. Some notable Hitchcock collaborators attended the Conference: actors 'Tippi' Hedren and Farley Granger, scriptwriter Ernest Lehman, Hitchcock's longtime assistant Peggy Robertson. Charles Barr's paper is printed here for the first time in English.)

I intend to talk about Hitchcock's British work (the period before 1940), partly because this seems one of the contributions that the English contingent can appropriately make on this third day of the Conference,

but more importantly because of the need to question an imbalance that is familiar in the critical literature on Hitchcock and is evident in the work of this Conference itself: that is, a concentration on the American films at the expense of the British. Why does this imbalance seem so inevitable, so natural? Firstly, the films have become distant in time - it would be hard to bring together a cross-section of Hitchcock's collaborators from the British period to talk to us as 'Tippi' Hedren, Farley Granger, Ernest Lehman and Peggy Robertson have done so interestingly about the American period. Secondly, the British films have always been less widely distributed and less widely available: we have heard from Signor [Morando] Morandini how (for instance) only five out of all Hitchcock's British films had a normal commercial distribution in Italy. But, thirdly, there is a powerful critical orthodoxy created by writers who have had no problems of access to the films, notably Robin Wood, himself English, whose immensely influential book in 1965 treated them as mere works of apprenticeship.

Ironically Hitchcock himself contributed to the neglect of these pre-1940 films by the terms in which he described them even when he was expressing a preference for them over his Hollywood work. As we know, he was always ready to tell interviewers what they seemed to want to hear, to privilege the British or alternatively the American work according to the preferences and prejudices and nationality of his questioners. Here is what he told a British-born interviewer, W. J. Weatherby, in a late interview published only last Sunday ('Sunday Times', London, May 4, 1980):

> I think my English films are more realistic. I not only knew the way of life better, but I could risk subtler observation. My American films are more romantic, more like my dreams. The personal touch, what means most to me, has to be slipped in surreptitiously.

The words set out a contrast, then, between realism on the one hand and dream or fantasy on the other, and the context clearly suggests that the former is more highly valued. They also define the "personal touch" in terms of the "slipping in" of eccentric details. Now it was in very similar terms that Anglo-Saxon critics of the 1940s and '50s consistently elevated the British films above the American ones. It was a line most powerfully expressed by Lindsay Anderson, writing in England around 1950; the view is not yet completely dead; but it has become an anachronism which it is hard to take seriously - I refer not to the liking expressed for Hitchcock's British work but to the terms in which this liking is expressed. We have many models for reading the personal signature and thematic of a filmmaker, within a film and an oeuvre, which transcend the notion of individual touches or of explicit subject-matter. Likewise, the critical attitude that uses the words Dreamlike, Fantastic, Escapist, Romantic, Unrealistic, Fabricated, as terms of dispraise, putting them ipso facto lower than 'realistic' stories and films with a 'documentary' base, has also been overturned.

So it has seemed simple to accept the terms of the conventional contrast and to turn them upside down: to neglect the British work precisely as being what its champions (Anderson and co.) presented it as being: more realistic, more eccentric, and thus, by a slight extension, more superficial and less rich than the American films were now found to be. That is the attitude which still generally obtains and which Hitchcock himself in his understandable nostalgia went on from time to time abetting.

I don't wish to reverse the process again and denigrate the American period, which I believe does contain Hitchcock's richest work, but I do wish to argue, briefly and as lucidly as I can, for a different approach to the British films on the grounds that in general they have the same kind of complexity and the same kind of dreamlike narrative structures as his American work does.

Let me start by recalling a sequence from Hitchcock's final silent film, and one of the finest of all his films, The Manxman. Like many of the early films this is a triangle story: a woman hesitates between two men. It is set on an island, the Isle of Man. Kate, the heroine, promises to marry Peter. He goes abroad, she promises to wait for him. While he is away, Kate and Philip - who is Peter's friend from childhood - fall in love. Peter is reported killed. Kate and Philip continue meeting secretly and discuss whether to bring their love into the open. Suddenly, Hitchcock reveals to the audience that Peter is alive after all: we see him despatch a joyful telegram to Philip to say he is coming home. Next scene: Kate leaves her house and runs to the shore to keep a rendezvous with Philip. He starts to speak to her (remember that the film is silent). Cut to the image of a ship at sea, sinister-looking, puffing out black smoke.

Now what is the impact and meaning of this image, the reading of it made by the spectator, at this point? It seems to me there are four possibilities:

- It is Kate's, or the couple's, mental image, located in no specific space; Philip is telling her the news that Peter is on his way back.

- It is their visual image: the next shot may show them looking at it.

- It is a narrative transition to a distant scene: Hitchcock is showing us Peter, en route.

- The ship is nearer, offshore, but the characters haven't seen it.

That is, the status of the image may be subjective/far (mental image), subjective/near, objective/remote, or objective/near.

What happens is that as the scene proceeds we are shown that the boat has come within the couple's field of view: he sees it, and she sees it, and they react to it, in turn. But this placing of the boat within the scene does not, I suggest, resolve the previous ambiguity. It is not a case of a confusion which has now been cleared up. The boat remains both actual and symbolic, both present to their imaginations and present in reality: we get these impressions in quick succession, and they merge, to give, very powerfully, the sense that their fears are coming true, they are starting to live through their nightmare. And this is a process which the film rigorously follows through. That hesitation between subjective and objective, actual and symbolic, evoked by the image of the boat, could have been illustrated in many other images and sequences in The Manxman, and it is the principle on which the whole film, one might ultimately say the whole of Hitchcock's work, is structured. On the one hand we see characters living their lives in an external world objectively presented, on the other the flow of images is subjectively motivated, catching us up in the dreams, fantasies, nightmares of these characters.

I want to say more about how this principle operates by referring to some of Hitchcock's sound films of the 1930s. Let me first say more about the term, 'dreamlike' in this context. Hitchcock does not simply present an exotic dream-world on screen in which a spectator can lose himself, or herself. Nor, often, does he insert dream or nightmare sequences in which we see a representation, clearly marked as such, of the character's dream. Nor, I think, does Hitchcock ever use the device of showing us an ostensibly 'real' sequence which is revealed in retrospect as subjective - "it was all a dream"; perhaps the closest he comes to this is in the tongue-in-cheek ending of North by Northwest, with the near-magical transition from extreme peril on the cliffs of Mount Rushmore to the top bunk of the railway cabin where Eve and Roger went to sleep mid-way through the film - as if it was all their dream. The delicacy, the non-explicitness, of this 'hint' is crucial. Dream or reality? (within a narrative that is in any case fiction). We need a concept that is at once more fluid and more precise, and for this I would propose, at least half-seriously, the idea of hypnagogia. The term is related to hypnosis but it is not identical with it. It has been used to describe the state between sleeping and waking in which an intense, fevered succession of images passes through the mind: the sequence is more rational, more subject to control, than the images of dream, but less rational and inhibited than our waking perceptions. Hypnagogis is a sort of trance, and hypnagogic images are images seen in a heightened trance-like state. I suggest that this kind of state links spectator and protagonist in many Hitchcock films.

If one had to define, in a single phrase, the subject of Hitchcock's British films, the best attempt at a definition might be this: a lady in a trance. Sometimes there is a man in a trance, sometimes the conflict within a character is presented without a strong subjective dimension, but frequently at the centre, as in The Manxman, there is a lady in a trance. Think of Murder!, Hitchcock's early sound film, where the lady accused of the crime enters the plea that if she did it it must have been when she was not conscious of herself, that it was, to quote her words, "daytime sleepwalking". Think of Alice, the daytime sleepwalker of Blackmail, a film absolutely full of the kind of hesitation between subjective and objective that I pointed to in The Manxman, and as complex, as multi-layered, a film as any Hitchcock ever made. Think of Madeleine Carroll in the latter half of The Secret Agent, and of Sylvia Sydney in the latter half of Sabotage. And consider the process by which, in the three purest adventure films of the 1930s, the act of sleeping is systematically inscribed in the narrative.

Every textbook on editing records, from The 39 Steps, the famous cut from the scream of the landlady discovering the dead body to the whistle of the train carrying Hannay to Scotland, but remember too that Hitchcock dissolves from the railway line to Hannay's sleeping face. It is part of a rigorous pattern whereby, until the final resolution, whenever Hannay is absent from the action we are shown either before, or retrospectively, that he is asleep or otherwise unconscious.

If one segments the narrative of The Lady Vanishes in terms of time and location, it falls into four very uneven sections: Day one, the hotel; Day two, the train; Day three, the ship (a single image); Day four, London. The real structuring principle of the film is seen if one divides it in terms of the periods of unconsciousness experienced by the heroine, Iris, and the blocks of action that take place during, and between, these periods. In succession, Iris sleeps, swoons, sleeps, swoons, hallucinates, swoons, sleeps, sleeps, and finally pretends to sleep. The whole film proceeds like a fantastic dream from which she intermittently awakes, then into which she plunges again, just as it is a fantastic adventure for the spectator, who is simultaneously conscious and unconscious of his own location in the cinema. And this hypnagogic discourse, based on the central character's fluctuations between sleep and waking, is very precisely motivated both in this film and in The 39 Steps. Both Richard Hannay and Iris become the focus of strong conflicts connected with sex and marriage. A chaotic world of unfulfilled sexual energy is created in the opening scenes in the Music Hall, and in the Hotel. Hannay himself is unattached; Iris is reluctantly engaged. Hannay is shaken up, meets a provocative woman, sleeps, wakes to nightmare, sleeps again, wakes (on the train), and so on. Iris is shaken up, sleeps, wakes to find by her bed (to fantasise?) a handsome man who creates new conflicts, is stunned by a blow on the head, wakes (on the train), and so on. At each stage it is as if she (like Hannay) is dreaming or hallucinating but at no point is this made explicit; the double status of the discourse, subjective/objective, is scrupulously maintained. The effect created is of a heroine playing out, living through, her fantasies, nightmares, conflicts. Or, to express it in reverse: what is being played out in objective narrative terms is a projection of meaningful interior fantasies, nightmares, conflicts, and works in that way, for the characters and through them for the audience.

Finally, Young and Innocent - one of Hitchcock's purest and most self-conscious narratives, the last of his 'Golden Sextet' of the 1930s (the others being the two films just discussed, plus The Man Who Knew Too Much, Sabotage, and The Secret Agent), and the only one of the six that has no political dimension. Like all of them it is centred on the formation, or consolidation, of a couple.

Analysis divides the film into 19 scenes, marked by change in location (the scene on the beach, the visit to the Aunt, and so on). What this analysis does is to reveal an extraordinary and perhaps calculated symmetry in what might be termed the hypnagogic structure.

We start with the young man, Robert: caught up in violence, accused of murder. In scene 3, in the police station, he swoons, faints; and Erica enters the room and the film, as if summoned up by his unconscious. In scene 8, on the run, he sleeps: Erica finds him and rescues him, thereby for the first time committing herself to helping him. In scene 12 - the 8th from the end - she sleeps, and he saves her from danger. And in scene 17 - the 3rd from the end - she swoons, faints, on her bed, and he enters her room by the window to save her like the fulfilment of her dream. Which sets it up for the happy ending: their unmasking of the real murderer, and their union. Remember that Robert has been established at the start as a writer of film scripts. It's as though he created a screen fantasy for himself, summoned up a woman to love and then projected a reciprocal (symmetrical) fantasy onto her; and this is also a satisfying fantasy or fairy-tale for his film's audience.

Which of course anticipates very closely the intricate structure of reciprocal fantasies in Suspicion, made by Hitchcock in Hollywood three years later - not to mention later films. The surface disparities between these two films (e.g. in acting style, and location versus studio shooting) are less important than the structural connections. There is no clear dividing line between Hitchcock's British and American work. I suggest that a close, and unpatronising, study of the British films can lead us to a more accurate grasp of his work as a whole, and to a thorough and long overdue revaluation of the British films themselves.

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THE BEST OF 1991

Or: the world as viewed from Down Under. Evan Williams lives in Sydney and reviews films for 'The Australian' newspaper; Tom Ryan lives in Melbourne, where he lectures in film studies and writes film reviews for 'The Sunday Age'. Both Evan's and Tom's 'ten best of 1991' lists include films shown at the Sydney and Melbourne Film Festivals.

Evan's list

1. 'Monsieur Hire' (Patrice Leconte)
2. 'Ju Dou' (Zhang Yimou)
3. 'Daddy Nostalgie' (Bertrand Tavernier)
4. 'Thelma and Louise' (Ridley Scott)
5. 'Architecture of Doom' (Sweden 1989. Direction & screenplay: Peter Cohen. Fascinating doco. on Nazi aesthetics.)
6. 'Dances With Wolves' (Kevin Costner)
7. 'Cross My Heart' (Jacques Fansten)
8. '35 Up' (Michael Apted)
9. 'Waltzing Regitze' (Kaspar Rostrup)
10. 'Life is Sweet' (Mike Leigh)

Tom's list

1. 'Miller's Crossing' (Joel Coen)
2. 'Thelma and Louise'
3. 'Monsieur Hire'
4. 'The Silence of the Lambs' (Jonathan Demme)
5. 'The Sheltering Sky' (Bernardo Bertolucci)
6. 'Trust' (Hal Hartley)
7. 'A Short Film About Love' (Kryzystof Kieslowski, an expanded and re-edited version of Part VI of 'The Decalogue')
8. 'The Company of Strangers' (Cynthia Scott)
9. 'True Love' (Nancy Savoca)
10. 'LA Story' (Mick Jackson)

(Editor's note. Tom adds that, for him, the best new Australian film in 1991 was Jocelyn Moorhouse's debut feature, Proof - "remarkably simple but it resonates with an originality and a cinematic savvy that makes it one of the most impressive Australian films in recent years".)

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BOOK REVIEW

Bordwell, David: 'Making Meaning: Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema' (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England, 1989; hardcover/paperback)

When critics and scholars use their favourite method for describing a film - namely, interpreting it - don't they in some fashion "make" the meaning they claim to find? Armed with that question, David Bordwell has investigated his academic colleagues' frequently unself-critical approach to the task of criticism. And though he's too canny to bring individual accusations, he exposes much wrongdoing. You may read him fascinated. He's a uniquely vigorous investigator - witness his book's 800 footnotes. On the other hand, you may also still arrive at the last page and hear yourself asking, so what else is new? It's that kind of work.

Perhaps I can best review it by ranging further afield to cite the following three 'case studies'. (For more on Bordwell, see 'Letters' in this issue.)

Case Study 1. A few years ago the New Zealand film magazine 'Illusions' printed a feminist critique of a local feature, The Scarecrow. Having consulted all the right sources (e.g. John Berger's 'Ways of Seeing' and Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema"), the critic set about showing how the film's character called Prudence, a "ripening" teenager, constituted a threat which would have "to be controlled, to be silenced" by men - both in and beyond the film. The general idea was that "the [pernicious] patriarchal system is inscribed within our cultural inheritance".

Well, no doubt it was commendable of the critic to sound that warning - even if, by 1986, it had become as commonplace in film journals as the other warning you saw on cigarette packs. The question is, did it apply in this case? 'Illusions' magazine decided to look further. Alongside the article I've just quoted, it printed a spirited defence from the film's director, Sam Pillsbury. And what he said was: The Scarecrow decidedly "does not 'teach [Prudence] a lesson by bringing her to the point of death' [after she is raped]", but rather "makes a statement within a comic/horror genre about the vulnerability of beauty and

innocence ... ". As for his critic's claim that Prudence was "meant [by himself and ultimately the audience] to be controlled, to be silenced", he was equally adamant: "This is bullshit, and it's not there in the film". How could it be, he asked, when virtually all the film's male characters are depicted as brutes, the product of their small-town environment?

Pillsbury had his own sources: himself as the film's director, and his personal experience. "I lived in a town like that once, and I wanted to say something about it." So where does that put his feminist critic's review? I'd say, in the cold. Reality must be respected, and it would be perverse in the extreme to still claim that The Scarecrow is "meant" to assert male control (as mediated in particular by the power of the viewer's gaze and his/her "visual pleasure"). I use the word "perverse" designedly.

Hence, this seems a case where the critic is guilty of imposing what Bordwell calls a "top-down" meaning. But notice, even he states his point as some sort of logical inference, rather than arriving at it through close investigation of particular films.[1] (I'll take up this matter in a moment.) The very term "top-down" is borrowed from cognitive psychology. Also, notice that at no stage does Bordwell, the canny diplomatist as far as his colleagues are concerned, allow himself judicious use of an expression like Pillsbury's "bullshit" - which seems to me a pity.

Case Study 2. As an instance of a film device being able to bear (different) "character-centred" meanings, Bordwell cites two feminist readings of the boathouse scene in Hitchcock's Rebecca. He notes that "both critics treat the film as a contradictory text" [i.e. one where the film's meaning indeed exceeds the sum of the director's intentions, to the point where inner contradictions appear as symptoms]. For Tania Modleski, the film is about female Oedipal relations, about how far the Joan Fontaine character may 'grow up' under patriarchy. For Mary Ann Doane, it's about how the same timid character doesn't grow up, i.e. about how the male gaze keeps oppressing her.

Merely a matter of emphasis, you might think. But now consider the boathouse scene. This is where Maxim (Laurence Olivier) reveals that he hated Rebecca - after initially being "enchanted by her". As he describes his behaviour on the night of her death, the camera moves over empty space. For Modleski, Rebecca is taunting Maxim from beyond the grave. The camera's movement, in Bordwell's paraphrase, "enacts the return of the repressed". But for Doane the shot is "itself repressive. She [Doane] takes it as Fontaine's optical point-of-view shot, transferred from Maxim and synchronised with his voice-off explanation." That is, Fontaine is made to identify with Maxim's dominant gaze.

However, it seems to me that neither critic gets to the nub of the scene. Neither of them sees that Maxim is probably lying - not just about whose body he'd identified at the first inquest, but about the degree of his guilt for Rebecca's death ... Describing the fateful night, he says that Rebecca had admitted she was "incapable of love, or tenderness, or decency". She'd then taunted him by asking, "Aren't you going to kill me?" The screenplay continues:

> MAXIM. ... I suppose I went mad for a moment - I must have struck her. She stood staring at me.
>
> The view moves down to the floor, indicating the place where Rebecca had stood.
>
> MAXIM'S VOICE. She looked almost triumphant - and then she started toward me again, smiling. Suddenly she stumbled and fell.
>
> The scene moves over to take in the ship's tackle on the floor.

Maxim adds that when he looked down, Rebecca was dead ... Now, let's go over the scene again. Rebecca appears to die after hitting her head on the ship's tackle, i.e. Maxim doesn't actually kill her and the Hayes Office has nothing to object to. Whereas, I'd say the film is hinting that he probably does kill her (as in the novel): he strikes her in one of his notorious temper tantrums, and she lives just long enough to give an "almost triumphant" smile. Remember, she'd been told by her doctor that she was going to die of cancer, anyway ...

In other words, the scene represents another of Hitchcock's so-called 'subjective' flashbacks, like that in The Lodger (which I analysed in 'MacGuffin' 3). There, the aristocratic Ivor Novello character appears unable to face the prospect of his innocent young sister 'growing up', so has her killed at her coming-out ball. In the case of Rebecca, by an exact substitution, the aristocratic Maxim can't face sharing Rebecca with her other lovers, so takes the opportunity she offers him of going "mad" and killing her in the boathouse (scene of her 'affairs', i.e. in his eyes an emblem of the fallen world). Afterwards, the respective characters - the Ivor Novello character and Maxim - lie about what has happened, even to themselves.

One may well ask what Rebecca symbolised to Maxim, and therefore what he effectively ends up repressing. I suggest that the answer is something like: sexuality in its wildest and most undifferentiated, i.e. 'uncivilised', aspects[2] - or, alternatively, what the philosopher Schopenhauer called sheer blind Will (hence the appositeness of the film's identifying Rebecca with the sea).

Maxim and the Joan Fontaine character, the second Mrs De Winter, will henceforth be living a lie together. (Again there are precedents/parallels in Hitchcock: for instance, the end of Sabotage.) Ironically, this marks the turning point in the marriage, and the second Mrs De Winter does indeed begin to grow up. For the first time, as the screenplay puts it, she becomes "intelligent, mature, taking command of the situation".

So, how does my interpretation of the boathouse scene affect the readings proposed respectively by Modleski and by Doane? Clearly, it vindicates them to a degree, i.e. concerning Maxim's fundamentally repressive character. Yet to a greater extent I'd say it shows them to be partial, even dubious. Both readings seem to me to generally ignore the film's crucial sense of two imperfect human beings - Maxim and his new wife - striving to realise their love. (It's surely what audiences most respond to.) In details, too, the readings seem to me questionable. For instance, Modleski claims that the reason the film doesn't resort to an actual flashback is that it wants to emphasise Rebecca's absence and 'lack', i.e. "an elaborate sort of castration joke" at Maxim's and the (presumably male) spectator's expense. Whereas, if Maxim is telling a lie, an altogether more probable reason for not showing the flashback is that it would diminish the scene's ambiguity (as in the line, "I suppose I went mad ... I must have struck her") - and showing the 'real' Rebecca would effectively stop her being 'all things to all men' (and women) ...

Likewise, Doane is correct in noting that Maxim's camera viewpoint comes to be shared by the Joan Fontaine character (when she learns he'd hated Rebecca) - but surely not as a means of showing her subordination. Quite the reverse, i.e. it emphasises that she now feels on equal terms with Maxim.

Notice that I'm not denying that Rebecca does "win in the end", just as Maxim had foreseen. If she'd lived, she would have used his aristocratic pride to make him pretend he'd fathered her child. In her "almost triumphant" death, she uses that same pride to make him live another lie - and to keep her successor childless. As I say, the film plays as an elaborate allegory of a fallen world, and one with its fair share of Freudian "discontents" ...

To return to Bordwell. It's possible he's too inhibited by the notion in modern criticism of the 'death of the author'. At any rate, he doesn't seem to me to get close enough to a complex film like Rebecca to fully assess the use of the critical strategies he describes. Towards the end of the book, he compares seven different readings of Hitchcock's Psycho in order to show "that the critical institution offers a diversified but not unlimited range of interpretive options". The chapter is neatly done - in its almost 'behaviourist', i.e. surface, kind of way.

Case Study 3. I first encountered the influential writings of Stephen Heath in an article he contributed to 'Screen' magazine about Hitchcock's Suspicion. The particular scene Heath described has two local police officers waiting downstairs to interview Lina Aysgarth (Joan Fontaine) in her country home. Heath notes, en passant, the presence in the scene of an 'abstract' painting. It's a painting which confounds the more junior police officer, who's clearly not a very bright chap. The score even pokes gentle fun at him with little trills on the piano. Unfortunately, Heath at no stage gives the slightest sign he's aware of this Hitchcock joke - which in its way anticipates Vertigo -[3] for plainly he has more convoluted business to pursue ...

Over the years, I read more Heath - nearly always protestingly. Then one day, after an extended interchange in 'October' magazine between Heath and rival critic Noël Carroll, my hopes were raised that he'd finally been demolished! But apparently that didn't happen. In Bordwell's book, which only 'quotes from the best', Heath is mentioned several times - and several more times than Carroll. Mind you, I again see evidence that Bordwell is just too polite: he refuses to call bullshit by its proper name. On one occasion (p. 221), he cites a particularly obscure - some would say, obnoxious - Heath passage from 'Screen', then follows it with a deadpan comment that "Anyone who complains about the style here is rebuked by this reply [from editor Ben Brewster, in the next issue]:

> No one writes difficultly in Screen for the sake of difficulty ...

Yet that reply just aggravates the problem. Whatever happened to euphony, concreteness, conciseness? After all, Brewster could have written:

> No writer for Screen is deliberately being difficult ...

But enough. Bordwell tells us how there's a great deal wrong with academic film theory and film criticism - and frequently the use, or rather abuse, of one by the other - but I'm unconvinced he offers insight for the sincere practising specialist. He discusses at length critics' rhetoric, or sleight-of-hand, yet never really distinguishes it from some accepted writing skills. (In both cases, you have to know what you're doing and be responsible.) So here's a parting thought. Perhaps one major problem with film criticism today is that some of its practitioners ignore what Schopenhauer often warned of: the need to distinguish between a (relatively concrete) percept and an (abstract) concept. If you mistake the latter for the former, you risk losing yourself and your readers in, precisely, the abstract - rather like Hitchcock's junior policeman.

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Notes

1. I see what Bordwell is doing. As he says in the Preface: "In order to study critical practice as such, we must pretend that all theories are correct ... and all critics are right. Holding partisan debates in abeyance helps us trace out underlying norms." My point later in the text, though, concerns how Bordwell's approach is 'behaviourist' and life-denying, and may itself be 'part of the problem' of modern criticism. For a suggestive example of critical obtuseness, induced by a scholar's use of an earlier Bordwell text in exegeting Hitchcock's The Wrong Man, see note 9 of my article on that film elsewhere in this 'MacGuffin', and compare the original article in M. Deutelbaum and L. Poague (eds), 'A Hitchcock Reader' (1986), pp. 214-15.

2. Rebecca may well be modelled on playwright Henrik Ibsen's Rebecca Gamvik in 'Rosmersholm' (1886), about whom Freud wrote brilliantly as ever in his essay "Some Character-Types Met With in Psychoanalytic Work" (1916). Freud characterised Ibsen's Rebecca as "a freethinker" brought up "to despise the restrictions which a morality founded on religious belief seeks to impose on the desires of life". In the script of Hitchcock's film, Rebecca is called "the beautiful Rebecca Hildreth", but the film itself changes the surname - most suggestively - to what sounds like "Henricks" or "Hendrich".

3. In the light of my closing remarks in this review, compare Hitchcock's comment to Truffaut that "Directors who lose control are concerned with the abstract".

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The American Mensa Writers' SIG welcomes new members. Membership + subscription to 'Calliope' (6 issues) costs US$6 (Mensans), US$8 (non-Mensans). Add US$2 for foreign postage. Sample of 'Calliope' costs US$1 + SAE (large) + postage for 2oz. Make cheques payable to Writers' SIG. Send to Donna Bocian, 3905 N. Panama Ave, Chicago, IL 60634-2041, USA.

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Dramatic Film Music in Hollywood's Golden Years (concluded)

One of the more distinguished film composers after the coming of sound was Dmitri Tiomkin who arrived in Hollywood in 1929. Born in St Petersburg, Tiomkin had been more used to the idioms of Tchaikovsky, Glazunov, Puccini and the young Stravinsky, than the lush contrapuntal lines of the late German Romantic scoring. However he quickly became fascinated by the legends of the American West. If one were to name the twenty best Westerns, Tiomkin would be found to have scored at least half of them. Yet the score which made him famous, that for Frank Capra's Lost Horizon (1937), had nothing to do with the American idiom. An enormous creation for nearly one hundred and twenty instrumentalists, it showed the composer's love of exotic and colourful sounds. More than a dozen percussion instruments, bells, gongs, gamelans, even Tibetan horns, as well as the full complement of symphonic instruments, were employed by Tiomkin to evoke the Himalayan never-never world of Shangri-La. Even the hard-bitten Harry Cohn of Columbia was deeply impressed, and if the film's art-deco visual splendours have faded a little, Tiomkin's rich Eurasian sound fabric has not. Oddly enough, Lost Horizon is at its most affecting when just a few instruments in chamber ensemble underline the meditative inwardness of the hero Robert Conway and his love for Sondra.

Tiomkin was fond of employing voices and choral effects in his scores, and the cliché of the hero and heroine riding off into the sunset to a hymnody of wordless singers was virtually his invention. Many of Tiomkin's best Western scores - for Duel in the Sun, Red River, Giant, High Noon and Rio Bravo - use the human voice in some fashion. Duel in the Sun (1947) has one of his most eloquent scores, with the cowboy folk song, Indian motifs, Spanish dance rhythms and the nostalgic Southern ballad all woven into a passionate, restless score which erupts violently at each new outrage wrought by Lewton McCanless, the lustful anti-hero. Red River (1948) was more orthodox, using snatches of old cowboy and military songs while matching them with sweeping passages of brass and percussion to mark the passage of a vast herd of cattle. Abrupt transitions between a ghostly and tender strain of melody for intimate scenes and sonorous blasts from the full orchestra to evoke landscapes and human conflicts was Tiomkin's most distinctive trademark.

'MacGuffin' readers will recall that Tiomkin made a valuable contribution to the Alfred Hitchcock canon with his sinister, quirky music for Strangers on a Train (1951) and his only slightly less arresting score for I Confess (1953).

Miklos Rozsa was perhaps the best-known and best-rewarded of all the older generation of Hollywood composers. Hungarian-born, he made his start in movies by doing work for Alexander Korda's London Films - first with Knight Without Armour (1937) and then the visually superb The Thief of Baghdad (1940). It is, of course, his contribution to the great historical epics Quo Vadis (1952), Ben Hur (1958) and El Cid (1962) for which he will best be remembered. Rozsa's deep musical scholarship and mastery of antique musical modes and idioms made him the acknowledged master of the sword and toga epic. The material he wrote for this genre is arguably better than his scores for several modern melodramas - Spellbound (1945) excepted - even those as famous as The Lost Weekend (1945) and Brute Force (1947). The reason lies in his curious inability to get away from an obsessive four-note ostinato figure with a rising accent on the third note which probably derived from the Hungarian folk idiom. It imparts a kind of dum-dum-DE-dum monotony to his writing which makes one modern Rozsa score often sound very much like another. Also his music for modern drama tends to be unrelenting and sombre - strings, horns and trombones mezzo-forte in lower register - with little light relief for contrast.

Some of the loveliest music Rozsa ever wrote was for Quo Vadis, notably the love-death theme for Petronius and his slave Eunice which was inspired by an ancient refrain in the Phrygian mode. El Cid too contains some magnificent heraldic and battle music, especially the startling use of full solo concert pipe organ at the end to mark the entry of the mounted corpse of El Cid into final battle.

Alfred Newman was inextricably linked as musical director with Twentieth Century Fox for most of his career, often being assisted by his able but less gifted brother Lionel. Newman was the first great American-born studio composer, and his finest scores rank with the best ever written for the medium. Like Steiner and Korngold at Warners, he fought for and got the best sound-recording and acoustics for his music then available. He did most of his earliest work as freelance when he wrote music for Goldwyn and others. His first really splendid score was for RKO's The Hunchback of Notre Dame (1940) - still the best evocation of

medieval life ever mounted on a studio lot. For this Newman borrowed a style inspired by the 16th century polyphonic master Palestrina and the Spanish master Tomas de Victoria, since actual music from the late Middle Ages was too restricted in range and colour. Newman sometimes borrowed freely from his own previous work, having no time to constantly develop new material whilst in his executive role at Fox. Thus the yearning love theme for Goldwyn's These Three (1936) appeared glowingly amplified and embellished as the love theme for Larry and Isobel in The Razor's Edge (1946), one of Newman's very finest scores. The final Alleluia for The Hunchback of Notre Dame in 1940 appeared again as the jubilant climax for his Academy Award setting for The Song of Bernadette (1943). This huge score with its impassioned outpouring of many themes illustrating spiritual love, human devotion and peasant simplicity was Newman's own favourite.

Newman's familiar idiom was marked by his preference for wide octave leaps between high-pitched, ardent, almost Mahlerian, writing for strings and heavy bass chords, frequently accented by bass drum. The unique intensity of his string-writing was shown at its best in themes illustrating erotic absorption or religious ecstasy, but he could be at home with a Gershwin-like symphonic jazz idiom as well. Possibly his most popular score was for the disappointing but costly swashbuckler Captain from Castile (1947). The concluding march theme, 'Conquest', eventually entered the standard repertoire for brass band. Oddly enough, Newman's often-mentioned early score for Wuthering Heights (1939) sounds trite, sentimental and very 'un-Brontë'. It has not stood the test of time.

Bernard Herrmann ranks as the last of the great composer-pioneers of the serious Hollywood score, and certainly not the least. He has become known as the quintessential Hitchcock composer. Herrmann's scores are full of that sense of danger which the great suspense films demand. His music is full of wild, hurtling chases, impending threats, and escapes which can diminish swiftly to a mere violinistic thread of sound. He also is master of the passage of high expectancy or some slightly astringent adagio for an erotic encounter. His score for Hitchcock's North by Northwest (1959) establishes its snarling force at the start; the tingling main 'pursuit' theme, with its spiky, staccato rhythm and shrieking woodwinds, is one of his most memorable creations. By contrast, Vertigo (1958) - some would say Hitchcock's masterpiece - has long sequences of brooding mystery below a surface of dream-like calm. These require extended slow lines of string writing with soft low-pitched woodwinds as Scottie trails the haunted Madeleine about San Francisco and up to Muir Woods. Vertigo shows that Herrmann could shift easily from the relative menace and acidity of his dramatic scoring to a clean, spare lyricism when required. There are echoes of the same dream-like quality in the superb sea music the composer wrote for Fox's The Ghost and Mrs Muir (1947).

The Man Who Knew Too Much (1956) required Herrmann not only to write the score but to conduct part of it on screen. In an agreed in-joke between Hitchcock and Herrmann, the composer decided to copy the master's trademark of briefly inserting himself into a film by appearing as the conductor in the Royal Albert Hall sequence. There are those who prefer the more briskly-edited 1934 original of this movie but Herrmann's contribution makes it 'no contest' when the two sound tracks are compared.

As film composer Herrmann will always be associated with his first great success Citizen Kane (1941). The film has a main theme of doom-laden power but it also contains a veritable cornucopia of moods, tempos and styles, all created to match the fast-moving documentary-like script. One sequence - the famous 'excerpt' from the bogus opera 'Salambo' - requires poor Susan Kane to sing a role against a vast fin-de-siecle symphony orchestra which her frail night-club voice cannot possibly cope with. So unerring was Herrmann's taste and scholarship that the sequence later passed into the standard repertoire as a soprano showpiece for singers like Kiri Te Kanawa. Director of the CBS network symphony orchestra as early as 1940, Herrmann was also a distinguished independent composer of many orchestral works, an opera ('Wuthering Heights') and a cantata ('Moby Dick'). His death marked the end of an era of full-blooded traditional scoring for the motion picture, which even the booming cinema sound resources of today cannot surpass and only rarely emulate. Herrmann was a significant transitionary figure between the old Wagnerian composing style of the 'thirties and 'forties and the modern idiom. He was capable of any style except rock-and-roll which, like many of his cultured contemporaries, he detested.

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* Excerpts from Dmitri Tiomkin's music for the Western is collected on a Silva Screen CD. A full suite from Lost Horizon, together with other Tiomkin material, is available in the RCA Classics CD series. Similarly,

there is a RCA CD devoted to the work of Alfred Newman and another to that of Miklos Rozsa. Two complete CDs from MGM are separately devoted to the Rozsa scores from Quo Vadis and Ben Hur. Bernard Herrmann is generously represented on record with the complete score for The Ghost and Mrs Muir on Varese-Saraband CD. There is a disc of selections from Herrmann's scores for Hitchcock on Decca/London CD - also a disc of his material from several Adventure films including Journey to the Centre of the Earth on the same label.

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Contributors to this issue

Charles Barr teaches film at the University of East Anglia, and has been prominent in English film criticism since helping to found 'Motion' ("The University Film Magazine") in the '60s. His books include 'Ealing Studios' and 'Laurel & Hardy'. His favourite English Hitchcock is The Manxman.

Ronald Conway is an Australian psychologist and author. Like one of his favourite composers, Ralph Vaughan Williams, he has "always preferred the imperfections of epics to the perfection of miniatures".

Ken Mogg once watched Hitchcock direct Family Plot. He lives near downtown Melbourne, Australia.

Irene Renata Radek is film reviewer for Mensa's 'International Journal' and Canadian Mensa's 'MC^2'. She's a talented actress and a graduate of the American Academy of Dramatic Arts in Los Angeles.

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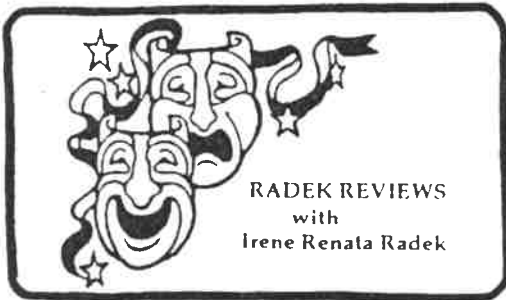
RADEK REVIEWS WRAP-UP 1991

(a) The 1991 Renie Awards



BEST FILM: The Fisher King

And now for something completely different ... The Fisher King never resorts to often tedious film formulae - rather, it reaches for the cinematic moon and firmly hangs on for the duration. It mixes most of life's ingredients in a completely novel and entirely entertaining way: reality and fantasy, love and hate, music and pain, comedy and tragedy, passion and apathy, riches and poverty, laughter and terror. Maybe it hits too close to home for a lot of the Academy's fat-cat conspicuous consumers who find it too uncomfortable to vote for a film about the homeless (an obscure documentary perhaps - a star-filled feature, highly doubtful). Regardless, The Fisher King is by far the best film of 1991.

Conversely, JFK is a long-winded bore (except for Gary Oldman - see below), Bugsy is classy but forgettable and none of '91's other films even come within a whisper of The Fisher King's entertaining originality.

Furthermore, I don't believe that an animated film should be placed in the same category with live action movies. Though Disney's Beauty and the Beast is truly wonderful, there are enough animated films in release to warrant their own separate category.

BEST ACTOR: Val Kilmer, The Doors

Though the film is positively putrid, Val Kilmer is nothing short of phenomenal as dead rock legend and all-around self-destructive egomaniac Jim Morrison. Recreating a historical figure - especially one still fresh in most people's minds - is an extraordinary challenge which Kilmer meets head-on; his onscreen concert performances (wherein Kilmer actually does the singing) are so eerily accurate that The Doors sometimes appears to be a documentary.

Unfortunately, the film was released in March and Kilmer's magnificent performance could be all but completely forgotten thanks to the Academy members' shamefully short-term memories.

Though front-runners Nick Nolte and Warren Beatty are commendable in The Prince of Tides and Bugsy, respectively, their performances were, to me, the best of their individual careers but paled against Kilmer's. If a performer's personal best were the Academy yardstick, then actors should be given a special Oscar each time one of their performances outdoes what they've done before.

The Oscars should therefore never be given as pat-on-the-back prizes to those who've simply outdone themselves (Nolte), as pity prizes to those who are ill (Liz Taylor, Butterfield 8), as consolation prizes to elderly actors who've never won (Jessica Tandy, Driving Miss Daisy), to those who deserved but lost the Oscar for another performance (Jessica Lange, who should've won for Frances - NOT for Tootsie) OR as congratulatory/safe-sex prizes to aging playboys who've finally settled down and had their first baby (you know who!). Though it's a difficult and often subjective call, Oscars should be given for the best performance of all performances in a given year. Therefore to choose anyone but Kilmer for this year's Oscar would be nothing short of criminal.

BEST ACTRESS: Ellen Barkin, Switch

Switch did not have a big budget, does not feature super-stars, was not released in December and is not a drama. Therefore the Academy may well miss or perhaps again forget a spectacular performance - Ellen Barkin's amazingly accurate portrayal of a man who is punished for his lothario lifestyle by being 'reincarnated' (sort of) as a man in a woman's body. Or the entire concept may just make male Academy members squirm ...

Barkin is highly underrated in general - she's created many splendid characters in both comedy and drama with little fanfare and a lot of talent. But, specifically, Barkin deserves to be nominated for her role in Switch as it is much more challenging than those enacted by any of her 1991 competitors.

BEST SUPPORTING ACTOR: Gary Oldman, JFK

Gary Oldman is the most brilliant actor on the face of this planet. In a relatively brief (6 year) film career, he's virtually done it all (and done it splendidly): assorted flawless dialects, original and historic characters, comedy and drama, straight and gay, punk and Shakespeare, intellectuals and clowns. Never false, never forced, always completely and utterly absorbing, Oldman is the quintessential actor's actor.

In JFK, Oldman's recreation of Lee Harvey Oswald is the ONLY thing that makes the 3+ hours worth watching. His character's physical mannerisms and vocal qualities are so accurate that I sometimes found it difficult discerning actual Oswald footage from Oldman's chameleonish performance. Oh, what the heck, just give Oldman all the Oscars and call it a night!

BEST SUPPORTING ACTRESS: Mercedes Ruehl, The Fisher King

In a comedically quirky yet perfectly poignant performance, Mercedes Ruehl is utterly charming and convincing as Anne, the bimbo girlfriend of a cold, confused ex-radio shock-jock. Ruehl plays subtext beautifully - beneath Anne's tough and tacky exterior lurks the wisest character of all.

In a particularly memorable scene, Anne's girlish flirtation vanishes in a breathless burst of agonised anger at her maddeningly stoic lover. Ruehl blends her character's opposites seamlessly.

BEST DIRECTOR: Terry Gilliam, The Fisher King

Terry Gilliam is a brave visionary, a film artist as well as director who has made an inspirational film that has no precedent, a unique and memorable cinematic masterpiece. Not only is The Fisher King beautiful to look at and listen to, the casting (with Casting Director Howard Feuer) is absolutely inspired - really, the featured players (Robin Williams, Jeff Bridges, Mercedes Ruehl, Amanda Plummer, Michael Jeter) ALL deserve to be nominated as well.

Furthermore, Gilliam painlessly delivers many a marvellous moral by wrapping said life lessons in a sensually splendid package. The audience never knows what to expect and, perhaps most wonderfully, The Fisher King leaves one with that lofty magical feeling that lingers upon awaking from a wonderfully exotic dream.

BEST ORIGINAL SCREENPLAY: Lawrence & Meg Kasdan, Grand Canyon

Lawrence and Meg Kasdan are the film philosophers of the baby boom generation. Their films' characters become almost secondary in importance; they exist chiefly to deliver the delicious Kasdan dialogue - dialogue that leaps off the screen to warm many a chilly boomer's heart. Virtually anyone could 'watch' a Kasdan film with eyes closed and still enjoy it.

Where The Big Chill encapsulated the concerns of the 1980s, Grand Canyon gently gathers and presents us with our contemporary world gone mad. Yet hope remains, according to the optimistic twosome, as humanity has not lost the ability to find and create miracles out of desperation. The Kasdans cater in literary food for the soul - and Grand Canyon is no exception.

BEST ADAPTED SCREENPLAY: Ted Tally, Silence of the Lambs

If you've read a good book, you'll probably be disappointed by the subsequent movie. Not so with Silence of the Lambs, based on the novel by Thomas Harris. Ted Tally's screenplay is deep-down scary and suspenseful, the characters fascinating and complete. No superfluous elements clutter the main plot line which plunges onward to a heart-gripping grand finale and a disquieting ending that leaves us wanting (though dreading) more. Absolutely delicious.

BEST CINEMATOGRAPHY: Adrian Biddle, Thelma and Louise

The United Kingdom's Adrian Biddle uses spectacular southwestern U.S. scenery to symbolise not only Thelma and Louise's isolation but the beauty of their friendship and of freedom as well (temporary though the latter may be). The towering golden mountains, hot hazy roads and sparkling desert skies are essential to the mood of the movie while Hollywood's preferred location for 1991, the Grand Canyon, makes a spectacular setting for Thelma and Louise's dramatic finale.

BEST SOUNDTRACK: James Newton Howard, Grand Canyon

Like the film, James Newton Howard's bewitching soundtrack captures life's opposites - a haunting choir of ethereally angelic voices smoothly alternates with a relentless urban-jungle beat. Mystical and powerful, the music sets Grand Canyon's moods quickly and cleanly to assist the flow of the film's rapidly changing scenes. Finally, a majestic American anthem reminiscent of Copeland soars like an eagle into flight.

Howard also composed the music for The Prince of Tides which, though entirely different, is just as memorably beautiful, poignant without ever encroaching into the realm of melodic melodrama.

Beauty and the Beast is heavily favoured to win Oscar but, again, I believe that incidental background soundtrack music should be in a separate category from music written specifically for musicals. More cinematic apples and oranges.

BEST SONG: Glenn Frey, "I'm a Part of You, You're a Part of Me", Thelma and Louise

Ex-Eagle Glenn Frey's ballad is the perfect theme song for the two best-buddy southern-belle rebels. Like the ladies, the melody has a sweet country beat while the lyrics speak eloquently of their forever friendship. Furthermore, Frey's song is the consummate driving ditty that makes you want to put the top down and feel that wind in your hair - just like Thelma and Louise (well, except for the end part ...).

BEST ART DIRECTION: Mel Bourne (Production Designer)/ P. Michael Johnston (Art Director), The Fisher King

Each Fisher King set visually describes its inhabitants with painstaking, fascinating detail ... from Jack's viciously cold and colourless penthouse to Perry's manically colourful urban cave (high to low, frigid to fiery) - whereas Anne lives somewhat gaudily on the second floor above a video store (a cinematic analogy for society's middle class?). Manhattan has never looked lovelier - or more frightening. From Gothic to apocalyptic, magical to murderous, The Fisher King's art direction/ production design is a deliciously unpredictable feast for the eyes.

(b) Top 10 Films of 1991*

Backdraft
The Doctor
The Fisher King
Grand Canyon
Hook
Little Man Tate
Prince of Tides
Silence of the Lambs
Terminator 2: Judgment Day
Thelma and Louise

Sleeper: Late for Dinner

(c) 1991's 10 Biggest Disappointments*

The Addams Family
Black Robe
The Doors
Hudson Hawk
JFK
The Marrying Man
Other People's Money
Scenes From a Mall
Soapdish
V. I. Warshawski

Didn't Expect Much But It Delivered EVEN LESS!: King Ralph

* Alphabetical order. Concert films, documentaries and animated films not included.

As I live in somewhat of a cultural wasteland, I have, as of this writing, to see Fried Green Tomatoes, Life is Sweet, Truly, Madly, Deeply and Hear My Song, as well as most of 1991's foreign films which should get here sometime THIS year. So, if upon seeing any of the aforementioned I change my mind on any of my Best (and possibly Worst) of 1991, I'll let you know!

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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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COMING ATTRACTIONS

Book reviews (e.g. 'Cary Grant: The Lonely Heart', 'Find the Director and Other Hitchcock Games'); the book and the film: Hitchcock's Suspicion; The Cabinet of Dr Caligari revisited. Plus 'News', 'Radek Reviews', etc. Additional items always wanted.

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The Man Who Knew Too Little: Hitchcock's 'The Wrong Man' (1957)

The majority of men are subjective towards themselves and objective towards all others, terribly objective sometimes ...

- Sören Kierkegaard[1]

In the novel 'Our Mutual Friend' by Charles Dickens (1812-70), the principal character is thought to have drowned, after which he goes incognito for a time. It's a peculiar sensation for him. "A spirit that was once a man", he says, "could hardly feel stranger or lonelier, going unrecognised among mankind than I feel." But he sees how "this is the fanciful side of the situation". His life has a "real side" which he determines to face. "I know I evade it, as many men - perhaps most men - do evade thinking their way through their greatest perplexity. I will try to pin myself to mine ..."

The passage is typical later Dickens. What it basically represents, of course, is a ghost's-eye view. Years earlier, in 'A Christmas Carol' (1843), Dickens had used the device of a ghostly watcher to teach his character Scrooge a simple moral lesson: here's what people really think of you, and hadn't you better do something about it? But in the major novels, like 'Bleak House' (1853) and 'Our Mutual Friend' (1865), he put the device to more sophisticated effect. One such effect was to make the people watched themselves seem like spirits - as if it took a ghost to see a ghost.

In turn, notice what that does. It helps turn the central Dickens problem of an intractable self into a universal phenomenon, one where everybody is visibly mortal. (By a "problem of ... self" I mean both a psychological and a moral issue, stemming in Dickens from our imperfect human nature.) In the case of 'Our Mutual Friend', if not all its characters choose to confront their "perplexity", even fewer of them prosper; still, the novel hints how, at a symbolic level, the waters of the Thames are at least potentially healing ...

Mind you, London itself is blighted from the start; in 'Our Mutual Friend' you have dust obscuring whole areas of sky and landscape. Here Dickens took his iconography from William Blake (1757-1827), whose poem 'London' refers to "the chartered Thames" and "Every blackening church".[2] Between them, these two writers created a vision of the metropolis which their successors exploited with varying degrees of effect and skill. For instance, what soon followed were the countless detective tales and 'thrillers' showing a city gripped by the notorious 'London particular' fog; the best of these included Conrad's 'The Secret Agent' (1907), Mrs Belloc Lowndes's 'The Lodger' (1913), Thomas Burke's 'The Hands of Mr Ottermole' (1931), and Margery Allingham's "The Tiger in the Smoke' (1952).

In the cinema, D. W. Griffith's Broken Blossoms (1919) provided an early instance of an adaptation from the same literary stream. The story came from another Thomas Burke title, a collection called 'Limehouse Nights'. (It, in turn, had appropriated its unredeemably brutal character known as 'Battling' Burrows from 'Our Mutual Friend' - whose 'Rogue' Riderhood is a scavenger in the Thames.) Under Griffith's direction, the story's riverside fogs were artfully realised, and the film's performers (Lillian Gish, Richard Barthelmess, Donald Crisp) all helped further convey a sense of ineluctable gloom.

Now, I want for convenience to call the tradition I've just outlined 'English expressionism' or 'English noir'. Alfred Hitchcock was drawn to it from the start, with his adaptation of The Lodger (1926), and further showed that he understood its deeper nuances when he made Frenzy (1972). The latter begins ironically, with views of a cleaned-up Thames. Within minutes, an equally ironic allusion to Wordsworth's 'Prelude' (Book XI - 'Imagination, How Impaired and Restored')[3] sets the director firmly onside with Blake and Dickens. Soon we learn that London is in thrall to a Necktie Murderer, and that the city is "littered" with the corpses of his victims ...

Frenzy is relatively lightweight. But at the height of Hitchcock's career, in America, he'd made The Wrong Man. That film tells the true story of a man's wrongful arrest and his fears for the loss of everything that constitutes his identity: his family, his job, his sanity. Straight away, Hitchcock must have seen how the film's wintry images and downbeat theme could be inflected according to the 'English' model he knew so well - no matter that the setting was New York. Indeed, the parallels with 'traditional' London were there

to be exploited, and Hitchcock promptly set about doing just that. In the event, even the structure of the film followed earlier models, the most important of which is undoubtedly Dickens's 'Bleak House'.[4]

* * *

[Kierkegaard] is the only modern man who has so profound a sense of the solidarity of the race that original sin makes any sense to him.

- Walter Lowrie

Far more than Kafka's 'The Trial' (1925) - which it influenced - 'Bleak House' underpins The Wrong Man in nearly every major respect.[5] (Hitchcock had read the Dickens novel at school.) There's a splendid study by Taylor Stoehr[6] which convincingly argues that at the core of Dickens's art is a sense of wholeness restored, an elaborate and by no means trivial "dream" for the reader to live through and savour. In this, Stoehr's estimation of Dickens's intent hardly differs from Robin Wood's notion of there being a "therapeutic" purpose to Hitchcock's films. I want now to examine The Wrong Man as a 'Dickensian' text - starting with the film's opening scenes.

For a certain kind of imaginative artist, time and space are major raw materials to be worked. Such an artist is Hitchcock, whom we see at the start of The Wrong Man. A shadowy figure, he addresses us across the vastness of a deserted sound stage ("This is Alfred Hitchcock speaking ..."); paradoxically, while he appears distant and diminutive, his voice is close at hand, confiding. It's as if we were being given privileged 'interior' information which transcends the space of its telling. (And which, having been recorded on film, it certainly does.) Appropriately, Hitchcock distinguishes between the present film and his past work: what we are about to see "is a true story, every word of it". Together with the gloomy and deserted set and a musical motif which includes a menacing double-bass, everything here contrives to suggest the essence of expressionism: a man bringing himself to judgment in his own mind.[7] But if Hitchcock quite literally puts himself at the centre of this first scene, that's not the end of it. The double-bass isn't only Hitchcock's instrument (as in Strangers on a Train), it's also that of his principal character, whom we are about to meet. Moreover, the same 'expressionist' stylistics that accompany the film's opening will envelop what follows to the last shot.[8] In effect, we're being told that all the world's a sound stage, and that Hitchcock is both master of ceremonies and, like us, one more participant.

Cut to New York's famous Stork Club - where musician Christopher Emmanuel ('Manny') Balestrero plays in the Latin band. Another master of ceremonies presides here: on the right of screen hovers the Club's maître de ... Likewise, a different double-bass prevails, that of Manny (Henry Fonda). But again things aren't as they first seem. Belying the generally festive connotations (people dancing and dining out beneath bunches of balloons; the band's rumba accompaniment), what the sequence shows via a series of near-invisible dissolves is the Club's patrons being spirited away. It's at once a foretaste of other 'Dickensian' effects to come and a link to the deserted sound stage of the opening. Equally, because the dissolves condense an evening's festivities into a few seconds of screen time, the sequence is a correlative of the first: instead of space being primarily what is transcended, here it's time. As critic William Pechter notes, the effect is positively eerie - and much-facilitated by Bernard Herrmann's reedy modulations of the rumba score.[9]

The foreshadowings multiply. Even the particular lettering of the film's credits in this sequence will be echoed later when Manny and his wife Rose (Vera Miles) visit the office of the attorney Mr O'Connor (Anthony Quayle), i.e. you can see the same style of lettering spelling out the words "Law Office" on the window behind O'Connor's desk. Such 'closure' may be comforting but it also suggests entrapment in someone else's nightmare - in this case, presaging the attorney's eventual inept defence of Manny in court. Again, during the credits sequence Manny's band is heard by the film audience playing continuously, i.e. without sound dissolves matching the visual dissolves: the effect both imposes a 'wholeness' on events that are in flux and suggests some (wilful?) blindness on the part of Manny and his fellow musicians to an insidious reality. Both aspects of the effect anticipate issues in the film. But their near-paradox, which continues the vein of Hitchcock's introduction, is surely aimed at us.

When Manny leaves the Stork Club that night the camera frames him in such a way that he appears to have been arrested by two passing foot patrolmen - but he is oblivious of this, i.e. he doesn't yet see himself

through an outsider's eyes. Also, though he next descends to his customary subway station and boards his usual train,[10] he soon ascends again, i.e. metaphorically and actually, he's unconscious of how he's about to be plunged, like a Dickens character, into murky depths where he'll struggle for his life. And so on - the opening scenes are indeed one long foreshadowing (thus, given the protracted nature of everything that follows, a kind of meta-foreshadowing).

Let's run the film forward to the point of Manny's arrest. Here there's a key sequence in which he's picked up by detectives and taken, after initial interrogation, to visit the places he's alleged to have robbed. Much of the area is familiar to him. As the police car starts out, Manny can see Rose waiting for him at home, unaware of anything wrong. Wherever he looks, people are going about their business. But soon we notice something else about the pinched faces of these passers-by in the wintry streets. Typically, they show the "Marks of weakness, marks of woe" evoked by William Blake's 'London' (compare Dickens's 'grotesques'). On the other hand, I can't agree with critic Donald Spoto that there's anything "suspicious" about them; basically, they express a preoccupation and busy-ness that are just human. And, yes, mortal: caught in car headlights, people hurrying across the road look like wraiths. The scene's 'ghostly onlooker' effect anticipates both Vertigo (adapted from a novel called 'Among the Dead') and the credits sequence of North by Northwest (which is as eerie as that of The Wrong Man).[11]

* * *

The bourgeois mind is really the inability to rise above the absolute reality of time and space, and as such is therefore able to devote itself to the highest objects, e.g., prayer, at certain times and with certain words.

- Sören Kierkegaard

Manny's nickname reminds us that he's just an ordinary man, a capable musician but no genius like the immortal Mozart (whom both Manny's boys, aged 8 and 5, say they wish to emulate). An Italian Catholic, he puts his faith in God and lives his life accordingly. Early in the film, Hitchcock goes to great lengths to establish the Balestrero family's average qualities. At the same time, death-in-life (a favourite Hitchcock theme since The Lodger)[12] already prowls ...

Arriving home from work in the early morning, Manny closes the front door - which the tracking camera 'miraculously' penetrates. Here, and again later, both the camera and the ubiquitous double-bass refuse to be kept out. In one sense, they assert the wholeness, the bigger picture, that Manny simply can't grasp. (If he could, he might have less need of miracles - something for which he and his family later pray.) But in another sense, it's death itself which enters Manny's home. This particular morning, the double-bass sounds as if it were stalking Manny down the hall, in a reprise of the mournful oboe and double-bass motif from the pre-credits sequence. Specifically, that motif functions like Albinoni's famous 'Adagio' as used in both Orson Welles's The Trial and Peter Weir's Gallipoli to suggest fatality (and where the double-bass is singularly expressive). Simultaneously, Hitchcock establishes a context that will mock any attempts by the Balestrero family to deny reality: e.g. when Rose wants to lock all the doors and turn people away.

Inside the house it's still dark and the two boys are asleep. But in the main bedroom Rose is awake and is anxious to talk to her husband. She's been suffering from impacted wisdom teeth, something her dentist has explained in a little lecture he gave her "on evolution". As Rose puts it: "Seems the human race is growing smaller jaws and having fewer teeth, but the teeth are ahead of the jaws ..." (i.e. everything moves so slowly). It's not the only such lecture we hear in the film. After Manny's drawn-out day in court ends as a mis-trial, the judge sententiously tells the jurors about the American system of justice - which has evolved from the famous Code of Hammurabi. "In Babylonian days ..." Against the sort of time-scale evoked by these references, that of Manny's and Rose's lives is modest indeed: e.g. they have enough problems just making month-by-month repayments of money they've borrowed on the instalment plan. The scene in the bedroom ends when Rose says she sometimes feels frightened at night as she waits for Manny's return; and a small bedside clock chimes the hour.

That tinkling sound - so puny compared to the film's omnipresent roar of trains - confirms the various

messages we've been getting. The outer world whirls around the fragile domestic world, threatening to catch it up and crush it. True, Manny can comfort Rose by saying without apparent complacency: "We're in love, we've got two good bright boys, I've got a job I like ..." Nevertheless, their sense of reality (which philosophers would define in terms of a time-space-causality nexus)[13] is not only ordinary, it's blatantly utilitarian and 'bourgeois', i.e. routine and confined. When next afternoon Manny joins his sons beside the piano (note the metronome on top), it isn't surprising to hear him offer this piece of homespun advice: "You musn't let anything throw you off the beat ..."

* * *

The opposite of the bourgeois mentality is really the Quaker religion (in its abstract significance), where it includes the uncertainty and chance which is found in the life of so many; altogether it is an annihilation of the historical process.

- Sören Kierkegaard

What now happens to Manny is played out like a nightmare against a backdrop we've already partly noted, that of New York in the winter of 1952-3.[14] In this nightmare, human need finds itself cut off, as if by a time/space warp, from a support which had always seemed available; now, other people come and go but they appear preoccupied or unheeding. In short, the atmosphere resembles that of 'Bleak House', whose famous opening includes the following passage:

> Implacable November weather. As much mud in the streets, as if the waters had but newly retired from the face of the earth, and it would not be wonderful to meet a Megalosaurus, forty feet or so, waddling like an elephantine lizard up Holborn Hill ... Foot passengers, jostling one another's umbrellas, in a general infection of ill temper, and losing their foot-hold at street-corners, ... adding new deposits to the crust upon crust of mud, sticking at those points tenaciously to the pavement, and accumulating at compound interest.

The weather that prevails in the very title of 'Bleak House' is, of course, symbolic, the equivalent of the dust in 'Our Mutual Friend'. That is, the 'problem of self' is evoked on a national, indeed universal, scale - though it's most artfully realised in the localised descriptions of London and its inhabitants, as in this passage. Notably, the passage hints at various forms of combativeness and greed, and the slow if not failed role of evolution in halting human imperfection. Also, it foreshadows the lumbering lawsuit that will take centre-stage in the story and affect many lives, several of them terminally.

Other imagery here is 'generic' in the sense that it recurs as a set of parallels in The Wrong Man: e.g. the tenaciously clinging mud (compare the film's memorable close-up of Manny's soiled hands after his finger-printing), the ill-tempered pedestrians losing their foothold (compare Manny's injunction to his quarrelling sons not to lose "the beat"), the implicit contribution made to the "general infection" by commerce with its "deposits ... accumulating at compound interest" (compare Manny and Rose's struggle to pay back money they've borrowed on the instalment plan). As I've implied, the parallels to be drawn between Hitchcock's film and Dickens's novel are more extensive, and more suggestive, than could be drawn between the film and Kafka's 'The Trial' ...[15]

Now, it's scarcely forcing matters to add that in The Wrong Man there are several 'bleak houses': the precinct station (with its scarred concrete walls), the cheerless tenements, the sanitarium (to which Rose is committed late in the film), the Balestrero house itself (after Rose's departure from it). The early hints of mortality and coming tribulation are just that, hints. But soon they are confirmed, as when Manny goes looking for alibi-winesses and finds that the people have all either died or moved away without trace. Seeking these potential witnesses, Manny and Rose visit parts of the city that are clearly unfamiliar to them; in the same way, characters in 'Bleak House' visit little-known parts of London (e.g. the foul slum called Tom-all-Alone's). Manny and Rose even travel out of the city to an up-state holiday resort where, the previous summer, they had spent happier times; now the resort is under snow and as much in the grip of winter as the city itself - a parallel to how in 'Bleak House' there's little to choose between muddy London and drizzly 'Chesney Wold' in Lincolnshire.[16]

Also, in both works hopes are constantly being quickened, then dashed. Manny strides purposefully across the snow at the resort but achieves nothing definite. Back in the city, he and Rose visit a tenement block and hear animated sounds in the apartment they're seeking, but the giggling young girls who answer the door can't help them. (The two girls, whose parents are not at home, mirror Manny and Rose's two boys - who at this moment are also without their parents' company.) Even Manny's trial begins in hope that the truth will quickly come to light, for he would seem to have one (at any rate) excellent alibi from his dentist, who can testify that his face was visibly swollen on one of the robbery dates; but the proceedings end in anti-climax. In all these instances, one may be reminded of a passage from Chapter 2 of 'Bleak House' (a passage ably analysed by Professor C. B. Cox):

> My Lady Dedlock (who is childless), looking out in the early twilight from her boudoir [at Chesney Wold] at a keeper's lodge, and seeing the light of a fire upon the latticed panes, ... and a child, chased by a woman, running out in the rain to meet the shining figure of a wrapped-up man coming through the gate, has been put quite out of temper. My Lady Dedlock says she has been 'bored to death'.

As Professor Cox's analysis shows, the effect here hinges on the sudden contrast between the generally deathly scene (there's even a paved terrace at Chesney Wold called 'the Ghost's Walk') and the warmth and darting movement across the way.[17] Also, let's note the continuity with other parts of the novel: e.g. with the ill-temper of the Londoners in Chapter 1. By such means, both 'Bleak House' and <u>The Wrong Man</u> exploit their respective closed worlds, to immense cumulative effect.

Again, people and events in <u>The Wrong Man</u> have generally a subdued, underwater quality - more purposeful movements are the exception. But when Manny is arrested and locked up overnight, in effect he survives drowning. As the camera begins to whirl around him in his cell, Herrmann's <u>most</u> 'underwater' music (harp, strings, distant brass and <u>stifled</u> woodwinds) echoes the suggestion of a vortex. For a while Manny finds that his whole conception of time and space, and of values, has shifted. Released on bail, he tells his wife and his in-laws, who put up the money, "I'll never forget this, never." For Rose, he has the special thought, "Oh honey, you'll never know how much I needed you." Perhaps most significantly, as he pauses on their door step where just the previous day the police had accosted him, he says it feels like it happened "about a million years ago".

* * *

> Even if, juristically speaking, we were not accessories to the crime, we are always, thanks to our human nature, potential criminals. In reality we merely lacked a suitable opportunity to be drawn into the infernal melee. None of us stands outside humanity's black collective shadow. Whether the crime lies many generations back or happens today, it remains the symptom of a disposition that is always and everywhere present ...
>
> \- C. G. Jung (1957)

Sadly, Manny never really incorporates the insights his ordeal offers him. His 'bourgeois' viewpoint remains essentially unaltered, restricted in spite of everything by his particular time and place.[18] Then he fails a crucial test. Even so, the director's compassion, especially for a fellow Catholic, allows a final ambiguity ...

Hitchcock called his film's dénouement merely an "ironic coincidence", but one he "liked". (Perhaps for more than aesthetic reasons?) As Manny prays to a religious picture, the real holdup man materialises on screen, to be caught soon afterwards. I think even a viewer who is a non-believer feels the impact of this. For a start, the <u>materialisation</u> of the real criminal reverses a trend: recall the 'dissolving' Stork Club patrons, the dead or vanished witnesses, Rose's breakdown. Manny himself has seemed headed the same way, having just told his mother (Esther Minciotti), "You'd all be better off without me". (Note that <u>dematerialisation</u> is also very much a motif of 'Bleak House', as epitomised in the startling death of a character by 'spontaneous combustion'.)

Also, the episode is constructed and played to suggest a new wholeness. This time, our sense of that

wholeness has less to do with a feat performed by Hitchcock's camera, and more to do with 'an act of God' which the film dutifully presents. After Manny's despairing remark to his mother, she tells him to pray for strength. What we then see is a succession of four 'heads': that of Manny's mother (who prays in an adjoining room), that of the Christ figure in the religious picture, that of Manny, and (after a single most emphatic dissolve) that of the real criminal who will be caught as he tries to rob a delicatessen. This visual 'chain effect' shows us a continuity not yet known to Manny, though he may infer it later. What he may never truly infer are all the other continuities, i.e "ironic coincidences", that have led up to it.

The crucial coincidence, of course, isn't just that Manny has a 'double' but that the latter operates in Manny's neighbourhood and holds up the insurance office where the Balestrero family have opened accounts. (Later, it even turns out that Manny and his double print alike and make an identical spelling mistake.) Actually, the film contains several 'doubles' of Manny and the real criminal, some more 'alike' than others: Manny brushes against one of them (the real criminal?) on the fateful afternoon he visits the insurance office to arrange a loan on Rose's policy.[19] Further, Manny lives in Jackson Heights, an area of Queens,[20] which happens to be where the attorney Mr O'Connor also lives. Yet Mr O'Connor's office is located in the Victor Moore Arcade Building, just up the passageway from the insurance office. This, in a city the size of New York! Again you think of Dickens, of whom his contemporary and biographer John Forster wrote:

> On the coincidences, resemblances and surprises of life Dickens liked especially to dwell, and few things moved his fancy so pleasantly. The world, he would say, was so much smaller than we thought it; we were all so connected by fate without knowing it and people supposed to be far apart were so constantly elbowing each other; and tomorrow bore so close a resemblance to nothing half so much as yesterday.

That's indeed the stuff of both 'Bleak House' and The Wrong Man. In Manny's case, he glimpses a state of consciousness which might encompass it (compare his "million years" remark and his new knowledge of the city), but even the glimpse 'dissolves'. In fact, the arrest of the real criminal seems only to cause Manny more setbacks in the here-and-now:

(1) The first of these is crucial - a test which he fails. When the two men come face to face at the precinct station, Manny's response is to assume the other's absolute guilt, as various people had earlier assumed his own. Manny shows no magnanimity. But, reverting to old form, nor does he show understanding. "Do you realise what you've done to my wife?" he asks peevishly. Which is no doubt human of him, and true-to-life, but also self-denying in a Jungian sense - note that I'm far from calling Manny a saint. And what will happen to this other man's wife and family?

(2) With grim justice, Manny himself encounters non-understanding when he tries to explain events to Rose. As in 'Bleak House', when the seemingly interminable lawsuit ends but leaves behind a trail of devastation and madness (e.g. Lady Dedlock's suicide), so Hitchcock's film contains its own victims. Notably, there's Rose. Blaming her impacted wisdom teeth and her inadequate housekeeping for what has happened, i.e. employing the same weak logic to which Manny is prone, she retreats into catatonia. When Manny comes to the sanitarium to tell her he's been cleared, she only murmurs, "That's fine for you". Here, what looks like a variant on Dickens's 'problem of self'[21] enters another slow stage. Manny admits to a nurse that he'd been "hoping for a miracle", and that his sons pray each night for their mother's recovery. The nurse smiles. Miracles happen, she says, "but they take time".

A final title, placed over a long-shot of a family strolling down a Florida street, tells us that after two years Rose left the sanitarium "completely cured". Yet still a plummeting chord sounds a note of terror. The essential Hitchcockian ambiguity remains.[22] The ordeal of one man and his family may be over, but the deeper-lying problem remains unaddressed. And though the answer may occasionally be glimpsed through what I've called the philosophers' time-space-causality nexus, who among us can really expect to do better than Manny and penetrate to that awesome region of the 'thing-in-itself'?

8. The film's penultimate shot shows a corridor in a sanitarium, where back-lighting duplicates that of the opening scene. The final image is of a Florida street, ostensibly signifying 'release'. But even here, converging footpaths form a wedge-shape which repeats the typical expressionist 'man bringing himself to judgement' motif. Also, as I note in the text, there's an alarming chord on the soundtrack at this point ...

9. Pechter's article - one of several perceptive pieces he wrote on Hitchcock - appeared in 'Commentary' magazine, November 1976. (I thank Freda Freiberg for showing it to me.) By contrast, Marshall Deutelbaum's "Finding the Right Man in The Wrong Man" (printed in his 'Hitchcock Reader', 1986) is often exasperatingly beside-the-point or wrong, as when he says that "the lap dissolves [in this sequence] function in a purely conventional manner".

10. Both the subway station and the train are largely deserted, with the same connotation as before.

11. An essay could be written on the North by Northwest credits sequence. An initial 'ghostly' green, itself a carry-over from Vertigo, dissolves to a view of glass office blocks which eerily reflect home-bound New Yorkers. The effect echoes T. S. Eliot's "Unreal City" passage in his poem 'The Waste Land' (e.g. the lines "A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,/ I had not thought death had undone so many") - a passage he notes was inspired by two lines from Baudelaire. Equally, though, it seems possible that both Eliot and Hitchcock (here and in Frenzy) were reacting against the typical Wordsworth view of London (e.g. the latter's 'Westminster Bridge', which begins, "Earth has not anything to show more fair"). In view of the many poetry references I keep attributing to Hitchcock, in various issues of 'The MacGuffin', it's worth noting that he was a friend of C. Day Lewis, the English Poet Laureate (1968-72), who wrote crime fiction using the significant pseudonym Nicholas Blake.

12. See 'Odd Spot' in 'MacGuffin' 3.

13. Hugo Münsterberg anticipated The Wrong Man when he wrote: "The photoplay tells us the human story by overcoming the forms of the outer world, namely, space, time and causality, and by adjusting the events to the forms of the inner world, namely, attention, memory, imagination and emotion." Nevertheless, as I wrote in 'MacGuffin' 2 (p. 4), we can make no ultimate distinction between outer and inner worlds, object and subject. Hence, perhaps, the characteristic Hitchcockian ambiguity ...

14. Hitchcock's film is based, via a treatment by Maxwell Anderson and Angus McPhail, on Herbert Brean's "A Case of Identity" which appeared in 'Life' magazine, 29 June 1953. Brean's article deserves anthologising for its excellent reporting and intrinsic interest.

15. Still, I leave as an open question Mark Spilka's differentiation between Dickens's and Kafka's basic religious assumptions. For Dickens, the unjust social order shown in 'Bleak House' has been generated in part by a false notion of people's natural sinfulness. The fog clinging to the Court of Chancery would disappear if society would accept the fact that God is beneficent, and people naturally good. (Compare Lesley Brill's view of Hitchcock in 'The Hitchcock Romance'.) Kafka, on the other hand, accepts the notion of a distant, inscrutable God, apparently unjust, who condemns all of us to a state of "sinful innocence". (This is closer to my own 'Schopenhauerian' view of Hitchcock.)

16. Compare note 4.

17. Professor Cox's "A Dickens Landscape" appeared originally in 'The Critical Quarterly', Spring 1960.

18. Jung's 'The Undiscovered Self', quoted at the head of this section and again later, was published in America just as The Wrong Man appeared. Both works reflect, in their respective subjects, some Cold War attitudes then prevailing en masse. Fittingly, Patrick Humphries' 'The Films of Alfred Hitchcock' quotes noted critic Colin McArthur: "the film which perhaps best conveys the underlying unease of 50s America is The Wrong Man".

19. Marshall Deutelbaum's article (see note 9) says that "the real thief is often visible in the film as he and Balestrero cross paths". But Deutelbaum fails to distinguish between actual look-alikes and people who

* * *

The perfect has no need of the other, but weakness has, for it seeks support and does not confront its partner with anything that might force him into an inferior position and even humiliate him. This humiliation may happen only too easily when idealism plays too prominent a role.

- C. G. Jung

To cite such an (arguably) God-like entity as Kant's 'thing-in-itself' is to raise the question: should any of us even want to presume knowledge of it? At any rate, that's a Hitchcock theme whose fullest exploration occurs in his next film, Vertigo. You might call the theme the 'tragic pursuit of perfection'. In Hitchcock, it's invariably linked to a character's sudden realisation of just how precarious his life is. That in turn may suggest a crucial link to the nightmare world of The Wrong Man.

Now, a coda. For the element of nightmare there's a further 'English' precedent, of which Hitchcock was undoubtedly aware.[23] I'm thinking of what is still probably the world's most famous case of mistaken identity, that of one Alfred Beck. In 1896 Beck was arrested in a London street on the say-so evidence of a woman who claimed he'd previously swindled her of money and jewellery. On being 'identified' by several witnesses, including two policemen, he was found guilty and spent five years in prison. Three years later, in practically identical circumstances, he was arrested again! Once more he was found guilty. This time he was awaiting sentence when the police learned of the arrest of another man who'd been using what sounded to them like a familiar technique. One of them visited the man and immediately saw his resemblance to Beck. It turned out the man had committed all the swindles ...

Thus the Beck case may have given Hitchcock the idea he used in The Wrong Man of a detective's sudden chance realisation of Manny's innocence - a scene which effectively completes the earlier 'four heads' sequence. Need I add how the ambiguous emphasis on chance fits the film's evocation of our everyday world, in which both mundane and extraordinary forces operate largely unseen?

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Notes

1. The present article will refer to works by Dickens and Kafka. The great Danish thinker Kierkegaard (1813-55) has been studied by scholars of both novelists. I've found him particularly illuminating of Hitchcock's films Shadow of a Doubt (1943) and The Wrong Man.

2. Camille Paglia's comments on Blake's poem in her book 'Sexual Personae' (1990) are relevant. She writes: "Blake prefigures Baudelaire and Kafka in his vision of the dead night-world of the modern city, today an arid grid of glass and concrete." Paglia, whose book has perceptive things to say on both Dickens and Hitchcock, might further have cited those artists in the context of her remarks on Blake. See also note 11.

3. For my thoughts on the zealous Wordsworth (1770-1850), see note 11.

4. The pioneering article on Dickens and Hitchcock, which is excellent, is Edward Buscombe's "Dickens and Hitchcock" in 'Screen', Volume 11, Issue 4-5 (July-October, 1970). One of Buscombe's main points concerns the notion of a 'desecrated Eden' in both artists' work.

5. For Dickens's influence on Kafka, and a comparison of 'Bleak House' and 'The Trial', see Mark Spilka, 'Dickens and Kafka' (1963).

6. Taylor Stoehr, 'Dickens: The Dreamer's Stance' (1965).

7. I owe this definition to Dr Margery Morgan who gave it in a lecture delivered at Monash University on aspects of German Expressionism.

are merely similarly dressed. In Hitchcock's The Man Who Knew Too Much (1956) we see a woman, dressed like Doris Day in a grey suit, arriving at the Albert Hall: this is presumably Hitchcock's way of telling us that Day, despite not being formally attired for the symphony concert, would have been admitted by the Hall doorman. For the record, in The Wrong Man I think that the man who bumps into Manny in the Victor Moore Arcade is the real criminal, but that other men seen in the street are merely wearing a similar style of overcoat.

20. Queens is where another Italian-American, and an admirer of The Wrong Man, Martin Scorsese, lived as a boy. Scorsese's Cape Fear (1991) deals with the breakdown of a family under pressure in ways that offer parallels to Hitchcock's film. See also note 22.

21. Dickens's 'problem of self' is partly one of characters' inability to change. 'Our Mutual Friend' explores that theme most fully. But if one seeks parallels for Rose's condition as seen in The Wrong Man, perhaps the Dickens characters who come most readily to mind are Mrs Clenham ('Little Dorrit') and Miss Havisham ('Great Expectations').

22. The 1992 edition of Donald Spoto's 'The Art of Alfred Hitchcock' reports (p. 257n.) that the film's final shot was added by the studio "over Hitchcock's loud objections". Spoto adds: "In fact the Balestreros never recovered from the lived nightmare ..." Such an outcome is in line with, for example, Australia's real-life 'dingo baby' case, filmed by Fred Schepisi as A Cry in the Dark (1988), where Lindy and Michael Chamberlain were divorced soon after their ordeal. Still, Hitchcock's film was accurate in reporting Rose Balestrero's release after two years spent in a sanitarium (whether or not she was "completely cured"): see "Court Turned Into a Movie Set", 'New York Times', 9 April 1956.

23. This article has concentrated on 'English' aspects of The Wrong Man. Even so, I've omitted to mention the likely influence of some of John Galsworthy's social dramas, especially 'Justice' (1910). I've had to leave out entirely the influence of Maxwell Anderson ('Winterset'), who worked on the screenplay, and of several American plays such as 'Death of a Salesman' (1949) and 'Marty' (1954). For comparison of Henry Fonda's roles in films for Fritz Lang and John Brahm, see Michael Kerbel, 'Henry Fonda' (1975).

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ODD SPOT: RACING AROUND (AND ACROSS)

A question for those who like to play "That reminds me of ..."-type games. What is the connection between Hitchcock's The Birds (1963) and Hugh Hudson's Chariots of Fire (1981)?

Answer: possibly none - but consider the following. Hitchcock's film contains a scene in which Rod Taylor and 'Tippi' Hedren race each other across a bay - he by driving around the perimeter in a sports car, she by taking the direct route in a motor boat. It's clear the scene afterwards influenced Peter Weir's Gallipoli (1981), where two young men race each other across the Australian outback, one on foot and the other on horseback. (The rider is required to refrain from taking shortcuts.)

Well, Hugh Hudson's film seems to pick up on Weir's. Near the start, one of its young men shows promise in athletics. Coming to Cambridge, he accepts a challenge to race against his college clock, which chimes the hour in a certain space of time. And, in fact, the young man succeeds in running around the college quadrangle before the clock stops chiming - the first person ever to do it.

Of course, if Weir's film, and indirectly Hitchcock's, didn't influence Hudson's, that leaves unexplained why the two 1981 films resemble each other in so many other ways. Answers, anyone?

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