

Introduction

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An Unrivaled Figure

IN THE WEEK FOLLOWING INGMAR BERGMAN'S death, film critic David Denby wrote in *The New Yorker* that Bergman "was perhaps the most influential of all filmmakers as well as the most widely parodied" (10). Of course, Denby said "perhaps," and he supported this view by writing that "In the nineteen-sixties and seventies, antic couples quarreled in mock Swedish, film students spoofed his morbid dream sequences, Woody Allen sent the hooded figure of death from 'The Seventh Seal' stalking through 'Love and Death.'" Nevertheless, this assertion was astonishing. It was as if someone had called Nietzsche "perhaps the most influential of all philosophers as well as the most widely parodied," and had noted that in the nineteen-seventies students walked about Harvard Square in Nietzsche T-shirts, that some thinker had designated Nietzsche *the* philosopher of the twentieth century, that even the much-heralded HBO television series *The Sopranos* invoked the pronouncement for which Nietzsche is best known (at least to non-philosophers): "God is dead."

Indeed, the case for Nietzsche is considerably stronger than the analogous one for Bergman. While there may be no obvious alternative candidates to Nietzsche as the "most influential" philosopher (at least in the twentieth century)—with the possible exception of John Dewey, Martin Heidegger, or Ludwig Wittgenstein, if philosopher Richard Rorty is right (5)—there *is* an obvious alternative to Bergman in the person of Alfred Hitchcock, whose work has influenced and been imitated,

parodied, and otherwise sent up by admirers and acolytes from Mel Brooks and Jonathan Demme to Gus Van Sant and Brian de Palma (see Boyd and Palmer). Has there ever been a more recognizable filmmaker, one who combined artistic achievement so thoroughly with commercial success, and whose influence can be felt in such disparate movements and subgenres as film noir, the French New Wave, the thriller, the psychological drama, espionage, romance, and horror films? Another significant indication of the continued influence and importance of Hitchcock is the ascent of *Vertigo*, his 1958 assay of the passions and obsessions of romantic love, to the top of the 2012 *Sight & Sound* critics poll, displacing for the first time in four decades Orson Welles's *Citizen Kane* (1941). While there can be little doubt about his place in the history of filmmaking, the essays in this volume provide new and compelling perspectives on Hitchcock, who worked through a "moral lens" whose contours and significance continue to provoke complex and appreciative responses.

A Philosophical Filmmaker

Irving Singer argues that Alfred Hitchcock, much like both Orson Welles and Jean Renoir, was not only a "great" filmmaker but also a "philosophical" filmmaker. Singer is one of the most prolific and respected of contemporary thinkers, so who might be more qualified to make such a judgment? And yet Singer thinks that Hitchcock himself would have scoffed at any notion that his films could be termed philosophical or, more weakly, that they even could be seen as seriously exploring weighty themes. Hitchcock, of course, would not have disputed being considered a giant figure of world cinema; he had, after all, by the end of his career achieved an unequalled record of critical and popular success. He directed more than fifty films for two different national industries, working regularly and profitably as a filmmaker for almost six decades; after making his way up the professional ladder, Hitchcock first assumed the director's chair in 1922 (with *Number 13* for Gainsborough, which was never finished); his last completed project was for Universal, *Family Plot* (1976). In addition, during the 1950s, he moved into producing a television series that proved an immediate popular and critical success. The director turned on-screen personality hosted numerous episodes of *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* with an unforgettable mixture of deadpan humor, playful ghoulishness, and cynical observations about human nature, in the process extending and enhancing his already considerable reputation as a storyteller and ironist, about which he was never too modest to feel quite proud.

Yet Hitchcock, or at least so Singer imagines, never would have considered any of his feature films or TV episodes philosophical because in them he never “pontificates about eternal verities or the analytic niceties of analytical philosophy” (3). Never reluctant to discuss his artistic aims and procedures, Hitchcock considered himself a gifted storyteller and well-practiced professional entertainer, but he was prone to slight the weightier aspects of the films he made. This self-conception emerges time and time again in his occasional writings (a precious few, but filled with interesting perceptions about the creative process and production procedures), as well as in interviews.¹ In a 1955 conversation with the director, for example, André Bazin observed that “several young French critics” (he refers to his *Cahiers* colleagues Claude Chabrol, Éric Rohmer, and François Truffaut) have found “hidden beneath the crime fiction pretexts of your films” a singularly “consistent and deep message.” Hitchcock’s response: “From the outset I take no interest in the story I am telling but rather only in the means I employ to tell it”; most important to him as a filmmaker, he continues, is maintaining the proper balance between drama and comedy, with at that point in his career the most successful of his works by this criterion being *The Lady Vanishes* (1938) (Bazin 29). To be sure, this film is arguably among his wittiest, remaining consistently popular with critics and his fans. But *The Lady Vanishes* has not been understood as propounding a “deep message,” and, perhaps for this reason, it was never a favored text of the *Cahiers* Hitchcockians (Bazin 28–29). Chabrol and Rohmer, for example, drily observe that “it prompts little in the way of commentary” (62). To be sure, if Hitchcock’s major cinematic accomplishment were a judicious manipulation of tone *tout court*, we would not be talking about him as one of world cinema’s greatest directors, but as a forerunner of specialists in the contemporary dramedy, with his talents in this area measured against the likes of the similarly gifted James Mangold (*Knight and Day*, 2010) and James Liman (*Mr. and Mrs. Smith*, 2005), both of whom have produced amusingly witty comedy thrillers in the tradition staked out by *The Lady Vanishes*.

But the nature of *The Lady Vanishes* should give us some pause. Easily dismissed is the notion that all of Hitchcock’s directorial efforts are necessarily informed by meaningful commentary on the human condition, broadly conceived. Or that they are uniformly profound in the sense somewhat overenthusiastically proclaimed by Alexandre Astruc in the early days of Hitchcock criticism. Engaging in these films, each of which, so Astruc says, tells “very much the same story,” is to “find oneself in a universe that is simultaneously aesthetic and moral where black and white, shadow and light find their places,” a universe reminiscent of

the fictional worlds conjured up by a Dostoevsky or Faulkner” (Astruc 5). It is evident, of course, that not all Hitchcock films are reminiscent of highbrow fiction or provide provocative variations on some weighty ur-story. A number of Hitchcock projects, especially during the early years of his UK career, are scarcely even personal, if at all; they are studio assignments, such as *Juno and the Paycock* (1930), which is better considered a Sean O’Casey adaptation than a Hitchcock film, properly speaking. And, much like Graham Greene’s “entertainments,” a number of Hitchcock films (such as *The Trouble with Harry* [1955]) offer low-key, mostly comic versions of the themes the director pursues more deeply and complexly elsewhere: the dark underside that suddenly intrudes, shockingly, and sometimes violently, into the banal everyday; the often neither unpleasant nor unsympathetic face of evil; a hitherto solid identity lost to misadventure that a therapeutic double pursuit restores, even remakes; the physical struggle that inevitably closes out the confrontation between good and evil and mostly ends, if more than a little precariously, in the righteous vindication of the characters Hitchcock has convinced us to at least consider good, despite their evident shortcomings, so that we might derive pleasure from their triumphs and consequent reclamations of self. As David Sterritt puts it, films such as *Frenzy* (1972), whatever challenges they pose to interpretation, offer “evidence of a broad moral vision that runs through Hitchcock’s work”; there is no doubt that he is a filmmaker who views the world he conjures into being “as a locus of substantial moral complexity”(16).

Hitchcock and Catholicism

At least these days, Hitchcock’s critics find themselves largely in agreement with Singer and Sterritt—and with good reason. Despite the director’s protests to the contrary and the fact that his oeuvre unsurprisingly includes productions that resist any penetrating thematic exegesis, it seems true enough that most, if perhaps not all, of Hitchcock’s films are philosophical insofar as they are infused, as Singer puts it, with “a profound perception of, and concerted interest in, the human condition as [he] knew it” (3). This “infusion” (surely a useful metaphor for this aspect of the creative process) resulted not from some intent to express or promote some religious, ethical, or political message. And yet some of his early admirers, most notably Chabrol, maintained that Hitchcock had a “Catholic conception of what life is,” even if he “could not envisage the direct (I mean ‘living’) intervention of God in that struggle whose reward is human deliverance” (Chabrol 20). Writing the first full-length study of Hitchcock’s films, Chabrol and Rohmer argue that Hitchcock’s

central theme is the interchangeability of the guilt of each and every one of us, which is to say that his films address the collective ontology of an Original Sin whose central fact is its totalizing transference from one generation to the next. For these two critics, then, Hitchcock's films illuminate different, but equally central, forms of sinfulness: the prideful presumption of innocence, even though depravity is in us all; and the self-regarding surrender to despair once we discover our presumption of innocence to be mere illusion. The moralism of his narratives, or so they suppose, oscillates between two poles of action: an unmerited descent into madness or loss (a consequence of the unfathomable and diabolical machinations of the universe) that is balanced by the unexpected deliverance from lasting disaster or death whenever divine grace finds its salvific powers activated by the virtuous exercise of free will (Chabrol and Rohmer *infra*, esp. pp. 150–54).

Though ingenious and at times illuminating, this attempt to claim Hitchcock as essentially a Catholic artist in the tradition of a Graham Greene or François Mauriac no longer persuades many. Such a reading of Hitchcock's moralism has mostly seemed unnecessarily narrow, over-emphasizing the centrality of those few films such as *I Confess* (1953) and *The Wrong Man* (1956) that deal directly with Catholic practice and institutions, with the supposed doctrinal themes of these films given perhaps unwarranted weight. As Robin Wood rather acidly puts it, this approach has "the effect of depriving the films of flesh and blood reducing them to theoretical skeletons" (Wood 62). Interestingly, even if he took a different path to understanding and appreciating Hitchcock's accomplishment, Wood was too perceptive a critic to deny that Hitchcock is a philosophical filmmaker in the sense that Singer maintains. "Hitchcock's morality, with its pervading sense of the inextricability of good and evil," he opines, "is not so simple" (63). But even in the frenzied first decade of Hitchcock enthusiasm in France, the notion that Hitchcock, the successful studio artist, was also "philosophical" found its detractors. Hitchcock, *Positif* critic Ado Kyrrou dismissively observes, has served three roles in the history of world cinema: first, he was fronted by a British film industry short on talent and resources that needed to promote its productions; second, he became a successful and compliant employee in a Hollywood determined to reduce film production to a series of commercially-proven formulae, of which the Hitchcockian thriller is a paramount example; and third, taken up by critics "who wished to use him to advance their particular opinions," the director "became a canvas on which theories could be portrayed," with even his minor touches of humor or insight into character "considered to be laden with the most abstruse metaphysical meanings" (qtd in Chabrol/Rohmer 10).

Such an unsympathetic attitude toward Hitchcock's seriousness (or, more precisely, toward those who would promote him as a serious artist) is perhaps as distorting as the attempt to turn him into a didact committed strictly to exploring and propagating his religious faith. However, it bears remarking that, following the path blazed by Wood, contemporary Hitchcockians have perhaps too eagerly turned a blind eye toward what in his films occasionally bears the (perhaps inevitable) traces of their maker's Catholic sensibility. Certainly, his choice of a very much out-of-date French play largely unknown in the Anglophone world by Paul Anthelme (*Nos deux consciences*, first produced in 1902 and in Paris) as the source for what would become *I Confess* reflects an interest in specific moral questions raised specifically by the Catholic practice of private confession, in which the priestly confessor becomes a stand-in for an attentive and forgiving God. There is more of Catholicism in this film than in any of his others, at least such is the critical consensus. In part, the drama revolves around the dilemma of a priest able to identify the perpetrator of a brutal murderer but who is prevented from so doing because he has learned the truth in hearing the man's confession. Even



Figure 0.1 . *I Confess*—Alma Keller (Dolly Haas) in moral crisis during the Logan trial.

when through a set of strange coincidences he himself becomes accused of the same crime, the priest does not break his silence. But this is not to say that *I Confess* is a “Catholic movie” whose iconography and themes persuade the attentive viewer to interpret the film’s crime fiction narrative as evoking the path to the Cross followed by a Jesus determined through his sacrifice to redeem a mankind otherwise condemned to eternal damnation (Chabrol and Rohmer 119). Instead, here Hitchcock’s characteristically broader, and more engaging, approach to moralism predominates; the film’s complex dramatization of ethical issues central to the human condition certainly includes, yet goes far beyond, its thematizing of the “seal of the confessional.” On this, more below.

Moralism, Not Moralizing

Like most contemporary Hitchcockians, Singer imagines the director’s “interest in the human condition” as not taking shape through “pontification” in any sense, including the promotion of Christian ethics or eschatology. Hitchcock’s high seriousness is rather the inevitable result, so Singer suggests, of the ways in which “whatever elements . . . [of great art that] entertain a receptive audience” also “permeate . . . the aesthetic fabric of the work itself” (8). The more deeply they succeed in providing entertainment and delight, especially through very Aristotelian mechanisms of emotional arousal and release, the more Hitchcock films (at least potentially) become philosophical in the very general sense identified by Singer. “There is nothing in the idea of entertainment,” he writes, invoking something like the Horatian ideal of *dulce et utile*, “that necessarily excludes the presentation of a meaningful perspective” (8).

Early in his career Hitchcock embraced the creation of suspense as what perhaps best defined his work as an entertainer; he became known as its “master,” with his aim to leave spectators “limp as dish rags at the end,” their feelings of fear and anxiety vicariously aroused only to be pleasurably purged (qtd. in Kapsis 24). Hitchcock’s concern with suspense, and with affect in the Hollywood manner more generally, should perhaps be seen, Jean Douchet argues, as the key to his moralism:

Suspense expresses the most ancient possible of all philosophical perspectives. It bears within it the primitive form of existential anguish, being connected to fundamental feelings of insecurity . . . the drawing out of a present caught between two contradictory possibilities for the imminent future . . . [and] linked to the first age of human emotions . . . Just the opposite of the hero who follows where adventure leads, the spectator

of a suspense film cannot take flight. He is rooted in his seat. Not only does he share the anguish of the character he observes, but he makes it his own. He becomes the victim of his own fascination. . . . The spectacle of the conflict between Darkness and Light guides Hitchcock's cinematic imagination (Douchet 5, 7, 11).

For Singer, the kind of great art that Hitchcock by current consensus produced becomes “philosophical when it offers probing insights into our reality that are valuable to people who have learned how to appreciate them” (8). The philosophical, in other words, is defined not only by what it communicates about the human experience, but also by the kind of value that filmgoers might find in the pleasing expression of significant ideas. Hitchcock's interest in various forms of crime narrative, primarily the thriller, meant of course that his “insights” connect most often to issues of value, and particularly of right and wrong. Hitchcock, we might say, is a moralist (an artist committed to portraying characters who find themselves compelled to choose), even if he does not moralize, that is, argue that some consistent set of values should guide or be marshalled to judge what they do. But there are those who argue, and provocatively, that Hitchcock's moralism is more narrow than “broad” (Sterritt), more *engagé* than the perceptions of a bemused observer of the human scene. In a recent study, for example, William Rothman claims that Hitchcock's moralism connects, if obliquely, to the American tradition of righteous conduct, moral perfectionism, which found its institutional home in New England Universalism and whose principal exponent was Ralph Waldo Emerson. Moral perfectionism, as Rothman describes it, emerges from “our obligation to become more fully human, to realize our humanity in our lives in the world, which always requires the simultaneous acknowledgement of the humanity of others” (4). Such an approach to the moral life was in ascendancy in Hollywood, and had thus achieved something of an international popularity during what might be called the New Deal Era of the 1930s and early '40s, eventually to be challenged by the pessimism of film noir, a contrary movement, with its inspiration more European than American, that was also influential for Hitchcock. In addition to his enthusiasm for moral perfectionism, Rothman admits that Hitchcock was drawn to an “incompatible vision” of the human condition, one that emphasized the innate depravity of original sin, especially in *The Birds* (1963) and *Marnie* (1964); however, he “overcame or transcended his ambivalence toward the Emersonian way of thinking he had longed to embrace for the sake of humanity” (8). These films, then, unambiguously propound a moral perfectionist view of human purpose.

Emphasizing the notion of artistic struggle, Rothman offers a challenging, if hardly uncontroversial view, of Hitchcock's development as an author interested in the meaning of the stories his films purveyed.

It is important, however, to remember that Hitchcock worked within an industry devoted to, and absolutely dependent on, the provision of viewer pleasure. Hitchcock's interest in the human condition was defined to some degree by his notion of entertainment, which emphasized the importance of delivering a benign shock to the audience through a heightened presentation of human experience, fabulized as a series of dangerous trials that must be endured and overcome; such a rhetoric might be considered an instrument of moralizing power in and of itself, beyond the meaning of the dramatizations that it depends on, because it forces viewers to confront their more elemental terrors. "Our nature is such," he wrote in 1936, "that we must have these shake-ups or we grow sluggish and jellified. . . . Watching a well-made film, we don't sit by as spectators; we participate" (Gottlieb 109). But, as Singer points out, echoing the arguments of poststructuralist theorists like Fredric Jameson, what might be mistakenly dismissed as simpleminded popular "entertainment is always capable of awakening our susceptibility to new ideas," becoming a vehicle that "conveys . . . artistic truth" (8) (see Jameson). One way of looking at Hitchcock's moralism takes the director at his word, emphasizing his masterful articulation of the primal anxiety of suspense through plots that characteristically can be reduced to the multiform dilemmas of souls "torn between good and evil . . . suspended miserably between the sky and the earth" (Douchet 8).

I Confess: What We Say, Whom We Tell

Among the many images from Hitchcock's films that might serve as exemplary illustrations of this inescapable predicament, consider the frame enlargement from *I Confess* on the cover to this volume. It is our first view of the film's protagonist, Father Michael Logan (Montgomery Clift). This medium shot emphasizes his priestly garb and how he is framed (or, perhaps better, contained) by the window of the rectory, a spot above from which he views the world below. Visibly reflected in one of the panes is an image of the church across the way. What he sees through that window, and it turns out to be the worst kind of evil, calls him to act, but only as a priest, providing the sacrament that makes divine grace available to others, not as a man like other men, who respond only to secular protocols. As this initial image suggests, Logan is a man thoroughly defined by inflexible institutional rules that privilege him (the camera honorifically looks at him from below, from an angle

slightly slaked, in this image and others, to suggest the disorder of his world) even as those rules restrict. The obligations attendant upon his special status as a priest prevent him from doing what he can to save himself from a mistaken charge of murder. Though legally exculpated, he is unjustly found guilty in the court of public opinion of what is, if unofficially, just as serious a charge: his romantic involvement, long before taking his vows of celibacy, with a woman, Ruth Grandfort (Anne Baxter), who continues to love him even after she marries. She does not tell Logan she is married when, not yet ordained, he returns home from the war; caught in a storm, they spend the night together (only in the literal sense of that term) at a remote farmhouse. Logan, it turns out, is neither a murderer nor an adulterer. And he never violates his vows, though in the end his technical innocence does not matter.

On this most fateful night for him and others, Logan spies from his window an as yet unrecognizable dark figure who has just entered the church he serves as a priest. We have been shown that this man is a murderer fleeing the scene of his crime. But Logan does not know if he is in need of spiritual comfort or is up to no good. It does not matter, in any case, though it turns out that the man is both a religious responsibility and a threat. Logan hurriedly enters the church and realizes that the figure kneeling at a pew is someone well known to him: Otto Keller (O.E. Hasse), a refugee from Germany who, along with his wife Alma (Dolly Haas), has been looking after the needs of Logan and the two other priests of the parish. Shaken and anguished, Keller asks for Logan's help and asks to make his confession, revealing, as the ritual unfolds, that he has just murdered a rich lawyer named Villette (Oliva Légar). In the grip of an irrational desperation, fueled by jealousy and his own sense of failure, Keller determined to steal the considerable money secreted in Villette's cash box in order, so he says, to provide his wife with some relief from the domestic drudgery that now is her life. Surprised in the act by his intended victim, Keller struck the man dead when, despite all entreaties, he persists with his intention to call the police.

Logan pronounces Keller absolved of mortal sin, leaving to God the question of the man's doubtful contrition and the ultimate efficacy of the sacrament. But, as Keller shows himself fearfully aware, if God has perhaps forgiven him, restoring the promise of eternal salvation, man has not. With his guilt unquestioned, how might he escape being hanged for the killing? The priest has no answer for him, other than to tell him that he should make another confession, this time to the police. But this confessional path promises not absolution, but the merciless condemnation of a state committed to the *lex talionis*. God, who sees all, cannot

be fooled, or so the murderer seems to believe, but his fellow men are another matter indeed. Keller thinks he might yet avoid human justice if the police fail to identify him as the guilty party. He had committed the crime incognito, having donned a cassock as a disguise to hide his identity, and to provide any passing policeman with an implicit alibi for his walking the streets of a deserted city at close to midnight.

But if this Logan, as God's representative, is the source of Keller's eternal deliverance, as a man he possesses the power, even though forbidden its exercise, to bring about his arrest and the imposition of the gruesome penalty that will inevitably follow. Will the priest break the seal of the confessional so that human justice might prevail, even at the cost of going against the explicit command of the Church? This is the film's initial source of suspense, a conflict of moral imperatives that creates a tension that is increasingly unbearable for Keller as circumstances, in a series of ironies, become more threatening. The killer was observed leaving the scene of the murder by two schoolgirls, who concluded he was a priest. Logan falls under suspicion himself when he is found to have been the only priest in the city who was out at that time of night and has no alibi to offer. Ironically enough, he had been meeting with Ruth to discuss the predicament in which they found themselves. Villette had been blackmailing her, threatening to reveal what he knew of her relationship with Logan. By killing the blackmailer, Keller had, so it seems, unintentionally put the couple in the clear, but, ironically enough, Logan now finds himself accused of an even more shameful violation of his vocation. Ruth inevitably finds herself dragged into the investigation, but she cannot clear the name of the man she loves. In the end, it does not matter that Logan is as innocent of murder as he is of adultery.

I Confess is no whodunit; its foregrounding of Villette's murder and Keller's guilt is just a typical Hitchcockian MacGuffin, the inaugural movement of plot that offers a form of initial interest and diversion that proves more or less irrelevant in the end. Predictably, Keller is eventually identified as Villette's murderer, but not by the ever-silent Logan, who remains true to his vow. It is a misreading of Hitchcock's art to complain, as does the usually more perceptive Bosley Crowther, that the film lacks suspense because "the audience is told near the start of the film that the hero is not guilty of the murder with which he is subsequently charged."² The title of the *Anthelme* play that is the source of the script (*Nos deux consciences*) suggests the way in which concerns with right behavior of different kinds inextricably links protagonist to antagonist, but the situation in which they find themselves is in the film rendered more complex than this bond of trust/distrust. It might

seem that the play's original title would have appealed to Hitchcock, and he must have been impressed by its far from simplistic handling of moral issues (including the difficult one of public reputation) when he saw it on the London stage in 1930 or in a later revival. Hitchcock's work in this period especially emphasizes his fascination with doubles (in *Shadow of a Doubt* (1942), *Strangers on a Train* (1950), and *The Wrong Man*, perhaps most notably). But he has changed Anthelme's title for a phrase that evokes more generally the several moral questions that the film raises, all of which involve the making public of what hitherto had been private. *I Confess* is a literal translation of the Latin *confiteor*, the first word of the prayer required of penitents, and it suggests, in both its religious and secular meanings, the painful expression of what might embarrass, shame, or condemn, an issue that confronts all the characters in the film, not just Father Logan and the miserable, conniving sinner who is his dark other. If Keller confesses willingly, crucial confessions in extremis come later from both Ruth Grandfort and Alma Keller. Both women are compelled, if for very different reasons, to divulge secrets that are simultaneously exculpating and incriminating, meant to free a man wrongly accused, but, ironically, resulting as well in the condemnation of the men they separately love.

I Confess dramatizes characters complexly connected by secrets revealed and as yet unconfessed. The night of the murder, Keller confesses more than once; the second time to his wife Alma, revealing to her that he turned thief for her sake and was forced to kill Villette in self-defense. The priest, he tells the horrified woman, now knows the truth, and so Alma, in addition to being made the unwitting beneficiary of the botched robbery, is made to share her husband's anguish that Logan, to whom she is grateful for his many kindnesses, will tell what he knows to the detective leading the investigation, Inspector Larrue (Karl Malden). To Keller's horror, Larrue runs into the priest the next morning at Villette's, where the detective is beginning his inquiries. Logan was to meet Ruth there to confront Villette, and he keeps their rendezvous even though he knows the man is now dead. Seen by Larrue, who knows the killer wore a cassock, Logan falls under suspicion, especially when, protecting Ruth, he refuses to tell the detectives why he went to see Villette that morning. However, she is forced to tell them Logan had met with her the night before, even though this information, because of the crime's timeline, does not exculpate him. Cheered to see the priest implicated, Keller plants the cassock he wore, stained with Villette's blood, in Logan's closet, where it is found. Logan is brought to trial, and Ruth is forced to testify to their relationship, including their innocent night spent together.

The evidence is circumstantial, and so Logan is found not guilty, though he earns the scorn of both jury and judge for his presumably unpriestly behavior in continuing his relationship with Ruth behind her husband's back. Alma sees the man who offered them shelter and work when they arrived in Quebec as refugees exposed to the hatred and scorn of the townspeople assembled outside the courtroom. She feels overwhelmed by the injustice done to him and starts to proclaim in a loud voice that it was Keller who killed Villette.

His fear overcoming deep feelings of love, Keller shoots her down in mid-sentence, and she dies after Logan gives her absolution. A chase ensues, Keller is cornered, and police trick him into confessing that he murdered Villette. His freedom no longer matters, with Alma now dead by his own hand. Ruth finds reconciliation with her husband and leaves the scene, while the priest is left with a mortally wounded Keller, shot down by the police as he attempts to kill Logan. Before he does, he asks enigmatically, "Father, forgive me." Does he address Logan as a man, asking him to forgive his attempts to ruin and kill him, or as the priest who offers him once again the chance to clear his conscience? Logan hesitates for a moment as if deciding between the two alternatives (or, perhaps, uncertain whether to do anything at all for the man who has set into motion a chain of circumstances that has ruined his life). A pained look crosses his face, and he responds by uttering the Latin formula of absolution.

"It would be better for you if you were as guilty as I am," Keller had said just moments before, recognizing that only in an ironic sense has Logan lifted from him the burden of the crime Keller had committed. Better also, the bitter man says, to be killed now rather than condemned to years of suffering. Learning of Villette's death that first morning, Ruth had exclaimed to her former lover, "Now we're free," not thinking that even Logan's presence that morning at her tormentor's office would lead to making public the information that had given the lawyer power over them both. Logan's obligations to God and to the woman hopelessly in love with him do not conflict in some simple way; nonetheless, the two find themselves first trapped by suspicion, then forced to confess to or admit what publicly shames them, marking them for life. What Villette had threatened comes to pass, even though Keller accidentally does what Ruth would not have dared wish for. Ruth is forgiven for her emotional betrayal by the husband who loves her. But Logan's virtues and innocence do not prevail, and for human rather than religious reasons. For him there is no second chance. Keller is right. His supposed imperfection is simply unacceptable.



Figure 0.2. Father Logan (Montgomery Clift) with the dying Otto Keller (O.E. Hasse).

“We are creatures typified by diverse ethical loves, some of which bear uneasy relations to each other,” writes philosopher Anthony Cunningham. “And, in the extreme, [these] may clash in tragic ways that can tear us apart at the moral seams” (4). He is speaking of literature when he writes the following, but the sentiment is applicable as well to great filmmakers like Hitchcock, who, in their best work, “offer us character portraits that can provide us with the right stuff for concrete, particular deliberation in all its ethical complexity” (5).



The various chapters of *Hitchcock’s Moral Gaze* reconsider the concept of morality in terms of Hitchcock himself, the content of his films, and their effect on his audience. Grounding much of their discussions on traditional moral philosophy, these new essays call into question assumptions by film critics who critique Hitchcock for his perverse, fetishistic, and amoral worldview. The contributors re-address Hitchcock’s morality as far more complex, ambiguous, and ironic than accepted cinema scholarship has suggested. In fact, Hitchcock’s films often use moral predicaments to undercut stereotypical reactions of indignity in order to accept rather than simply debase as evil desires and misperceptions that are all too human. Hitchcock was always skeptical of over-moralizing

human behavior. That he chose morally detestable acts—serial murders, kin-killing, marital violence, and degrading acts toward women—has too often been argued as evidence of his own distorted moral compass. As though filming perversions makes one a deviant, this almost puritanical logic comes under scrutiny in these chapters, not to elevate Hitchcock's ethics, but rather to humanize the fundamental fascination shared by people for the abnormal, the aberrant, the macabre, and the morbid, which accounts for the prominent place accorded such themes in popular entertainment cinema, both in Hollywood and elsewhere. The essays collected here invite readers to re-examine and re-view Hitchcock's career, from the silent era to the beginning of his mastery of suspense, with an eye to intricate visual, thematic, and narrative structures that reveal how morality, like the devil, is always in his details.

A case in point is Hitchcock's lifelong fixation with Jack the Ripper. Graham Petrie offers close readings of Marie Belloc Lowndes's novel and Hitchcock's adaptation of it in *The Lodger* (1926) as he positions Hitchcock in relationship to the audience. Critics have condemned Hitchcock for merely playing a cruel, cynical joke on his audience, but Petrie wants to explore how the director provides a moral recognition of human emotional frailty in this first true Hitchcock film. Thomas Leitch approaches the problematic ending of *Suspicion* (1941) by laying out various theories proffered by film scholars before examining how Hitchcock's deliberately ironic construction of the film eschews any "logical or emotionally satisfying" conclusion. Hitchcock provides a view "both inside and outside Lina's consciousness," so that suspicion and guilt become the overarching vantage point for the audience's need and complicity with storytelling.

Another side of complicity resonates in what Nick Haeffner attacks as the "Spoto myth," which claims that the sexual perversions of his villains are thinly veiled projections of Hitchcock's dark and diseased personality. Beginning from a Sadean perspective that immorality increases human understanding, Haeffner evaluates Hitchcock's villains, particularly Uncle Charlie (Joseph Cotten) in *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943), as Byronic, Gnostic, and aristocratic, all characteristics that are decidedly unlike Hitchcock, the man. Castigating Hitchcock for the amorality of Uncle Charlie ignores the Sadean challenge to societal hypocrisy. As Haeffner points out, the condemning of Hitchcock's morality by his biographer Donald Spoto and others might well be a veiled judgment on their own moral uncertainty and guilt. Concentrating on the play of guilt and confession, Brian McFarlane resurrects from critical obscurity two undervalued Hitchcock films, *The Paradine Case* (1947) and *Under Capricorn*

(1949). Of specific interest to McFarlane is how the complex role of feminine culpability, especially when bounded by class and patriarchal constraints, leads to either death or redemption.

Immorality often characterizes the tensions among the Hitchcock hero, villain, and audience. George Toles goes into considerable detail on the moral significance and consequences represented by the cigarette lighter in *Strangers on a Train* (1951). Dismissing the idea that the lighter is a mere Hitchcockian MacGuffin, Toles elaborates on the complex systems of doubling, criss-crossing, and exchange that occur in the film as a result of Hitchcock's visual emphasis upon this lighter, which, from a moral point of view, serves as "the repository and secret conductor of all the sinful thought energy" in the film, which is Bruno's (Robert Walker) lack of ethics. Steven M. Sanders places Bruno in relationship to Uncle Charlie and other immoralists in Hitchcock's oeuvre, all of whom demand from audiences an answer to the fundamental question of their personalities: "Why should *I* be moral?" Three immoralist perspectives—egoism, amoralism, and nihilism—generally characterize their motivations and unethical behavior. Criticizing Kantian morality as too broad and Hobbesian egoism as too narrow, Sanders finds Hitchcock's cinematic "thought experiment" suggests a judgment—more objective and impartial than the two philosophers provide—from the audience on comparative values or choices of conduct.

Sidney Gottlieb unhesitatingly claims Hitchcock to be an amoralist in his structuring of looking in *Rear Window* (1954). Gottlieb lays out seven propositions for looking by which to evaluate the pleasures and desires of the eye: the I, looking good and looking well, the gaze, the compounded gaze of people gazing at people gazing, the spectator, the attraction and distraction of cinema, and finally, the ethical warning of look, but do not touch. Such intricate analogies among the various types of visual experience in Hitchcock reveal that "optical expectations and experiences inevitably go awry." By examining voyeurism in *Rear Window*, Richard Allen offers a typology that includes sexual voyeurism, psychological curiosity, and legitimate intrusions of privacy. The personal satisfaction from seeing, for Allen, both associates Jefferies (James Stewart) with the film's audience and displaces any such analogy. Allen posits that this film in particular serves as "a moral allegory for cinema" and spectatorship, one that continually renews and rejects facile ethical categories and simplistic moralizing conclusions.

Moralizing accompanies much of the misdoubt in Hitchcock's narratives. Further investigations of Hitchcock's moral cinema are carried out by Murray Pomerance in "Alfred Hitchcock as Moralist." Pomerance

contributes what we might describe as a conceptual map of, in Pomerance's words, "the ethical world of [Hitchcock's] characters, that world and its doubts, its vacuums, its labyrinths, its obscurities, its fervent hopes." In this connection he discusses at length *The Wrong Man*, *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, and *The Lodger*. R. Barton Palmer observes in "The Deepening Moralism of *The Wrong Man* that "in a number of Hitchcock films misidentification becomes the pretext for a different approach that centers on a disturbing probing of guilt, innocence, and, most centrally, the limitations of human agency." Palmer calls attention to "the elucidating and contextualizing of this significant change in tone" after the commercial and critical failure of *The Wrong Man*, a change that leads Hitchcock to focus on the life-transforming experience of profound mischance, of life-altering disasters that seem to drop out of a clear blue destinal sky . . . And cannot be entirely reversed, if at all, or even fully understood."

According to Jerold J. Abrams, philosophers since the time of Hegel have explored the idea that art in some sense passes over into higher forms of consciousness. For the contemporary philosopher Arthur C. Danto, painting passes over into philosophy and reflects on the philosophical structure of art itself. Film, too, Abrams argues, attains a philosophical end. He explains that this is especially so in the way Hitchcock's cinema "traverses the sensuous show of objects on the screen and enters into an investigation of the very medium of film itself . . . in Hitchcock film is doing philosophy." Abrams discusses *Rear Window*, *North by Northwest*, *Rope*, and *The Birds* in connection with this thesis of the self-reflexivity of Hitchcock's films in which these films "are actually *about* the experience of film itself."

Moral acts often define and plague Hitchcock's heroes. In "The Dread of Ascent: The Moral and Spiritual Topography of *Vertigo*," Alan Woolfolk writes that in this film "Hitchcock's insights extend . . . [t]oward a moral psychology that is reminiscent of the Crisis psychology of European intellectuals such as Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Freud." In his detailed discussion, Woolfolk depicts the psychological struggles Scottie (James Stewart) faces as he tries to deal with his vertigo and the moral costs to him as he gradually uncovers the plot of wicked, adulterous Gavin Elster (Tom Helmore) and Judy Barton (Kim Novak), costs that include depression, feelings of futility, and despair. Against the background of Bertrand Russell's treatise on *Marriage and Morals* (1929), Jennifer L. Jenkins takes up Hitchcock's philosophy of marriage. That philosophy, as it is exemplified in *North by Northwest*, "espouses a union of equals serving the greater good of domestic security won

through trouble and strife.” Marriage, she writes, “functions as a leitmotif: . . . The philosophy of marriage in *North by Northwest* is a singularly democratic one: a volitional Union of equals, hard-won by strife and commitment to an idea greater than themselves.”

In “‘The Loyalty of an Eel’: Issues of Political, Personal, and Professional Morality in (and around) *Torn Curtain*,” Neil Sinyard discusses this film’s “quite complex view of morality in both the personal and political sphere.” He also considers issues of professional morality, loyalty, and betrayal in the context of the falling-out between Hitchcock and the distinguished composer on many of Hitchcock’s films, Bernard Herrmann. In “Hobbes, Hume, and Hitchcock: The Case of *Frenzy*,” Homer B. Pettey first identifies the chiasmus structure of *Frenzy* “whereby moral issues cross over to their opposite meanings,” and provides the reader with a detailed account of the way *Frenzy* achieves this crossover effect. He then explains how the concepts of skepticism, causation, and moral judgment are handled by philosophers Hobbes and Hume and provides a clear explanation of the way, in *Frenzy*, Hitchcock’s unique “moral gaze” offers an intriguing alternative to the approaches of both these philosophers to issues of moral conduct.

In all of the chapters, the contributors have taken new views of the master of suspense to find correlations between cinematic style and ethical issues that disclose another form of Hitchcock’s signature: what Irving Singer usefully identifies as his “profound conception of, and interest in, the human condition as he knew it.”

Notes

1. Consider, for example, the interview with David Brady entitled “Core of the Movie—the Chase,” reprinted in Gottlieb 125–32, in which Hitchcock discusses with lucidity and energy a number of topics related to what he sees as the most characteristic narrative element of the cinema, including the advantages to emotional engagement of the double pursuit (“As the camera cuts from police to hero to real criminal, the audience has the opportunity to identify itself with both the chaser and the chased in the person of the hero without suffering the frustrations of a divided allegiance”) (130); and the relationship between pure action and characterization (“In the ideal chase structure . . . the tempo and complexity of the chase will be an accurate reflection of the intensity of the relations between the characters. But I have found that even in the final physical chase, touches of characterization will embellish it”) (129).

2. Bosley Crowther, “I Confess,” *The New York Times* 23 March 1953 <http://www.nytimes.com/movie/review?res=9B00E2D91F3AE23BBC4B51DFB5668388649EDE> (accessed 12/26/2014)

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