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Personality, Pathology, and The Act of Creation: The Case of Alfred Hitchcock¹

In his best-selling biography of Alfred Hitchcock, Spoto (1983) claimed that the celebrated film director of the macabre and the unsettling was a man in the grip of uncontrollable impulses. Hitchcock's pathological urges, according to Spoto, included misogyny, sadistic tendencies, and fantasies of rape; bathroom and various other fetishes about sex and the body; overwhelming guilt, anxiety, and a mother fixation; and phobias toward women, people in general, and the world at large. Without considering this psychological profile, Spoto maintained, it is not possible to make sense of the Hitchcock oeuvre or of the sources of Hitchcock's creativity. Spoto's rendition of the film director's gifts is a reductionist one, not in the sense of the reduction of psychological motivation to biology and chemistry (Peele, 1981), but in the view that an artistic vision can be reduced to a specific set of psychological—or psychopathological—elements.

Spoto's detailed, well-informed analysis opens up the question of whether any or all art can be so detached and analyzed or whether there remains something ineffable in the act of creation that cannot be broken down into elemental components. I aim to refute Spoto's explicit and implicit contentions that Hitchcock merely exposed his psychological problems for public view, and to propose instead that Hitchcock molded this material, consciously and unconsciously, into artistic form. My purposes in examining this question are to (1) introduce into psychological discourse the image of the aware artist as an agent in his or her own creativity, (2) critique a popular contemporary tendency to mistake psychological biography for literary and other

artistic analysis, (3) establish the value for literary analysis of a nonreductionist social-psychological perspective, and (4) account for the continuing attraction Hitchcock exerts on moviegoers by noting Hitchcock's acute sensitivity to psychological drama in character development as well as in the interplay between audience reaction and cinematic content.

BIOGRAPHICAL AND CRITICAL BACKGROUND

Alfred Hitchcock was born into a Cockney, Catholic family in London in the year 1899. His father died when Hitchcock was 14. Hitchcock's full-time scholastic education ended in 1913, although he read extensively, took evening classes, attended theatre and cinema performances constantly, and sketched and wrote. He was ambitious, and moved from a clerical engineering position at his first job to one in the advertising department as a layout artist. In 1920, he read that an American film company, Famous Players-Lasky, was opening a studio in London. He applied for a position as a title designer, was accepted, and worked as a filmmaker for the rest of his 80 years. Hitchcock set about with intense concentration to learn every aspect of the film business, and in little more than three years he became an assistant director and, by 1925, a director. He worked in Germany for his British employers between 1923 and 1925, where he absorbed the expressionistic, purely visual style of the then-most-advanced filmmaking industry in the world, which included the directors Ernst Lubitsch, F. W. Murnau, and Fritz Lang (all of whom, like Hitchcock, were to emigrate to the United States).

Hitchcock met Alma Reville in 1921, and began an engagement—his first romantic attachment of any kind—that led to marriage only in 1926. They had one child, a daughter, born in 1928, and remained married until Hitchcock's death in 1980. Reville was herself a respected film editor and screenwriter, although after marrying Hitchcock she devoted herself professionally and personally to her husband's work and career. Hitchcock's first two pictures were unevenly received, but *The Lodger* (1927)—the story of a roomer who was under suspicion for the murder of a number of young women—achieved critical and public acclaim. Prepared in the meticulous fashion he was to use throughout his career (Hitchcock created storyboards with mock-ups of every shot in a film before shooting), *The Lodger* dealt with themes of murder, suspicion, public order and private trust, and sexual attraction and repulsion that were to characterize all his work in some form or another. Hitchcock had directed a total of nine silent films and

was one of Britain's leading directors when he made his first partially sound film, *Blackmail*, in 1929.

Among the 13 subsequent sound films Hitchcock directed in Britain were such classics (all of which are shown regularly in the United States today) as *Murder!* (1930), *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1934, the only one of his films Hitchcock remade in America), *The 39 Steps* (1935), *Sabotage* (1936, based on the Conrad novel *The Secret Agent*), and *The Lady Vanishes* (1938). By then widely held to be Britain's top film director, Hitchcock came to America in 1939, believing he could realize his cinematic vision more fully here. His first American film, *Rebecca* (1940) won an Academy Award as best film (although Hitchcock did not receive best director award on this or any of the other four occasions when he was nominated for it). In America, he averaged more than a film a year ending with his direction of *Psycho* in 1960, the year Spoto reckons Hitchcock's personal and professional life entered a deep decline. Just a few of his classic pictures of this period were *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943), *Notorious* (1946), *Strangers on a Train* (1951), *Rear Window* (1954), *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1956), *Vertigo* (1958), and *North by Northwest* (1959).

From the late forties on, Hitchcock realized his wish to produce as well as direct his films, attaining a degree of control unmatched by any other commercial filmmaker in America over the same period. All of the films mentioned above (as well as most of the other films from his late English and American period) concerned murder and/or espionage and their effect on personal and social relationships. Because of the topics of these films—and, oddly, as a result of his continuous public appeal—Hitchcock was slow to attract serious critical attention (although he was always recognized as a supreme film technician). The first study of his themes and techniques was by two young French enthusiasts—Eric Rohmer and Claude Chabrol (1957)—who were later to achieve substantial reputations of their own as film directors. The first English-language book on Hitchcock was by another future filmmaker, Peter Bogdanovich (1963). Andrew Sarris (1968), writing in celebration of American film in the pages of the journal *Film Culture*, gave the first appropriate estimation of the role Hitchcock played in American cinema, while the distinguished critic Robin Wood (1965) wrote the first analytic English-language treatment of Hitchcock's work (cf. Wood, 1969). Since the seventies, the serious and carefully crafted thematic development in Hitchcock's films has been widely acknowledged (Durgnat, 1974; LaValley, 1972; Rothman, 1982; Spoto, 1976).

Like many celebrated artists, Hitchcock frequently adopted a pose

of obtuseness and obfuscation about his work, rarely giving anything up to interviewers aside from a ready stock of technical anecdotes about the challenge of shooting various scenes. Yet he clearly relished the appreciation of other filmmakers and considered self-promotion to be one of the keys to his professional success. These motives combined in his eager but oddly ambivalent participation in what was to become the most famous book about himself and his work prior to Spoto's, the series of interviews with the French director François Truffaut that appeared under the title *Hitchcock* in 1967. Spoto (1983) accurately noted that this book, in common with other French writing about Hitchcock, focussed on technical cinematic issues and global philosophical themes (such as a Catholic sense of guilt), while slighting more central psychological issues in Hitchcock's work. These deficiencies in Truffaut's approach were originally noticed in Braudy's (1968) review, which explained that Truffaut was "so doggedly technical, so intent on style as opposed to meaning" as to miss "how Hitchcock in his best films manipulates the deepest reactions of his audience" (p. 21). Furthermore, Braudy maintained, Truffaut missed hint after hint offered by Hitchcock of his deeper purposes: "While Hitchcock vainly implies the emotional and psychological relevance of his details, Truffaut concentrates on an intellectualized appreciation of the fine finish and professional gloss" (p. 22). Truffaut's revised edition of *Hitchcock* (Truffaut and Scott, 1984)—which also traced Hitchcock's declining years—appeared after Truffaut's death (cf. Truffaut, 1984).

Spoto (1976) himself contributed an important and popular book on the body of Hitchcock's work. However, in reconsidering Hitchcock's later films (Hitchcock made six films in the last 20 years of his life, the final one—*Family Plot*—in 1976) and revelations of increasingly peculiar and offensive behavior, Spoto came to see the great director as a seriously maladjusted individual whose personal defects poisoned his work. Not only did Spoto find Hitchcock's late films to lack the greatness of his earlier work as a result of their having fallen hostage to Hitchcock's unmanageable preoccupations, but the critic downgraded Hitchcock's own role in his earlier successes. Instead of regarding Hitchcock as the *auteur* (i.e., creator, cf. Sarris, 1968) of these works, Spoto portrayed him as a victim of personal urges that often had to be held in check and channeled by other, more rational collaborators. Spoto observed, typically, that the screenwriters Hitchcock employed were responsible for giving his films' characters realistic personalities and motivations (Spoto further noted that Hitchcock rarely acknowledged these contributions, as in his interviews with Truffaut).

Yet how is an immensely accomplished director who made 53 fea-

ture-length films, who worked with a host of actors, technicians, composers, publicists and studio administrators, and who moreover created some of America's most popular and cherished films to be judged mentally ill? Spoto cited peculiarities Hitchcock manifested from early on, such as the compulsive sexual innuendo he engaged in personally and on screen. The critic returned to such early films as *Strangers on a Train*, in which a woman is strangled after flirting with her murderer, to locate signs of Hitchcock's incipient psychopathology. Moreover, Hitchcock committed acts of cruelty throughout his life, as when he left his daughter screaming at the top of a ferris wheel on the set of *Strangers on a Train*, or when he forced liquor on an alcoholic Montgomery Clift until the actor passed out. Spoto furthermore catalogued the instances in Hitchcock's films in which crucial action takes place in bathrooms, in which women are attacked, or in which male protagonists make over women in Pygmalion fashion.

Hitchcock sought a certain type of female star, blond and icy, because he claimed audiences had a greater sexual interest in them. But whereas he idealized such stars as Ingrid Bergman and Grace Kelly, later in his career he sought to dominate such actresses as Vera Miles and Tippi Hedren, interfering in their home lives and finally, in a unique episode for Hitchcock, propositioning Hedren and threatening her career when she rejected him. Hitchcock had earlier taken a week to shoot a scene in *The Birds* (1963) in which birds were hurled at Hedren, until at last one pecked her near the eye and she collapsed from physical and nervous exhaustion. After Hedren rejected Hitchcock on the set of *Marnie* (1964), Spoto claimed, Hitchcock lost interest in the film, with obvious detriment to the final product. Spoto believed this disinterest characterized the large part of the remainder of Hitchcock's career.

Spoto used this malaise to explain the decline in Hitchcock's productivity after he was 60, although he was for the most part in good health and sound intellectually. The only film aside from *The Birds* and *Psycho* which was financially successful in these years was *Frenzy* (1972), a tale of a psychopathic murderer who could overcome his impotence only by strangling women (a madness Spoto found highly suggestive of Hitchcock's state of mind). Hitchcock filmed his most graphic depiction of the act of murder in this film and injected *Frenzy*—along with *Psycho* and *The Birds*—with dark visions of social upheaval and apocalypse little relieved by attractive or noble human behavior. While Hitchcock was still capable of creating moments of haunting cinema, Spoto found that these appear only irregularly in the director's late films. Spoto noted that Hitchcock's last, incomplete

film was to have its protagonist rape and murder a woman, a scene his collaborators regarded as impossible for a commercial movie.

When Hitchcock was in his seventies, Alma Reville became ill and friction appeared in what those who knew the couple considered an idyllic relationship. Hitchcock's obesity reached its peak and his periodically heavy drinking worsened, leading on one occasion to his hospitalization for alcoholism. The director found himself increasingly alone, in part because he alienated his current co-workers, and in part because he had never established intimate relationships outside his marriage. His last efforts at work—which continued up to the month he died—were fragmented and often involved recalling episodes from his life to his captive screenwriters. In his final business arrangements, he set adrift two women assistants who had served him faithfully for decades without considering pensions for them or the possibilities of their future employment. He frequently cried out to former associates about his loneliness and his fear of death, even as he was being feted in the waning moments of his life as one of Hollywood's greatest directors.

GENIUS AND PSYCHOPATHOLOGY

Whereas Spoto (1976) previously was inclined to see Hitchcockian themes as an expression of conscious concerns the director was trying to work out in his films, Spoto (1983) later regarded the same motifs to be barely contained outpourings of a deep neurosis. Are artists more neurotic than others? Spoto's graphic recounting of the morbid idiosyncracies of Hitchcock's life engages a classic theme in the analysis of artistic creation: the relationship between personality (and neurosis) and creativity. This issue has concerned literary critics like Trilling (1950) and psychoanalysts like Kubie (1958), who both found the relationship inexact or nonexistent. Neurosis is certainly not a sufficient condition for artistic creation, and Trilling claimed it was not a necessary one. Certainly neurosis is not unilinearly correlated with creativity; while artists may have their share of neuroses, Kubie described how severe neurosis becomes incapacitating (as it did with Hitchcock late in his career).

Although Spoto documented Hitchcock's self-centeredness and lack of concern for others, he did not support his case that the director was out of touch with his own motivations and those of his audience. There are two lines of evidence which argue against Spoto's contentions here: the care and accuracy with which Hitchcock developed his characters, utilizing all the elements of film technique, and the popularity and critical attention Hitchcock's work has sustained over the

years. Spoto's view of an almost serendipitous process by which Hitchcock embodied his material to elicit a response in the spectator simply cannot explain the continued relevance of these films to a half-century's moviegoers. Moreover, as a group of dedicated critics has by now made clear, Hitchcock did not simply select evocative scenes to gain a rise from the audience. Rather, his best films are integrated wholes with a unity of purpose that subsumes the screenplay, scenario, and the variety of dazzling cinematic tricks he employed. Spoto himself frequently attested that, while Hitchcock relied on screenwriters for dialogue and plot, he worked hand in hand with his writers throughout the writing process, often bringing in a series of collaborators in order to achieve the overall effect he sought from the script.

Among Hitchcock's many admirers, Wood (1969) and Rothman (1982) have made the most persuasive case for Hitchcock's overall mastery of the medium through their detailed exegeses of his seminal films. I will describe how several of Hitchcock's major works—mainly from Hitchcock's greatest creative period, 1954 to 1960—tackle the very psychological issues which Spoto was at pains to adumbrate in Hitchcock's personal life. The seriousness of purpose in these films is often overlooked, an oversight assisted by the director's own, often fatuous pronouncements about his work. This dilemma is accentuated in the Truffaut book where, as Braudy (1968) made clear, "Instead of drawing Hitchcock out, Truffaut forces him back into his old masks" (p. 21). Still, this book, containing the most extensive comments by Hitchcock on his craft, offers significant leads to his cinematic intentions and designs. *North by Northwest* (the title, significantly, is taken from Guildenstern's description of Hamlet as being "mad north by northwest," meaning Hamlet had a method to his madness) is the epitome of the nonsensical Hitchcockian plot. The story appears to be unified only by the gradual movement of the scenario in a north by northwesterly direction from New York, where the film begins. Hitchcock himself often described with relish how the film's star, Cary Grant, announced midway through the film that the plot made no sense. According to Hitchcock, however:

In this picture nothing was left to chance, and that's why, when it was over, I took a very firm stand. . . . They [M-G-M] put a lot of pressure to have me eliminate a whole sequence at the end of the picture. I refused. (Truffaut, 1967, p. 191)

Hitchcock described for Truffaut, on the other hand, a scene he considered but did not include in the film, in which Grant was to walk

through an auto assembly plant in Detroit while a car was being built. At the end of the assembly line, when the door of the car was opened, a body was to fall out. Truffaut responded enthusiastically: "That's a perfect example of nothingness! Why did you drop the idea?" Hitchcock, who had just blithely remarked, "I practice absurdity quite religiously," in this case replied: "We couldn't integrate the idea into the story. Even a gratuitous scene must have some justification for being there, you know" (p. 195). Hitchcock showed throughout the Truffaut book a firm grasp of his oeuvre—sifting out the failures from the triumphs, acknowledging and explaining the reasons for each, and in general—while eschewing direct psychological insight into himself or his characters—demonstrating an understanding of his work that (as in the example above) exceeds by many degrees that of his interlocuter.

North by Northwest is one of the films in which—as Spoto (1983) underlined—Hitchcock takes a debonair leading man and gives him Hitchcock's own personal hang-ups. Cary Grant plays the character of a vacuous Madison Avenue advertising executive, divorced and overly attached to his mother, who is suddenly swept up into a bizarre plot of international intrigue. In the course of this plot development, Grant is gradually stripped of the superficial accessories of his existence until, in one of the monumental scenes in the American cinema, he is attacked by a crop-dusting plane while he stands alone in a desolate field. Spoto emphasized how Hitchcock expresses his own anxieties vicariously through Grant. While it is true that Hitchcock's relationship with women was dominated by his sense of his physical unattractiveness, this is not to say that many men as attractive as Grant do not suffer the same kinds of insecurities Grant's character does in *North by Northwest*. The female lead, Eva Marie Saint, plays a woman intent on seducing Grant, to which Grant reacts with disbelief and insecurity long after the Saint character has clearly indicated she loves Grant. There is nothing in his reaction, however, out of character with the part Grant is playing. It is Grant's character's gradual acceptance—following the crop-duster scene—of adult sexuality, intimacy, and responsibility which marks the resolution of the thematic and character issues in the film.

Among Hitchcock's major films, Spoto took particular pains to explain the failure of *Marnie* (although he mentions in passing that the film has attracted considerable, though belated, critical and viewer interest; see, especially, discussion in Wood, 1969). The title character, played by Tippi Hedren, is a kleptomaniac. She is discovered stealing by her employer, played by Sean Connery, who subsequently marries

her. Marnie recoils from her husband's attempts to solve her psychological problems as well as from his sexual advances. What concerns Spoto is the Connery character's own peculiar attraction to Marnie and his need to mold Marnie to his own purposes. Spoto correctly identified this theme as one that appears in several earlier Hitchcock films, such as *Rebecca*, *Rear Window*, and *Vertigo*.

Vertigo is the most extreme—and darkest—expression of the desire to control a lover. Jimmy Stewart plays a detective hired to trail a woman (Kim Novak) whose personality has supposedly been absorbed into that of a historical character to whom she had become attached. Actually, the man who hires Stewart has concocted an elaborate plot for murdering his wife, whom he has induced the Novak character—a common shopgirl—to impersonate. At the end of this phase of the film, Novak rushes to the top of a tower where Stewart cannot follow because of his vertigo, and from which the murderer hurls his wife. Stewart, never understanding there was a plot, is hospitalized for depression. When he is released, he chances upon the Novak character, who is now reimmersed in her own mundane identity. Stewart sets about to remake her into the image she had affected when she played the part of the killer's wife. Unable to control his urges to mold Novak into a fiction, Stewart finally forces her back to the scene of the murder where Novak herself accidentally falls to her death.

Hitchcock was hardly unaware of the theme that men strive to embody their fantasies in their dealings with women. Describing the plot of *Marnie*, he spoke of his fascination with

the fetish idea. A man wants to go to bed with a thief because she is a thief. . . . It's not as effective as *Vertigo*, where Jimmy Stewart's feeling for Kim Novak was clearly a fetishist love. To put it bluntly, we'd have to have seen Sean Connery catching the girl robbing the safe and show that he felt like jumping at her and raping her on the spot. (Truffaut, 1967, p. 227)

Spoto (1983) highlighted the scene in *Marnie* where the Connery character does force his wife to have sex, after which she attempts suicide. For Spoto, this man's desire to make a woman over and the idea that she is frigid are expressions of Hitchcock's own imaginings and frustrations over Hedren the person, and her rejection of Hitchcock's advances.

The rape scene in *Marnie* is not pleasant, and Marnie's attempted suicide following it does not create feelings of sympathy for her husband. Moreover, *Marnie* emphasizes the woman character's point of

view and feelings as had *Rebecca*, Hitchcock's inaugural American film. Hitchcock had read the novel *Rebecca* in its galley proof form while he was still in England, and he induced David Selznick to purchase the rights to the novel. That this property was so prominent in Hitchcock's mind indicates that its theme especially interested him. In *Rebecca*, a cold, withholding man (played by Laurence Olivier) marries a woman from a lower social class who tries everything to please him, with little success. Hitchcock was well aware of his male characters' problems in this film and in *Vertigo*, whose very title derived from a psychological disorder suffered by its male protagonist. *Vertigo* is perhaps the most powerful cinematic rendition of how a man's possessiveness literally kills the object of his love.

Rear Window too does not readily exonerate its protagonist's overcontrolling, voyeuristic impulses (see Rohmer and Chabrol, 1957). In this film Jimmy Stewart plays a photographer confined to his apartment in a wheelchair after having broken his leg in a fall. His girlfriend, played by Grace Kelly, is eager for marriage, although Stewart holds her at arm's length because of his fear that their professions (she is a fashion magazine editor) and lifestyles are incompatible. Idly observing his neighbors through his apartment window, Stewart eventually detects a murder, which he sends Kelly to investigate. In doing so, he endangers first her life and then his own, as the murderer confronts the invalid photographer alone in his apartment. The film is an exploration of the motives and consequences of a career of watching others, commanding friends and lovers to become involved in the enterprise, and not being able fully to give of oneself except on one's own terms. In short, this is an explicit cinematic treatment of the existential issues Spoto attempted to deduce biographically.

The issue of male-female combat was one never far from Hitchcock's mind. Sometimes, as in *North by Northwest*, the outcome is a positive one of mutual acceptance by the male and female characters, despite the male protagonist's emotional problems. In both versions of *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, a woman who has given up her career (in the first version as a sharpshooter, in the second as a singer) experiences conflict in her marriage. In the climactic scenes in each film, the woman relies on her skill—and courage—to rescue her child. Considering particularly the date of the earlier version, Hitchcock might be seen to have been unusually prescient about issues of female independence. Hitchcock himself married an exceptionally talented person whose professional judgment he always relied on above any other.

At the same time, Alma Reville gave up her independent career

when she married Hitchcock and the marriage had elements of an *égoïsme à deux* (Peele and Brodsky, 1975). One actress related how, after being caught in a traffic jam, she deposited an anxious Reville at Hitchcock's hotel an hour late for dinner, a lapse which angered him and for which he would not forgive the actress. Again, the issues Hitchcock did not deal with in his personal life proved exceptionally fruitful for his art. *Notorious* has Cary Grant portraying a government agent who enlists Ingrid Bergman to spy against her father's Nazi friends (her father is now dead). An exhausted, dissolute playgirl, the Bergman character is induced by the CIA-like agency for which Grant works to marry one of the Nazis. She does so because of—and despite—her love for the American agent. Although he feels the same way and they commence an affair, the Grant character is unable to express these feelings, until—almost too late—he rescues Bergman from a plot by her mother-in-law to poison her.

Notorious contains a kissing sequence between Bergman and Grant that is oft-noted by cinema students (it is described extensively in Spoto, 1983; Truffaut, 1967; et al.). The scene contains a long, claustrophobic close-up shot of Bergman clinging to Grant across the entire set of their hotel room as Grant first answers the ringing phone, and then walks to the door to leave. Grant's attitude is one of ambivalence; he accepts—even welcomes—the interruption of their intimacy caused by the call and the obligation that leads to his departure. Bergman clearly expresses more attachment, almost a desperation, as she tries to ignore the demands of their jobs and their situation in order to hold onto her lover. Hitchcock recounts in connection with this scene how he once saw a girl continue to grip the arm of her boyfriend while he urinated against a wall. The conclusion that Truffaut (1967) derived from all this—"Ideally, two lovers should never separate" (p. 199)—may reflect Hitchcock's approach to marriage, but it is an urge that he does not treat uncritically on the screen.

The analysis in this section is not meant to exonerate Hitchcock for his behavior—which Spoto convincingly portrayed as often going beyond the bounds both of decency to others and of self-respect. It is meant to distinguish between the personality of the artist and the artist's creative power. Hitchcock consistently displayed the capacity to transform artistically impulses that caused him difficulty personally. In addition, while Hitchcock did depict rape and murder on the screen, he never did so in the easy way of most contemporary films that might be thought to encourage the behavior being shown. Showing a viewer the difficulty, consequences, and reactions of the victim of

aggression significantly reduces the likelihood that aggressive behavior will be imitated (cf. Bandura, 1973). Hitchcock understood this psychological truth implicitly. He shot the rape scene in *Marnie* to focus on Marnie's distress and horror while she is being raped, just as he noted her desolation and attempted suicide after the act. Hitchcock treated the rape-murder in *Frenzy* from a similar—though even more horrifying—perspective.

In *Torn Curtain* (1966), Hitchcock shot a prolonged scene in which the morally ambiguous figure of an American agent (played by Paul Newman) slowly kills an East German named Gromek who is assigned to guard him. Hitchcock first established the likeable, if boorish, character of the East German. The murder scene is an interminable and horrible sequence where Newman wrestles with his victim while aided by a woman ally—who helps first by pouring scalding soup on Gromek, then by giving Newman a carving knife which breaks off against the victim's neck, and lastly by hitting at the East German's legs with a shovel while Newman drags him to an open oven—where Gromek is finally suffocated while the camera focusses on his fingers waving spasmodically at the air! The desperation of all three characters is so amply delineated that the viewer is left fairly drained (for an analysis of the viewer's *implication* in the killing, see Wood, 1969, pp. 186–187). Asked about this scene by Truffaut, Hitchcock remarked simply: “In every picture somebody gets killed and it goes very quickly. . . . I thought it was time to show that it is very difficult, very painful, and it takes a very long time to kill a man” (p. 234).

Hitchcock's treatment of Tippi Hedren offscreen during the shooting of *The Birds* and *Marnie* was execrable and possibly pathologic. However, it is unwise to equate the offscreen and onscreen workings of Hitchcock's mind. Hitchcock's description of filming a scene with Hedren in *The Birds* (a different scene from the one which turned into an ordeal for her) makes clear the danger of underestimating the cinematic purpose of any footage Hitchcock shot in this period:

Space should not be wasted, because it can be used for dramatic effect. . . . When the birds attack the barricaded house and Melanie [Hedren] is cringing back on the sofa, I kept the camera back to show the nothingness from which she is shrinking. . . . If I'd started, at the outset, right next to the girl, we'd have the feeling that she was recoiling in front of some danger that she could see but the public could not. And I wanted to establish just the contrary, to show that there was nothing off screen. Therefore, all of that space had a specific meaning. . . . The placing of images on the screen, in terms of what you're expressing, should never

be dealt with in a factual manner. Never! You can get anything you want through the proper use of cinematic techniques, which enable you to work out any image you need. There's no justification for a short cut and no reason to settle for a compromise between the image you wanted and the image you get. (Truffaut, 1967, pp. 200–201)

Hitchcock declared (as his worst critic might) in response to a moralizing attack on *Rear Window*, “Nothing could have prevented my making that picture, because my love for cinema is stronger than any morality” (Truffaut, 1967, p. 15). This badly understates Hitchcock's moral vision, one that typifies great art, through which the artist endeavors to lay out the moral conflicts he perceives and to engage the spectator in their resolution. It is not necessary to argue that artists are better people than others; what is required for the creation of the kind of art which Hitchcock presents is an awareness of moral tension and the ability to portray this tension meaningfully.

It is a tribute to the complexity of Hitchcock the artist and the human being that almost simultaneous with the publication of Spoto's biography, Rothman (1982) published the most ardent defense yet for the notion of Hitchcock as the conscious creator—a direct antithesis to Spoto's views. Rothman traced Hitchcock's explicit concern with the meaning of his art and the process of its creation from *The Lodger* to *Psycho*, finding the rendition of these overriding themes in *Psycho* to be more powerful than any of his preceding work. Critics of all ilks have conceded this film's power; Durnat (1974, pp. 332–333)—frequently found to be arguing with himself about how seriously to take the claim that Hitchcock knows fully what he is doing—in this case acknowledged “the perfection of the film's mechanism . . . [as] illustrated by the unusual degree of unanimity and mutual complementarity displayed by various exegeses” (including, in addition to Rothman, Wood, 1969; Braudy, 1968; et al.). Braudy (1968) underlined Hitchcock's discussion with Truffaut about the film, quoting first Hitchcock:

“It wasn't a message that stirred the audience, nor was it a great performance or their enjoyment of the novel. They were aroused by pure film.” Truffaut answers, satisfied, “Yes, that's true.” But Hitchcock explains further what he means: “. . . the construction of the story and the way in which it was told caused audiences all over the world to react and become emotional.” Truffaut responds: “Yes, emotional and even physical.” Hitchcock snaps: “Emotional.”

Braudy's purpose was to demonstrate that “all of Hitchcock's ‘techniques’ are aimed at destroying the separation between the film and its

audience” (p. 22); in the degree to which Hitchcock accomplished this he may be compared with no other film director so much as with Shakespeare.

As one approximation of Hitchcock’s impact on viewers—in addition to the ongoing critical debate he provokes—we may take his continuing popularity. Hitchcock’s unflagging ability to interest audiences threatens to derail Spoto’s existential explanation of Hitchcock’s problems as a filmmaker. Is a psychological explanation really needed for why a director released only six films after his sixtieth birthday, three of which were commercial successes (beginning with arguably his greatest work, *Psycho*, and ending with a respectable effort, *Family Plot*, that may yet gain a cachet), a percentage of “hits” no different from that of any other period—save one—in Hitchcock’s career? Also contradicting the notion of Hitchcock’s progressive dementia, his best output was from his mid-fifties until he was sixty, when he made *Rear Window*, *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, *Vertigo*, *North by Northwest*, and *Psycho* (along with three lesser films).² No other director in Sarris’s (1968) pantheon of *The American Cinema* who was as long-lived as Hitchcock—including Chaplin, Ford, Griffith, Hawks, Lang, Renoir, von Sternberg, or Welles—matched Hitchcock’s record of success and all had more precipitous declines in their critical reputations, while being unable to generate film projects, at an age when Hitchcock was still a major figure in motion pictures.

Truffaut’s (1984; cf. Truffaut and Scott, 1984) balanced and empathic account of Hitchcock’s final films may serve as the ultimate epitaph for that troubled genius. Truffaut (1984) also described Hitchcock’s decline as being due to the failure of *Marnie*—more particularly “the failure of his professional and personal relationship with Tippi Hedren” (p. 42). (Truffaut thought this was part of a larger difficulty Hitchcock had working after the loss of his favorite male—Grant and Stewart—and female—Bergman and Kelly—stars.) Truffaut found Hitchcock suffered a loss of confidence in the aftermath of *Marnie* that led him unwisely to part company with his most important collaborators. Moreover, the failure of this most personal of Hitchcock’s films dissuaded him from directly exposing his emotional concerns on screen again, and he strove to return to familiar formulae for the remainder of his films. At the same time, Truffaut was aware that *Frenzy* and other late successes buoyed Hitchcock both personally and professionally.

Truffaut’s posthumous analysis (it postdated the death of author as well as subject) again (like his earlier edition) expressed idiosyncratic and superfluous assumptions. Truffaut (1984) believed that—rather

than identifying with his male leads—Hitchcock hid himself behind the bit players and character actors in his films. He unfortunately opined, “it could not have been easy for him [Hitchcock] to impose his neuroses on the whole world” (p. 47). But we must be grateful for the moderate tone displayed in this work by another distinguished director (albeit one both more personal and less powerful than Hitchcock) and cinema lover, one who can recognize that great artistic creation deserves its own level of analysis:

Hitchcock belonged to a different family: the family of Chaplin, Stroheim, Lubitsch. Like them, he did not merely practice an art, but undertook to delve into its potential and to work out its rules. . . . (p. 47)

CONCLUSION

Overall, when we note that Hitchcock’s films have been well-received *in six different decades*, we may identify as the critic’s task to seek the source of Hitchcock’s remarkable artistic productivity and longevity rather than of his decline. Consider that Hitchcock’s *Notorious* (1946) was shown to good response on prime-time national TV 25 years after its original release; that when five films Hitchcock owned himself were rereleased theatrically (in 1984) twenty-five and more years after they were made, they were shown in first-run theatres and treated as a major cinematic occasion in New York and around the country; that films Hitchcock made in the thirties such as *The 39 Steps* and *The Lady Vanishes*—and even films from the twenties like *The Lodger* and *Blackmail*—are shown regularly to audiences as something other than period pieces. What causes people to respond to Hitchcock’s vision after fifty years? To answer this question, what we really need to comprehend is how Hitchcock transcended—and transformed—compulsive personal preoccupations into film masterpieces. Discipline, hard work, and sensitivity to his audiences are useful first approximations for such an understanding, while the rest may fall under the category of genius.

Under any circumstances, Hitchcock’s films *cannot* with profit be regarded as elaborate excuses for their director’s foibles and deficiencies, as uninhibited vicarious indulgences of Hitchcock’s hidden yearnings, or as inchoate expressions of his unexamined and unconscious desires. Like all substantial art, Hitchcock’s work is too complex morally to allow such easy, reductionistic synopses. Biographical analysis can offer solid clues to the genesis of those things which concern the auteur, but it cannot specify how an artist will treat these concerns—which is, after all, the substance, the mystery, and the power of art. Despite many recent attempts to unify them, the biographical

enterprise and the effort to analyze art from critical and moral perspectives remain irreducible enterprises, necessarily conducted separately and with different tools. Indeed, the ability to separate one's personality from one's creation may be the hallmark of the successful artist, the failure to do so the sign of artistic mediocrity.

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NOTES

1. I thank Archie Brodsky not only for reading and commenting on this manuscript, but for viewing and discussing Hitchcock's films with me over the years and working with me to develop the critical perspective this article embodies.
2. Hitchcock directed 20 television productions from 1955 to 1962, most for the highly successful series, *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*, which he hosted.

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