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Hitchcock and the Melodramatic Pattern

If the origins of an art reveal something of its basic nature, then a good case might be made for melodrama as the essential cinematic form. Isn't early film history really the history of an increasing ability to handle the ageless melodramatic ingredients? The bandits, rescues, catastrophes, ambushes; the threatened mothers, pale daughters, stout-hearted heroes and cold-blooded villains that had been the staple of popular theater from Boucicault to Belasco naturally became the staple also of the American silent film. And as early as 1915, when Vachel Lindsay published his *Art of the Moving Picture* and D. W. Griffith was filming *Intolerance*, it was already customary to believe that a whole grammar of film language had been permanently established. Declared Lindsay: "We now have a vast range of technique. All we lack is the sense to use it." And Griffith: the "stories will begin like four currents looked at from a hilltop. At first the four currents will flow apart, slowly and quietly. But as they flow they grow nearer and nearer together, and faster and faster, until in the end, in the last act, they mingle in one mighty river of expressed emotion."¹

Griffith's casual reference to the "last act" of a film he would also subtitle "A Drama of Comparisons" suggests how generously the pioneer directors helped themselves to the methods and materials of the popular stage.² But the rapid success of the "photoplay" was not only due to its ability to assimilate technique and subject matter from an older dramatic art; it was just as much a case of film's being able to do better some things which theater could merely do well. Consider the following sequence from W. J. Thompson's nineteenth-century stage melodrama, *A Race for Life*. The story centers on the Widow Farrand and her son Jacques, whose home is mortgaged to the villain of the

piece, Gaspard. Jacques is betrothed to the virtuous Louise, but Gaspard plots to kill the widow, steal her mortgage money, and thereby thwart the marriage. The scene of the widow's murder involves three playing areas: at stage right, the Farrand home, cut away to reveal apartments above and below; stage left, a small yard opening between the barn and the side of the house. Here is the sequence as described in the 1883 production book:

Gaspard hides in barn—Madame Farrand appears in the upper apartment—sits at table with package [containing the mortgage money]. . . . Gaspard the villain gets ladder from behind house. Places it over door against window, ascends and peeps in at Madame Farrand (she discovers him). Gaspard slides down ladder quickly and hides with ladder behind house. Mad. F. peeps out of window, Louise enters lower apartment. Sits at table with lamp . . . Mad. F. gets lamp, puts it on table, sits on sofa. Gaspard takes off his coat, puts Jacques' coat on which lies on fence. Places ladder back again to window. Mad. F. puts package under her head, lays down on sofa. Gaspard draws knife, feels edge as he is about to ascend ladder. Is stopped by Rob [his hesitant accomplice] . . . Gaspard ascends ladder cautiously. Blows out lamps. Madame Farrand starts. Rob follows him cautiously. When Gaspard gets in window he closes it quickly. Rob on ladder tries to open it but fails. After Gaspard has killed Widow Farrand, Rob slides down ladder and hides behind well watching Gaspard . . . Gaspard feels cautiously for money, touches Mad. Farrand who wakes. He seizes her by throat . . . she thinks it is Jacques . . . stabs Madame F. who screams faintly and falls . . . Gaspard comes quickly down ladder . . . replaces ladder . . . runs up on Bridge and off R. followed by Rob. Louise appears in upper part of house.³

Even in so elliptical a form and without benefit of the melodramatic “business” that would have filled out a performance, the dramatic ingredients of the sequence are obvious. There is no significant dialogue, suspense being generated entirely on a broad visual level. As the scene develops our attention is directed back and forth between two, then among three separate but simultaneous lines of action, each occurring on a different area of the set. At first our interest is divided between Gaspard and Madame Farrand: while he sets his ladder against the outside of the house and, dagger in hand, begins to climb, the widow is happily and unwittingly counting her money in the upper

apartment. A bit later we are attracted to the apartment below by the entrance of Louise, who will remain there to serve as an ironic counterpoint to the murder. When Gaspard is finally able to enter the widow's room and quickly closes the window behind him, Rob fills his place on the ladder outside, thus maintaining use of all three playing areas. Note that the resolution of the murder is delayed twice: when Madame Farrand spies him outside the window, Gaspard must conceal the ladder and adjust his plan to include Jacques' coat; then Rob stalls his second attempt at ascent with misgivings about the whole affair. On the stage the effectiveness of this scene would have ultimately depended on careful orchestration of its parts, cunning timing, and clever oscillation of an audience's attention. The rhythmic flexibility of film editing, along with the camera's ability to control the range of our vision, would of course lend themselves to much finer manipulation. But Griffith's use of parallel editing and accelerated montage is really not much different in principle from Thompson's handling of the widow's murder, for which he designed a set on which he could engineer three-way "cutting" and draw maximum suspense from three separate but converging actions.

I find the same principles illustrated in the films of Alfred Hitchcock, whose currency as a director of "ideas" has perhaps led us to neglect his skill as a melodramatist, even though he always preferred speaking of his films in those terms. "Melodrama is all I can do," Esmond Knight quotes Hitchcock in 1933, out of place on the set of *Waltzes from Vienna*, and it is an admission that in his interviews and essays is expanded into an article of faith:

The cinematic logic is to follow the rules of suspense.

Our primary function is to create an emotion and our second job is to sustain that emotion.

Sequences can never stand still. They must carry the action forward, just as the wheels of a ratchet mountain railway move the train up the slope, cog by cog.

You use one idea after another and eliminate anything that interferes with the swift pace. The rapidity of those transitions heightens the excitement.

You turn the viewer in one direction and then in another; you keep him as far as possible from what's actually going to happen.

There is possibly a colorful opening developing into something more intimate. Then, perhaps in the middle, a progression to a chase or some other adventure. And sometimes at the end the big shape of a climax, or maybe some twist or surprise. You see this hazy pattern, and then you have to find a narrative idea to suit it. Or a story may give you an idea first and you have to develop it into a pattern.⁴

The melodramatic spirit could not be stronger than it is in Hitchcock, whose world is one of headlong action, swift reversals, suspense, irony and delay. It is a world where dramatic action is patterned rhetorically, to elicit and sustain audience excitation, a world where logic governs form and “plausibility is not allowed to raise its ugly head.”

Take, for example, the opening sequence of *Strangers on a Train*, and its knee-high follow shots of Guy Haines and Bruno Anthony as they approach their “chance” meeting on the train. It is often remarked how in this sequence, before we see their faces or learn their names, the basic opposition of the two characters is visually established. Bruno’s shoes are lean, swank, and sportive, and his arriving first not only makes it clear that the meeting is unplanned, but gives him time to dawdle about the terminal and display a casual yet mincing grace. Guy, who arrives barely in time to catch the train, wears plain loungers and walks with more purpose than art. To stabilize the rapid cross-cutting, Bruno is emblemized by his flashy wing tips, Guy by the uncased tennis rackets always accompanying him in the hands of a porter. Despite our worm’s-eye view, we are never in doubt where we are because of what we hear: the urban street noise, the hollow echoes of arrivals and departures, the Sturm and Drang of a train leaving the station, the muffled cadence of the rails—these, laid over Dmitri Tiomkin’s jaunty-metropolitan (and matchingly contrapuntal) score, tell us what we cannot see. Finally the opposition of Guy and Bruno becomes not merely one of mutual contradiction, but a dialectical one, for their contradiction is the determining factor in their interaction.

The dramatic effect of the exposition of *Strangers* is to draw us straight into the action. We want to see the faces that match the feet, and we are psychologically propelled towards a meeting which the parallel editing tells us is inevitable. As Ronald Christ has observed, this expository counterpointing of Guy and Bruno clarifies the nature of their encounter—a fateful yet unsuspected convergence—whose metaphorical significance is plain from Hitchcock’s insertion of a low-angle shot from the front of the train as it moves through a series of rail switches. And it thus introduces the twin themes of doubling and

criss-crossing, which in the course of the film (and most criticism on the film) come in for elaborate variation.⁵ Such thematic excess is characteristic of melodrama, reflecting its desire to amplify and prolong sensation by all possible means, and certainly one of the pleasures we expect from Hitchcock is his witty embroidering of thematic “ideas.” Here, however, I want to focus on those larger formal principles Hitchcock implies when he speaks of turning a found story “into a pattern.” And *Strangers* is a good place to stay, for it was not a studio assignment, but a story which he chose himself as “the right kind of material for me to work with.”⁶ To compare the final film version with the original novel by Patricia Highsmith, less to praise what has been preserved than to see what has been adjusted or omitted, is to learn something about Hitchcock’s formal intentions.

The premise of the novel is essentially the premise of the film. Guy Haines (an ambitious young architect in the novel) encounters one Charles Anthony Bruno on a train bound for Texas. Guy is on his way to persuade his reluctant wife Miriam to divorce him when Bruno, a spoiled richling with an Oedipal problem, confronts him with a “foolproof” plan for double murders. Bruno, at least, takes the idea seriously: he obligingly strangles the unwanted wife, then begins prompting Guy to fulfill his half of the bargain by murdering Bruno’s father. At this point, however, Hitchcock and Highsmith part company, as in the book Guy goes through with the murder and, consumed by stress and guilt, loses everything he had sought and eventually gives himself up to the police. Bruno, who has a head start at depravity, merely sinks deeper into alcoholism and depression.

Beneath a wealth of dreary Freudian bunting, Highsmith’s novel has the shape of a moral parable, with good and evil forces at war for the human spirit. Guy’s desire for the ideal and spiritual, signified by the recurrent dream of designing “a white bridge with a span like an angel’s wing,” becomes compromised by the passionate impulse to realize that dream at any practical cost. The exterior corollaries of his dilemma are Anne and Bruno, and the contradictory impulses are projected respectively in a courtship and a seduction. On the one hand, Guy is attracted to Anne, a *dea ex machina* who is herself “as beautiful as a white bridge” and who likewise represents material and spiritual success. But on the other he is drawn towards Bruno, the “secret brother” who makes dreams come true by eliminating whatever obstacles stand in their way. For Guy, the thought of marrying Anne, like the process of architectural creation, is essentially “a spiritual act”—but “the world,” he must admit, “is geared for people like Bruno.” Highsmith’s ironic point, of course, is that Guy’s desire for the ideal eventually leads him to accept the blind determination of Bruno’s emancipated will, and so he achieves his goal at the cost of his

soul. Guy marries Anne and builds his bridge, but the beatific vision is displaced by the haunting image of Bruno: “Now, where he had seen the vision of the white house, a laughing face appeared, first the crescent mouth, then the face—Bruno’s face.”

What we have in the novel, then, is not simply psychic doubling, but a full-scale *psychomachia* which implies two oppositions: Bruno and Guy, and Bruno and Anne. That Bruno is the nefarious shadow of his own personality even Guy recognizes early on, right after he has fulfilled his part of the murder-bargain:

Love and hate, he thought now, good and evil, lived side by side in the human heart, and not merely in differing proportions in one man and the next, but all good and all evil. One had merely to look for a little of evil to find it all, one had merely to scratch the surface. All things had opposites close by, every decision a reason against it, every animal an animal that destroys it, the male the female, the positive the negative. . . . And Bruno, he and Bruno. Each was what the other had not chosen to be, the cast-off self, what he thought he hated but perhaps in reality loved.⁷

By this point in the story, Guy has begun to come over to Bruno’s way of thinking. But the exact nature of their relationship is clarified later on, when Anne joins them in an arrangement which for Guy has the force of an eternal tableau:

He was standing beside Anne, and Bruno was here with them, not an event, not a moment, but a condition, something that had always been and always would be. Bruno, himself, Anne. And the moving on the tracks . . . He felt rather like two people, one of whom could create and feel in harmony with God when he created and the other who could murder.⁸

The Freudian emphasis would have naturally appealed to Hitchcock, whose own artistic vision was characterized by an ironic awareness of how easily evil can shatter the normality of daily existence, how frequently order and logic are undercut by chance and absurdity.

But though there is foreshadowing in the Highsmith story of much that characterizes the film—including the celebrated “criss-cross” motif⁹—Hitchcock finally preserves little more than the premise of Guy’s initial encounter with Bruno, and the latter’s function as his *Doppelgänger* and general gadfly. There are, first of all, the changes one might expect to be made in adapting material that is

essentially psychoanalytical to the rigors of melodramatic form. Several characters are excised, among them Arthur Gerard, an abrasive, cigar-smoking private dick who for the last third of the book hounds Guy toward confession, plus Owen Markham, the father of Miriam's unborn child and the man who in the final chapter becomes Guy's implacable confessor. Many scenes are deleted, even a brief meeting between Guy and his mother which Hitchcock might have retained to deepen the psychological parallelism of the two strangers. In the interests of rapid motion and mounting tension, Guy trades architecture for tennis, idealism for action. (In the book, the "identity" that Guy absentmindedly leaves with Bruno on the train is a high school copy of Plato; in the film it becomes the cigarette lighter emblemized with crossed rackets.) The final screenplay is trimmed to a cumulative series of climaxes: the initial encounter on the train, Bruno's murder of Miriam, the brief crisis of Bruno's "trance" at the senator's cocktail party and, following Guy's nocturnal visit to the Anthony home, the lengthy crosscut sequence which leads him and Bruno to their final battle on the carousel.

Other changes, however, greatly alter the moral focus. Since the film shifts its emphasis to the relationship of Guy and Bruno, Anne loses most of her status as active moral agent. Her demotion carries some of the weight of secularization: Guy's dream of the white house materializes in the film as the image of the White House (or, more precisely, the Capitol Dome), from which our heroine emerges as a senator's daughter and a socialite, home and family aglow with everything in politics and high society that for Hitchcock has always epitomized the democratic ideal of an ordered life. (In keeping with this, the film does preserve some sense of Anne's spiritual distance by giving her a pesky kid sister who, in serving as go-between for the two lovers, keeps Anne from having to soil her gloves on unseemly matters of plot. It is Babs whose resemblance to Miriam draws Bruno into the open, and Babs who executes Anne's plan for Guy's escape following his match at Forest Hills.) But while the original story had emphasized the psychic contest between superego (Anne) and id (Bruno), with Guy's ego the spoils, the film version stresses the battle of conscious ego (Guy) and unconscious id (Bruno), with Anne the prize. So while Guy's moral ambivalence provides the central dramatic issue for Highsmith, in Hitchcock the central conflict depends on Guy's refusal to accept — perhaps even to recognize — in himself the amoral impulses of Bruno.

All this, of course, has significant implications for the character of Guy Haines. Since in the Hitchcock version Guy does *not* murder Bruno's father and unconditionally seal the pact, he can be only subliminally guilty to begin with, and then only insofar as he harbors

some malice aforethought, is (legally if not willingly) an accessory to murder who fails to come promptly forward, and is the beneficiary of Bruno's elimination of Miriam.¹⁰ Clearly there is circumstantial evidence in the film on all these counts: in Guy's strangled outburst on the phone to Anne, in his equivocation and delay in going to the police with the full story, in his vague political ambitions, and – not the least convincing, I think – in the taint of moral weakness which has always characterized the screen *persona* of Farley Granger.¹¹

Still, these devious suggestions of complicity seem less influential in determining our attitude towards Guy than the dramatic context in which they appear. Let us take Hitchcock's characterization of Miriam. Had he been particularly interested in intensifying our awareness of Guy's guilt, it would have been easy for Hitchcock to retain some of the ambiguity of Highsmith's estranged wife—a rather frumpish character, hardly blameless, but not wholly unsympathetic, and one whom even Guy has enough sense to recognize as “the symbol of the failure of his youth.” Hitchcock's (and Laura Elliott's) Miriam, on the other hand, seems transparently cunning, self-serving and avaricious—a wronged woman with a vengeance. In the record shop her initial cordiality sours quickly when Guy wants only to speak of divorce. What we remember are her fish-eye glasses, her scornful smile, her taunting, her cold implacability, and her vindictive pleasure when, once she has accepted the divorce money from Guy, she reneges and threatens that by wrongly claiming him as the father of her unborn child she will try to siphon some personal profit from his alliance with Anne's family: “I can be very pathetic as the deserted little mother in a courtroom. Think it over, Guy.” Following all this, Guy's outburst in the record booth and his muttered imprecation on the phone with Anne seem certainly understandable, if not purely justifiable, responses. By the time Miriam appears bedizened at the amusement park, teases two loutish escorts and flirts suggestively with a certain dark stranger, she has become so expendable that we hardly blink an eye when no one—including Guy—seems much affected by her loss.

Hitchcock is clearly working with his audience, not his characters, in mind. Since Guy's ordeal is not rigorously logical, but often implausible, it allows much to be read into it. But any Faustian implications remain rather weak in dramatic terms, for Guy's rational soul never gives assent to Bruno, and the worthiness of his values (Anne, Washington) is assumed without question.¹² The pivotal scene, I think, occurs just before the climactic chase, when Guy secretly removes from his bureau the gun Bruno has sent and, with every indication that he means to go through with his half of the plan, pays a nocturnal visit to the Anthony mansion. Here everything depends on

the tension between our basic desire to believe in Guy's innocence and our fear that he has instead succumbed to Bruno's prodding. On the staircase he is delayed by a large, threatening watchdog; but then the beast proves uncommonly friendly and Guy is free to enter the master bedroom, only to disclose that his actual motive for coming was to warn Mr. Anthony about his son. At this, the shadowy figure on the bed rises slightly to turn on the lamp and reveal itself, not as the father, but the son – Bruno. To use Hitchcock's customary terms, the scene involves a "suspense effect" followed by a "surprise effect." Our anxiety about Guy's intentions is prolonged by the delay on the stairs; when he finally reaches the bedroom, however, we relax in relief – Guy is not there to murder Bruno's father at all, but to warn him; at which precise point we receive the shock – he has instead tipped his hand to the dangerous Bruno.

Here any notion of Guy Haines as a modern-day Faustus poised between the lure of Anne's ideality and the promptings of Bruno's heartless practicality gives way to Hitchcock's simpler desire to make us apprehensive about his hero's moral welfare. I don't think that, on a visceral level at least, we ever seriously question our allegiance to Guy beyond that moment in the bedroom when, having inadvertently betrayed Bruno to his face and apparently alienated him for good, he pronounces his moral conviction:

BRUNO: Well, then am I correct in assuming, *Mister* Haines, that you have no intention of going through with our plan?

GUY: None whatsoever. I never had.¹³

Bruno's caustic "Mister" punctuates the entire conversation, giving us every reason to believe that the two are strangers again, and this point is visually reinforced when Guy must finally leave at gunpoint. Indeed, there is an important dramatic reason why, at this time, the primary opposition of the two characters needs to be reaffirmed. The whole thrust of the chase which follows – with its cumulative cross-cutting between Bruno's efforts to plant the "incriminating" lighter, and Guy's struggle to wrap up his tennis match in (record) time to prevent him, plus all the visual fireworks of their battle on the carousel – depends on our having taken sides, recognized our hero and our villain, anticipated an outcome to hope for and another to dread. Perhaps this "mock murder" scene (which, incidentally, marks the sharpest departure from the book) does not really alter our opinion of Guy so much as it confirms what we had always hoped was true – that he is a morally earnest and upright fellow after all. But whatever our disposition beforehand, following this scene we are much likelier to

disregard any inconsistency in his behavior as a simple matter of dramatic expediency, and to overlook the disturbing ambiguity surrounding his motives in light of the fact that, on the conscious level at least, they proceed from comfortably honorable intentions.

I have gone into this scene at some length, since it illustrates so perfectly the relationship between melodramatic structure and audience expectation, and so aptly indicates how suspense results not merely from our uncertainty about what will happen next but from our active desire for a particular outcome. In a very real sense, the melodramatic experience has much in common with that of competitive sport, where excitement always runs strongest in the man who takes sides. Naturally, with so fundamental an interest in action and suspense, character in melodrama tends to break down into elements and fragments of personality. The melodramatist does not attempt to create fully rounded characters so much as stylized figures which, if they are successful in absorbing our archetypal fears and desires, put us under the pleasant yoke of what Robert Heilman has called a "monopathy," a single strong feeling that excludes all others and, according to Heilman, renders us psychically complete:

In the structure of melodrama, I suggest, man is essentially "whole." This key word implies neither greatness nor moral perfection, but rather an absence of the kind of inner conflict that is so significant that it *must* claim our first attention. He is not troubled by motives that would distract him from the conflict outside himself. He may, in fact, be humanly incomplete; but his incompleteness is not the issue. In tragedy, man is divided; in melodrama, he has at least a quasi wholeness against besetting problems. In tragedy, the conflict is within man, in melodrama, it is between men, or between men and things.¹⁴

That is why, even though it is the most public of genres, the melodrama so often radiates a glow of archetypal intensity, and why the suggestion of allegory is always creeping around its fringes. That is also why Guy Haines, in the words of the sportscaster who underscores his tennis match, is obliged to abandon his "watch and wait" strategy and play "well within himself" in the climactic sequence of *Strangers*. For, while character in melodrama need not be wholly undivided (and in Hitchcock hardly ever is), its divisions can never be allowed to take the dramatic center.

It would be wrong, of course, to maintain that Hitchcock's films are vital only on the immediate, affective level, even though this is our primary level of apprehension, and the level on which Hitchcock him-

self spoke most comfortably. Any careful examination of *Strangers* reveals that hero and heroine are themselves part of a world where virtually all appearances are deceptive and hide menace, where surface innocence seldom fails to betray a substratum of anxiety and amorality. We have, most obviously, the violent expressionistic painting of Bruno's delightfully harebrained mother (Marion Lorne); the university calculus professor, Collins, who is unable to provide Guy with an alibi because he was too "boiled" to remember having met him on the train; and, among the Washington gentry, a legal official who defends capital punishment with frighteningly chilly logic, as well as two jeweled beldames whose secret fantasies about murder seem to shock even so practiced a plotter as Bruno. Nor are Anne and her family wholly exempt from suggestions of moral duplicity. Senator Morton, though he is paternal enough to make the point that Miriam, for all her imperfections, "was a human being," appears less concerned with Guy's predicament than with a fear that "the gossips" may here uncover material for scandal. Babs, excited by the possibility of a crime of passion, hangs wide-eyed on Hennessey's gruesome tales of murders past. And even Anne, despite what appears on the surface to be a conventional, unimpeachable devotion to her Guy, finally grows to suspect him so strongly that she becomes the first to impugn him directly. "How did you get him to do it?" she charges following Bruno's revealing misbehavior at the party — an accusation which Guy aptly twists to justify his failure to inform the police, adding "Now that you know, you're acting guilty too." We all have it in us to hate and to murder, Bruno apprises a smiling Mrs. Cunningham (whom, anon, he will nearly strangle), and it is an obvious case of the villain serving as director's mouthpiece.

All this lends the finale, a wild maelstrom of whirling screams and moon-eyed chargers, the double character of exorcism and repression. And it makes the coda, in which the reunited couple playfully snub an (apparently) benign minister who idly echoes Bruno's opening gambit, only partially satisfying. But I do not think that we are urged to read these final scenes too litigiously, and seek in them evidence of either Guy's deepening paranoia or his recognition and exorcism of the devil within. Why else would Hitchcock, in the thick of battle on the carousel, introduce a cheeky toddler for Bruno to threaten and Guy to save? And why would he allow the close of the film to become so dominated by the familiar glow and musical laughter of Hollywood in its rosiest oh-no-here-we-go-again mood? The sophisticated doubling and devious hinting certainly does more than just "fill out the tapestry" — it reflects, enriches, and subtly undermines the naive level of the action. But while it is more than skin keep, it does not cut so far as structure.

One suspects that Hitchcock chose Highsmith's *Strangers* for its opening premise and its clean Freudian outlines. But to remain faithful to the "rules of suspense," he had to adjust the story to conclude with his hero's innocence. For though the subject matter is developed to imply much beside that innocence, Guy's personality (like Anne's) is finally static, unchanged by the force of action or event, and his dilemma the result not of a conflict between active human will and blind circumstance, but merely of a set of circumstances held together by an ironic chain of causation. And while Bruno often engages our affections as the spirit of misrule (at the party, for example), he is ultimately destined to go down ungenerous, unrepentant, clutching to the last the symbol of his dark mission.

It is a discomfiting formal (and moral) victory; but it is a victory nonetheless. And its real causes surely lie not in Hitchcock's public principles, but in the private life which informed them:

I'm full of fears and I do my best to avoid difficulties and any kind of complications. I like everything around me to be clear as crystal and completely calm. I don't want clouds overhead. I get a feeling of inner peace from a well-organized desk. When I take a bath, I put everything neatly back in place. You wouldn't even know I'd been in the bathroom. My passion for orderliness goes hand in hand with a strong revulsion toward complications.¹⁵

On the one hand, we find here the desire to maintain a system in an essentially inimical universe; on the other, a special awareness of the quirkish forces which are constantly threatening to disrupt that system. And Hitchcock would have been quick to point out how easily a revulsion can become what it secretly implies, a fascination.

Hitchcock's notable achievement in *Strangers*, and in the best of his American films of the fifties, lies precisely in this tension between the exigencies of formal order and the compelling personal desire to show how flimsy any such order is in the fickle currents of the world. The world of these films is not one whose moral foundations are in any real danger of crumbling, but one where they, along with our dramatic expectations, are cleverly and persistently tested. Clearly we have come a long way from the simple attitudinizing of Gaspard and the Widow Farrand. But though in the course of a film like *Strangers* we are teased with the prospect of moral dissolution, we are left with a final, if uneasy, reassurance that collapse gives way to order, wit, and goodness. Perhaps it is the character of our fears which changes, and not the fundamental nature of the form.

NOTES

¹Lindsay, from *The Art of the Moving Picture* (New York: Macmillan, 1915), p. 8; Griffith quoted from Robert Edgar Long's *David Wark Griffith* in Lewis Jacobs, *The Rise of the American Film* (New York: Harcourt-Brace, 1939; rpt. New York: Teachers College Press, 1974), p. 11.

²The standard discussion of the influence of the nineteenth-century theater on the early motion picture is A. Nicholas Vardac's *Stage to Screen: Theatrical Method from Garrick to Griffith* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1949). John L. Fell's *Film and the Narrative Tradition* (Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1974) includes a chapter on film and melodrama.

³From a *Harvard Theatre Collection* manuscript in the author's hand, marked "First produced Aug. 27, 1833." Quoted in Vardac, p. 22.

⁴All but the last of these quotes are from Francois Truffaut's interviews with Hitchcock transcribed as *Hitchcock* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1967), pp. 147, 80, 50, 69, 206. The last is from Hitchcock's article "Direction" in *Footnotes to the Film*, ed. Charles Davy (London: Lovat, Dickson and Thompson, 1937), p. 32.

⁵"Isn't it a fascinating pattern?" Hitchcock remarks to Truffaut, then adds, "One could study it forever." Ronald Christ and Raymond Durnat have between them assembled a formidable list of the doublings and crisscrossings of *Strangers*. See Christ's "Strangers on a Train: The Pattern of Encounter," in *Focus on Hitchcock*, ed. Albert J. LaValley (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1972), and Durnat's chapter on *Strangers* in *The Strange Case of Alfred Hitchcock* (London: Faber, 1974).

⁶Truffaut, *Hitchcock*, p. 142. Though Raymond Chandler shares screenplay credit with Czenzi Ormonde, and Whitfield Cook is credited for the adaptation, the evidence leaves little doubt that the final stamp is Hitchcock's. See Chandler's remarks in *Raymond Chandler Speaking* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1962) on the "changed and castrated" final script, and Hitchcock's comments to Truffaut (pp. 142-43) on the unsuitability of Chandler's work on the screenplay.

⁷The Highsmith novel, first published in London by Cresset Press, has only recently been distributed in the United States. My page references are to the 1974 Penguin paperback (Aylesbury, Bucks: Hazell Watson and Viney), p. 163.

⁸*Ibid*, p. 175.

⁹See p. 221 of the Highsmith novel: " 'The trouble with the police force is that it has a single-track mind,' Gerard announced. 'This case, like many others, took a double-track mind. Simply couldn't have been solved without a double-track mind.' " But the novel's schizophrenic relationship becomes in the film a relationship between an actual schizophrenic (Bruno) and at worst a potential one (Guy).

¹⁰My observations on Guy's guilt are indebted to Raymond Durnat's discussion of the film in *The Strange Case of Alfred Hitchcock*, pp. 217-231.

¹¹Interestingly, Hitchcock remarks to Bogdanovich and repeats to Truffaut that "Granger was miscast" and he would have preferred the "stronger" lead of William Holden. It is tempting to speculate how this casting change would have affected our notions about *Strangers*. Wouldn't Guy's moral weakness and "transfer of guilt" seem less striking than his political opportunism?

¹²As Durnat observes, the orthodox Catholic Hitchcock ought strenuously to insist that as long as Guy's rational soul does not give assent to the devil, the subject is his victim, not his accomplice. See *Strange Case*, p. 224.

¹³My transcription from the Warner Brothers print.

¹⁴"Tragedy and Melodrama: Speculations on Generic Form," *Texas Quarterly* (Summer 1960), rpt. in *Perspectives on Drama*, ed. James L. Calderwood and Harold E. Toliver (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1968), p. 158-59.

¹⁵Truffaut, *Hitchcock*, p. 197.