

The Films of Alfred Hitchcock

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Contents

1	Introduction	<i>page</i> 1
2	<i>Blackmail</i>	28
3	<i>Shadow of a Doubt</i>	52
4	<i>The Wrong Man</i>	65
5	<i>Vertigo</i>	82
6	<i>Psycho</i>	100
7	<i>The Birds</i>	119
8	Epilogue	144
	Select Bibliography	148
	Filmography	149
	Index	163

I

Introduction

Alfred Hitchcock is among the few directors to combine a strong reputation for high-art filmmaking – even his detractors grant the consistency and technical ingenuity of his work – with enormous mass-audience popularity. The broadly based interest in Hitchcock’s work stems from a number of factors, including his lifelong fascination with one of the fundamental concerns of modern art: the tension between order and chaos. It is clear from his key works (as well as from his biography) that he perceived this tension not just abstractly or intellectually, but as a visceral concern – he was in a subliminal but perpetual panic over it. This helps explain the perceptual and emotional properties of his films. It also sheds light on the obsessive control he exercised over them, from his compulsively precise camera and editing styles to his “cattledriver” attitude toward performers and his fixation on vision as the ultimate arbiter of communication and reality itself.

Hitchcock expresses his deep-seated fear of encroaching chaos in various ways. He inflicts vulnerability on his characters by shifting the relationships between reality and illusion, often in settings that allude to stages or theaters; he places characters in confining environments that connote suffocation and paralysis rather than safety or security; he represses key thematic material too dangerous or forbidden to be actualized, thus creating a kind of “shadow film” that colors and modifies everything we see and hear. Such observations lead us to the culminating fact of Hitchcock’s universe: the transcendence of physical conflict over psychological and even moral confrontation with evil.

Studies often miss the complexity of Hitchcock’s achievement by leaning too far toward either thematic analysis – examining his scenarios and story lines more intently than the films as cinematic experiences – or technical analysis that sheds light on isolated corners without illuminating the canon,

or even the individual film, as a whole. Since the cinema specialist and the everyday moviegoer share an interest in Hitchcock's work, he is an ideal subject for analysis that attempts to seek out the relationships among his technical, stylistic, and thematic strategies; to examine these in broadly cinematic terms; and to conjoin them with the dramatic, humanistic, and even spiritual resonances that characterize his best films.

In the years since auteur analysis lost its dominating position on the American film-studies landscape, it has become commonplace for books about "The Films of So-and-So" to include disclaimers, excuses, and explanations of what the writer *really means* when So-and-So's name is mentioned. True to that spirit, when I say Alfred Hitchcock in these pages I don't mean only the odd-looking individual (a "symphony of circles," one journalist called him) who sat in the director's chair for 53 productions, also popping briefly into camera range in most of them. I also mean the phalanx of collaborators (some regular, some occasional, some one-shots) who contributed major and minor ingredients to all his works. Beyond this, I mean the great complex of social, political, economic, and psychological forces that influenced all these people in uncountable ways.

And yet, and yet. While all this is true and important, it is not certain that auteurism has lost its value (or revealed a lack of value that was present all along) as definitively as some critics and scholars have insisted. As a means of organizing film history – especially American film history – it has proven its utility; as a means of emphasizing and exploring the human dimension of moviemaking – especially in the potentially dehumanizing environment of the studio system – it has proved invaluable, at least in the hands of its more thoughtful practitioners.

Hitchcock, moreover, is a special case. Although he never wrote his own screenplays, as did such peers as Orson Welles and Preston Sturges, he exercised great care in shaping the screenplays that others wrote for him. He was able to do this because of the extraordinary degree of personal power he gained in the film industry by virtue of, among other factors, the box-office success of his movies and the public-relations value of his personal appearances in cameo roles, advertising campaigns, and TV programs. He used this power, abetted by his strong technical facility, to control every aspect of his films, from preproduction planning to opening-day publicity. As much as any major filmmaker ever has, he channeled the talent of his collaborators and the temper of his times into coherent narrative/aesthetic patterns dictated by his own deepest instincts.

The origin of Hitchcock's exceptional ability is not clear. He did not, for example, come from an artistically inclined family background as Welles and Sturges did. Born in 1899 in London, he grew up in a middle-class merchant household; a central incident of his childhood, according to an anecdote he never tired of repeating, was a momentary taste of jail arranged by his father and a local policeman, as punishment for some small misbehavior. After attending a Jesuit college, he entered the film industry at age 21 as a writer and illustrator of silent-movie title cards. He worked his way up to such positions as art director and production manager, making his directorial debut with *The Pleasure Garden*, released in 1927. The previous year he had married his assistant, Alma Reville, who continued to be an important (but low-profile) collaborator throughout his career. The first true "Hitchcock film," the celebrated thriller *The Lodger: A Story of the London Fog*, came soon after his marriage; his first sound production, *Blackmail*, was released in 1929. His first American film, *Rebecca*, won the Academy Award for best picture of 1940. He died in 1980 while preparing what would have been his 54th feature.

There are few clues in the Hitchcock chronology to indicate whence his inspirations came or why they developed as they did. It becomes all the more necessary, therefore, to identify and assess the transpersonal forces that made themselves felt in his work despite his passion for personal control – or, as an antiauteurist might skeptically say, the illusion of such control. Since his thematic and stylistic preoccupations remained remarkably stable throughout the decades of his career, one might begin such an investigation by examining his formative years in the British film industry, remembering that the industry was itself in a formative and immature stage during the 1920s and 1930s. Tom Ryall has singled out a number of forces that influenced British film culture at this time.¹ Among them are the following:

- the international popularity of mainstream Hollywood cinema;
- the existence of an alternative "Film Society" movement in England;
- the intellectual prestige of documentary film;
- interest in Soviet montage theory;
- interest in German expressionist filmmaking; and
- the popularity of crime and sex in British popular culture.

Filmmakers who were subject to this convergence of forces tended to make fairly definite choices among alternatives suggested by the first three items. Naturally there was a strong temptation to make movies in imitation of Hollywood, aiming at success not only with British audiences – who were conditioned, and happily so, to Hollywood productions – but also

with American audiences, even though this goal generally proved unattainable. It is obvious to anyone familiar with Hitchcock's subsequent career that he was far from averse to many of the themes and stylistics long associated with American filmmaking. If popular success and a comfortable career had been his only aspirations, he might well have clung to the Hollywood model, becoming an accomplished professional storyteller and perhaps little more.

Hitchcock possessed a broad streak of artistic as well as box-office ambition, however. He was impressed by unconventional styles more easily found in film-society showings than on commercial screens, and by the very un-Hollywood stylistic ideas he encountered during a brief period of work at UFA, the great German studio. He must also have been aware that many film intellectuals of the 1920s and 1930s were being drawn away from "entertainment" movies by the notion of an "art" cinema based on documentary principles.

Hitchcock did not follow any of these leads to the extent of abandoning mainstream film production; yet each left a lasting mark on the young director. *The Lodger*, for example, joins a conventional thriller plot and gothic characterizations to a shadowy *mise-en-scène* with strong Germanic overtones, and to an editing style influenced by Sergei Eisenstein as well as D. W. Griffith and other American pioneers. And whether or not Hitchcock was familiar with Soviet theories on the importance of sound-image counterpoint in talkies, *Blackmail* – surely the greatest of his 1920s films – shows a strong awareness that disjuncture can help prevent the tyranny of word over image, and vice versa.

The complexity of Hitchcock's interaction with the film aesthetics of this period, and the lasting impression this interaction made on him, can be illustrated by his relationship with documentary cinema. Many of his British productions – such as *The Lodger*, *The Ring*, *The Manxman*, and *Blackmail* – contain strong documentary elements, especially (as Ryall notes) in the opening sequences, which establish fundamental aspects of the world imagined by each film. In part, this reflects Hitchcock's interest in the documentary "art film" movement headed by John Grierson and others. It also reflects Hitchcock's rapport with a general tendency, felt most strongly in the 1930s, to put more faith in documentary than in pure fiction – a tendency encouraged by diversifying uses of the camera, which James Agee called "the central instrument of our time" in 1936. "The camera is a prime symbol of the thirties' mind... less because the mind was endlessly fragmented," writes William Stott, "than because the mind aspired to the quality of authenticity, of direct and immediate experience, that the camera captures

in all its photographs.”² This sense of “authenticity” keenly interested Hitchcock.

So did the challenge of capturing a kind of reality not usually found in British movies. Conventional films, as a 1937 article in *World Film News* complained, generally pictured 1930s Britain as “a nation of retired businessmen, mill owners, radio singers, actors, detectives, newspapermen, leading ladies, soldiers, secret servicemen, crooks, smugglers and international jewel thieves” rather than people with everyday jobs and ordinary problems.³ By contrast, homes and businesses in Hitchcock’s early works are often filmed with an attention to gritty, workaday details calculated to offset the more flamboyant portrait of England frequently manifested in mainstream pictures. Lindsay Anderson notes such examples as the restaurant and tobacconist’s shop in *Blackmail*, the chapel in *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1934), the country house in *The 39 Steps* (1935), the movie theater in *Sabotage* (1936).⁴

Hitchcock acknowledged, in a 1937 article for *Kine Weekly*, that he was consciously trying to put what he called “that vital central stratum of British humanity, the middle class” onto the screen, adding that he hoped “we shall do unto America what they have done unto us, and make the cheerful man and girl of our middle class as colourful and dramatic to them as their ordinary everyday citizens are to the audiences of England.”⁵ (In the same year, however, he admitted the difficulty of making English subjects appealing to the English themselves: “One difficulty . . . is that English audiences seem to take more interest in American life – I suppose because it has a novelty value. They are rather easily bored by everyday scenes in their own country.”⁶)

In addition to stating one of his early priorities, Hitchcock’s comment on “that vital central stratum” anticipates a strategy that would become one of his chief trademarks: the penchant for showing violence and chaos not only in violent and chaotic settings, but often in ordinary places (frequently pleasant, sunny, crowded) where they beset ordinary people as they go about their ordinary business. Although his later works employ stylized elements at times – *The Birds*, say, and *Marnie* – the tendency toward surface realism continues to be strongly felt decades after his formative period, even in movies with subjects and ambiances very different from those of Anderson’s examples. The look and sensibility of *The Wrong Man* (1956), for instance, are powerfully influenced by documentary traditions. Even such an apparently light and artificial concoction as *To Catch a Thief* (1955) bears traces of Hitchcock’s documentary impulse, moreover, here translated into a very different idiom. After a credit sequence that indicates the setting and mood

of the story with a shot of a travel-agency window, the largely wordless opening sequence alternates conspicuously acted shots of burglary aftermaths with realistic views of a cat (introducing the narrative's "cat burglar" motif) stalking across real-looking rooftops. Although this is not a documentary sequence, its shop-window and stalking-cat shots are so completely literalized – visually and metaphorically – as to recall Hitchcock's roots in the documentary tradition despite the whimsical narrative that follows them.

Other early influences on Hitchcock's work, including Soviet montage theory (associated with Vsevolod Pudovkin, Lev Kuleshov, Eisenstein, and others) and the German expressionist style, also continue to echo in his later films. Pictures related to the 1940s film noir cycle, for example, such as *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943) and *Notorious* (1946), have inflections of lighting and camera angle that recall expressionist techniques; and the editing of many classic sequences – most famously the shower murder in *Psycho* (1960) – is steeped in Eisenstein's notions, as are disjunctions between sound and image in numerous films.

Such stylistic tendencies can be traced across Hitchcock's whole career. Indeed, an understanding of his work must involve recognition of all the forces so far mentioned – classical American film, various national cinemas, documentary expression, popular culture, and so forth – not only in isolation, but also as they interacted with other factors: Hitchcock's artistic ambitions, his wish for praise from high-culture sources, his even stronger wish for mass-audience appeal, his desire to explore social and philosophical issues through visual narrative. And don't forget that key Hitchcockian characteristic, the love of a good (or bad!) practical joke, be it on the people *in* his films or the people *watching* his films. Such diversity recalls the "dialogic" principle of literary theorist M. M. Bakhtin, according to which "everything means, is understood, as a part of a greater whole – there is a constant interaction between meanings, all of which have the potential of conditioning others."⁷ Such a dynamic is clearly at work in Hitchcock's British films and continues to operate even more richly – complicated by new production and marketing considerations that Hitchcock encountered after his move to Hollywood – in his later work.

One means of sifting through so many contributory elements in Hitchcock's work, as in the work of other significant filmmakers, has been the auteurist practice of seeking consistent themes, preoccupations, and (that favorite auteurist term) "obsessions" running through his canon. This methodology gained its first major foothold in Hitchcock studies when Eric Rohmer and Claude Chabrol published their groundbreaking book *Hitchcock: The First Forty-Four Films* in 1957, suggesting a compact list of main

Hitchcockian themes and emphasizing the religious elements – specifically Roman Catholic attitudes and outlooks – that they found pervading (and even determining) the films. Many later critics have worked along roughly similar lines, finding concentrations of thematic and “obsessional” material to explain, justify, or consolidate their own interpretations of the on-screen evidence. Key themes to emerge from such studies include:

- the ambiguity of guilt and innocence;
- the transference of guilt from one individual to another;
- the fascination with a guilty woman;
- the therapeutic function of obsession and vulnerability; and
- the equation of knowledge and danger.

These points do not exhaust the list of major thematic concerns, by any means. Others are also important, from the “confession” theme posited by Rohmer and Chabrol to “fear of the devouring, voracious mother,” in Tania Modleski’s phrase.⁸ Each of those listed above may claim a persistent and resonant presence in Hitchcock’s oeuvre over a period of decades, however, and thus deserves a brief overview before any deeper examination of individual films.

The first two points are closely intertwined. On its most transparent level, the ambiguity theme can simply mean that guilty people look innocent (Uncle Charlie in *Shadow of a Doubt*) and vice versa (Hannay in *The 39 Steps*). More interestingly, a genuine moral ambiguity may inhere in a character’s decisions and behaviors: In both versions of *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1934/1956), for instance, the female protagonist knows that action on her part could result in harm to her kidnapped child, and hence – despite her seemingly justified self-image as a decent and gentle person – finds herself (almost) allowing a murder to proceed.

Moral ambiguity crops up consistently in the transfer-of-guilt motif, which takes many forms in many films, but rests ultimately on the ambiguity of guilt itself. The mysterious visitor of *The Lodger* is mistaken for a murderer *he* wants to destroy; the policeman of *Blackmail* precipitates a death by hiding his girlfriend’s responsibility for a killing; the priest of *I Confess* cannot refute a false accusation of murder; the heroes of *The 39 Steps* and *North by Northwest* are hunted for murders committed by others; the protagonist of *Vertigo* remains ignorant of his part in a murder scheme while wrongly believing that he failed to prevent a suicide; a belligerent man is branded a murderer in *Frenzy* while the amiable culprit goes unsuspected; and so forth. Guilt may also be “transferred” within a single human psyche, as when the protagonists of *Spellbound* and *Marnie* become

the victims of their own overactive superegos because of deaths for which they are physically, but not morally responsible.

Actual guilt also plays a part in Hitchcock's cinema, of course, and while this often attaches itself to men, there does seem to be a preponderance of interest in the female variety. Hitchcock's approach to the guilt and innocence of women is diversified. The female protagonists of *Blackmail* and *Under Capricorn* seem to have been justified in committing their "crimes"; not so the villainous women in *The Paradine Case* and *To Catch a Thief*. The complex Judy/Madeleine figure of *Vertigo* appears fully culpable in a murder scheme yet can also be seen as the instrument of men (first Elster, then Scottie) throughout the film; the title character of *Marnie* is a full-fledged crook, albeit one capable of redemption.

The notion of a therapeutic theme comes primarily from Robin Wood, who suggests that certain Hitchcock characters are "cured of some weakness or obsession by indulging it and living through the consequences." Wood cites *Suspicion* as a major instance of this motif, and one can find it in many other films; *Vertigo* is especially interesting here, since its "therapy" is physically as well as psychologically on display in the last scene, where Scottie's action (climbing the stairs with Judy in tow) amounts to a self-administered dose of the "flooding therapy" practiced by neobehaviorist clinicians.

Finally, the theme of a knowledge–danger equation has received too little attention from Hitchcock critics, although it runs loudly and clearly through a great deal of his work. The title *The Man Who Knew Too Much* adds little to spectator understanding of either version of that story, but the fact that Hitchcock used it twice over, some 20 years apart – and alludes to it elsewhere, most notably in *Rear Window* – suggests its importance for him. His films often contain individuals who face danger or adventure only after learning some piece of information, be it a secret (*Shadow of a Doubt*), a clue to a secret (*The Lady Vanishes*), the mere fact that a secret exists (*The 39 Steps*), a secret that only appears to exist (*Vertigo*), or whatever "MacGuffin" the scenario has up its sleeve. (Hitchcock used the term "MacGuffin" to mean a plot element that didn't interest him specifically but served to generate and propel the action of a film.)

Although long-studied themes such as those discussed so far are important to Hitchcock's work, others – long neglected by Hitchcock critics – are manifested no less consistently in his films. A crucial one is the deep-seated resonance between "real life" and the world of theater – or rather, the borderline between truth and illusion that theater often represents.

To some degree, of course, we all shape our behavior (in public, at least)

in accordance with our awareness of people around us; this is part of what it means to be integrated with a society and a culture. In films, this dimension of behavior often goes unexplored, since filmmakers and audiences take it for granted, overlook it, or simply ignore it. Some filmmakers have probed it, however, paying special attention to the capacity of human beings to reinvent their personalities in accordance with changing circumstances. Theater is often a metaphor in such films, but the theatrical world need not be explicitly present. Although theatrical ambience has a strong presence in *Murder!* and *Stage Fright*, it is absent in *I Confess* and *Rear Window*, which show an equally strong fascination with role playing and behavioral artifice.

Even when no obviously theatrical (or cinematic) activity appears within a Hitchcock film, his characters are forever playing roles, for each other and for themselves. The wide range of these roles is apparent from even a few examples – the policeman’s hypocritical pose in *Blackmail*, the professor’s feigned respectability in *The 39 Steps*, the heroine’s ostensibly loving marriage in *Notorious*, the Uncle Charlie sham in *Shadow of a Doubt*, the false Arab in *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1956), the Madeleine/Judy masquerade in *Vertigo*, and of course, Norman Bates’s mind-bending “portrayal” of his mother in *Psycho*.

Hitchcock’s characters “act” for more than one audience, moreover. They perform for one another’s benefit – whether the motive is to seduce, deceive, cheat, or simply communicate – in the various schemes that generate and sustain their narratives. They perform for their own gratification or protection, à la Norman Bates. They perform for us as we watch their movies. And they perform for Hitchcock himself, whose camera observes and records their activities. Hitchcock, furthermore, can be considered a performer in his own right – explicitly in his cameo appearances; and implicitly as he manipulates the figures in his films, who act *for* him on-screen.

Every narrative filmmaker sets characters in motion, of course, and thenceforth controls (actively or passively) their every move. Hitchcock stands out by virtue of the ingenuity and thoroughness with which he accomplishes this – through his inventiveness in devising narratives and characterizations and through the meticulousness of his preproduction, shooting, and editing strategies. As the dominating force of a filmic universe that incorporates an unusually large share of violent and immoral actions, however, the “master of suspense” is implicated in an unusually large share of unpleasant activity – from, say, the (passive) voyeurism of *Rear Window* to the (active) savagery of *Frenzy*.

This doesn’t mean Hitchcock is a perpetrator of perverse or antisocial acts, to be sure; he merely contemplates and re-creates them, and sometimes

even this seems to make him uncomfortable – one thinks of Jefferies, that eager voyeur, averting his eyes (albeit not very often) during *Rear Window*. Given the large quantity of evil deeds that appear in Hitchcock films, one might think he reveled in such things, and one might expect his work to be infused with an atmosphere of perverse pleasure. Perhaps because of his early life in bourgeois Catholic circumstances, however, the mood is often closer to brooding guilt, which generates such powerful momentum that (along with other factors involved in his filmmaking) it actually prevents many stories from achieving the customary closure of a happy, or at least resolved, ending: Think of the moral tensions in the last scene of *Blackmail*, the mental anguish that lingers beyond the last scene of *The Wrong Man*, the ambiguous last image of *Vertigo*. The characters themselves seem to feel this troubled atmosphere, which might be called an “overflow of guilt” from the director’s restless and uneasy mind – and from the restless and uneasy culture that shaped, influenced, and enclosed this mind.

What distinguishes Hitchcock’s relationship with his characters is not only the importance he attaches to having them under his highly judgmental gaze, but also his willingness to allow them an intuitive knowledge that some kind of presence is overseeing their words and deeds. In a number of his films, a moment arises when a character’s behavior seems to reflect awareness (perhaps prompted by a strategically placed on-screen element) of the filmmaker’s gaze; of its morbid, yet clinically detached fascination; and of the manipulations in which the filmmaker is engaged.

In some cases, an on-screen character may embody the Hitchcockian gaze, as young Charlie does in *Shadow of a Doubt* when she looks at Uncle Charlie on the stairs of the family house, and the latter is frozen in his tracks (at the exhilarating moment when, in the logic of the narrative, he might believe his criminal secrets will be safe forever) by an overwhelming sensation of something as close to guilt, or the fear growing out of guilt, as he is capable of feeling.

In other cases, a character may respond directly to Hitchcock’s unseen yet evident manipulation of the cinematic world. At a key moment in *Vertigo*, for instance, a stable visited earlier in the narrative by Scottie and Judy/Madeleine swings into view behind them as they exchange a particularly significant kiss. Scottie momentarily stops kissing and takes on a perplexed expression, as if he were aware of the cinematic event taking place behind him even though he isn’t looking at it. In one sense, of course, he needn’t look to be aware of it, since it represents (symbolically and atmospherically) memories called up in his own troubled mind by this close encounter with the re-created woman of his dreams. Yet the stable appears

prior to his perplexed look, not simultaneously with it, allowing it to be read as a purely cinematic event generated not by Scottie's mind but by Hitchcock's, and taking Scottie (as well as the spectator) by surprise. What's audacious here is less the event itself – although it is a stunning *coup de cinéma* – than the boldness of allowing Scottie a response that visibly acknowledges the filmmaker's active control over the moment, and hence stretches the concept of classical Hollywood narrative to (and probably beyond) its breaking point.

Perhaps because of such awareness of directorial control, the “performances” given by characters within Hitchcock films are often not of the healthy and extroverted kind that lead to creativity and emotional liberation. On the contrary, they tend toward such negative goals as deceit and the manipulation of helpless or ignorant others. Frequently they maintain a morbidly inclined appearance of “being on best behavior” that underlines the powerful superego drive pervading Hitchcock's oeuvre.

Hitchcock's presence in his films is motivated not only by his wish to observe and control – and, particularly, to control *by* observing – but also by a constant quest for *closeness* to his characters, which finds its most potent expression in two practices. One is his celebrated use of point-of-view shots – often praised for their power to generate physical and psychological identification between spectator and character, but equally effective in uniting a character's consciousness and perspective with that of the director himself. The other is Hitchcock's habit of injecting himself – more insistently than other filmmakers, and using methods unlike those of other filmmakers – into the world of his films. He does this not by *becoming* a character, in the manner of a Charles Chaplin, Orson Welles, or Woody Allen, but in two other ways: through his famous cameo appearances, which allow him to enter the action directly, costumed yet unmistakably himself, and through his use of characters and objects that serve as surrogates for his own presence.

Hitchcock's walk-on appearances are traditionally seen as a sort of trademark or public-relations gimmick, as an ongoing cinematic joke with no particular meaning or importance, or as a series of minor directorial grace notes tacked gratuitously onto the films in which they appear. On occasion, however, they have been taken seriously. Ryall, discussing “qualities of self-consciousness . . . at odds with the anonymity associated with the tradition of classical film making,” calls them “that most familiar mark of Hitchcock's personalisation of his films.”¹⁰ More elaborately, Ronald Christ relates the director's “signature appearances” to the *parabasis* convention in Greek Old Comedy, whereby the Chorus speaks directly to the audience (in a

moment with “nondramatic” and “illusion-breaking” functions) on behalf of the author.¹¹

While these notions are useful, reasoning on the subject can be carried further. Hitchcock’s cameos are self-publicizing jokes and ironic punctuation marks, no question about it. They also have perkily nondramatic and illusion-breaking qualities. Yet our willingness to point and chuckle at them needn’t stop us from seeing them as something more resonant: manifestations of Hitchcock’s deep-seated wish not only to speak *through*, but to become physically integrated *with*, his films.

Blackmail, his first sound picture, provides an example. Hitchcock plays his cameo as a passenger on a bus. A little boy in an adjacent seat annoys him; he complains to the child’s parents; the boy turns toward him with an aggressive stare, which Hitchcock returns with a confounded, helpless, and quite comical look. Hitchcock is obviously being menaced by the child – a situation that meshes with the story of the film, which involves the killing of an artist by a woman who is smaller and probably younger than he. (In another echo, just moments after the Hitchcock cameo, the two main characters are almost kept out of a restaurant by a young male doorkeeper.) Clearly the cameo (which has complexities beyond those cited here) functions as a microcomedy that anticipates, and comments on, situations that will figure in the main body of the film. Just as clearly, the cameo could have been realized with a conventional actor, but takes on special resonance (and humor!) by incorporating the filmmaker’s own recognizable presence, crammed with good-natured ostentation into an already crowded *mise-en-scène*.

Three observations can be made concerning this and other cameos. First, Hitchcock enters his movies not only to wink and wave at his audience, but to comment on the action in some small, sly way that accords with the manipulative, often sardonic attitude that characterizes much of his work in general. Second, his presence indicates a wish to approach and “keep an eye on” his characters. Third, the cameos signal to his audience (which normally receives the message on a subliminal level) that he is the presiding spirit of his films. Each movie posits a particular relationship between its characters, on one hand, and fate – or destiny, luck, the way of the world – on the other. In every case, it is Hitchcock who has determined what kind of relationship this will be and how it will work itself out through narrative mechanisms. His on-screen presence is a mischievously overt signature that proclaims his control over the narrative and the world that it constructs.

Hitchcock also developed an indirect way of maintaining a dynamic pres-

ence in the world of his films: positioning surrogates (human or not) within certain shots and sequences. I don't mean to suggest that a carefully determined series of Hitchcock "stand-ins" must be detected or decoded in film after film; nor do I suggest intentionality or even full consciousness of the surrogacy practice on Hitchcock's part. I do assert that his iconography often includes human (or humanlike) figures and faces that have no necessary function in the *mise-en-scène*, or which carry a weight out of proportion to the function they do have, and that these can be taken as signifiers of the filmmaker's presiding influence over the narrative.

Returning to *Blackmail*, we find a number of examples. The most obvious is the painting of a laughing jester – one of Hitchcock's most famous early images – that greets the heroine on her arrival in the room where she will soon (to her own horror) kill a man. The painting mutely witnesses this event; later, it hovers in the police station where the killing is being investigated; still later, it punctuates the last scene of the story with its silent, sardonic merriment. This painted image has been variously interpreted, most usefully as Hitchcock's purest exercise in the "Kuleshov effect," whereby a single image may take on different meanings according to the context in which it is seen. Yet it may also be taken as a signifier of Hitchcock's control over the narrative and of the shifting (perhaps ambiguous) nature of his own sardonic feelings about the events of the story.

Other directorial surrogates in *Blackmail* include the mask in the artist's apartment and the impassive British Museum sculpture that presides over a vain flight toward safety by the film's ostensible villain. (These scenes will be considered at length in the next chapter.) Surrogates in other films include the circus audience in *Murder!*, certain figures in the courtroom of *The Paradine Case*, the Statue of Liberty in *Saboteur*, and the Mount Rushmore faces in *North by Northwest*, among many possible examples. At times Hitchcock blends a cameo appearance with an image that would have a surrogacy function if he weren't present, as in *The Lodger* and *Frenzy*, where he appears in crowds gawking at violent events. Images with a surrogacy function may also serve other, perhaps more important functions at the same time. And full-fledged characters can serve as surrogates. In a discussion of *Vertigo*, one commentator says it is "typical of Hitchcock's work" that he "presents a version, or an understanding, of directorial powers through a surrogate within the film," adding however that "he systematically distinguishes himself from that surrogate and what he represents"; specifically, in *Vertigo* "the Novak figure represents the film and Hitchcock" while "the Stewart figure stands in for those viewers whose attachments