

The Television Films of Alfred Hitchcock

by Steve Mamber

From 1956 to 1962, Alfred Hitchcock's Shmley Productions produced over 350 television programs, primarily for the series *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*. The famous silhouette and the "Funeral March of the Marionettes" theme were a weekly promise of thirty minutes (later an hour) of generally light suspense, accompanied by humorous introductions from Hitchcock himself. Of these many shows, only nineteen were actually directed by Hitchcock: Evaluation of this work has been almost nonexistent, although Hitchcock's feature films have been the subject of a tremendous amount of critical attention.

The reasons for this neglect are perhaps natural. Weekly TV series have not offered much that is worthy of close concern, and it is easy enough to assume that Hitchcock simply exploited the value of his name as a purveyor of "entertainments" and did not pay much attention to his directing endeavors in this area. Robin Wood in *Hitchcock's Films* lumps the TV shows along with the advertising and trailers for the features to assert that Hitchcock is "the least uncompromising of great artists" (p. 34), while Peter Bogdanovich in his Museum of Modern Art interview quotes Hitchcock as saying that he did not seek out which TV shows to direct, but simply took them "as they cropped up" (p. 34). Only Rohmer and Chabrol, of all writers on Hitchcock's features, suggest ("rumor has it") that his TV films might be of some interest, although they only refer to one show he directed (*Hitchcock*, p. 138). Even the voluminous Truffaut interview book contains just an occasional reference to a particular TV show, and never, in fact, mentions a single specific title.

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Despite this critical neglect, the Hitchcock-directed shows are an illuminating part of Hitchcock's total work, and in fact, seem to me to be invaluable as a means for understanding key Hitchcockian concerns. Hitchcock has said "Television is, in a certain way, a simplified cinema," ("Hitchcock et la TV," p. 7) and the TV shows afford an excellent opportunity to observe distilled elements of the features. It is my hope to demonstrate the closeness of these shows to the features and the cross-fertilization that has taken place between Hitchcock's work in the two media.

One possible objection to a close study of these TV shows might be that the Hitchcock-directed episodes are not necessarily superior to the others. Rather than labor this point, I would simply point out that those who remember watching the series are often surprised to learn their favorite shows were among those directed by Hitchcock. Despite Hitchcock's suggestion that he exercised no special selection in choosing projects to direct, the films are their own evidence of his interest. Rather than comparing Hitchcock-directed episodes to others in the series, it will be sufficient to direct attention solely to the relationships between all the films, television and feature, directed by Hitchcock. While the other shows may display his influence to varying degrees, this is not the argument here being pressed.

Since the following discussion depends upon at least a nodding acquaintance with certain Hitchcock themes and technical concerns, it may be useful to review these. These concepts are the "transfer of guilt," the Hitchcockian "look," and Hitchcock's constant preoccupation with working out special problems of suspense.

"Transfer of guilt" as a Hitchcock theme was first discussed by Rohmer and Chabrol in their seminal 1957 study. The phrase is

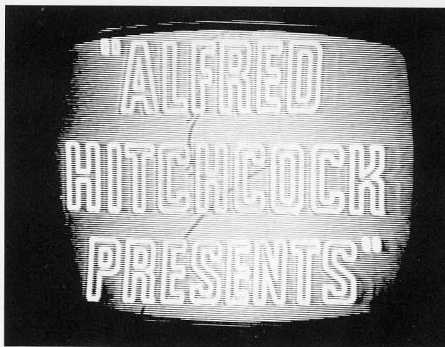


somewhat misleading, for what is involved is the implication of the innocent in the guilt of others, or to put it another way, that the innocent are partly guilty and the guilty partly innocent. In its highest expression this develops into an idea of the "interchangeable guilt" of all human beings (p. 156). Transfer of guilt situations in the features include Bruno and Guy "exchanging" murders in *Strangers on a Train* and the priest's hearing the confession of a murderer in *I Confess* and having to withhold this knowledge even though he himself is charged with the crime.

Jean Douchet has noted how frequently Hitchcock heroes and heroines are seen with absolutely fixed stares, either in panic or some level of madness. Examples of this are Ingrid Bergman through most of *Under Capricorn*, Vera Miles as she goes insane in *The Wrong Man*, and Tippi Hedren in *Marnie*. The final shots of Scottie in *Vertigo* and Norman Bates in *Psycho*, both of them transfixed in kinds of madness, find numerous counterparts in the TV films. While none of Hitchcock's interviews discuss this, he has referred to his special interest in facial expressions in the TV shows: "Personally, what interests me [in television work] is the actor's faces, because I know that what the public is interested in. One must take care with faces, and above all, looks." ("Hitchcock et la TV," p. 7) Douchet accounts for the frequency of these looks by saying that they are "the filmic means through which this panic obsession of always present death" can be communicated (p. 136). While this is a somewhat arguable point in relation to the features, there are several clear cases in the TV shows where such stares are indeed closely related with death.

In interviews, Hitchcock often expresses assiduous concern for specific technical problems and suspense devices. The point of importance here is that Hitchcock has often returned to unsolved difficulties in the hope of finding more satisfactory solutions. For instance, Hitchcock tells Truffaut that he made a serious error in *Saboteur* (1942) when he had the villain dangling in mid-air from the Statue of Liberty, rather than the hero (p. 106). From this we can conclude (though it isn't mentioned in the interview) that Jimmy Stewart hanging from the roof at the start of *Vertigo* and Eva Marie Saint in similar straits at the end of *North by Northwest* are two cases of righting this early error. In this same area, Hitchcock has been concerned on a number of occasions with special problems of time and/or space unities, as in the ten minute takes of *Rope* and the confined sets of *Lifeboat* and *Rear Window*. With these ideas in mind, one can more fruitfully discuss the TV films.

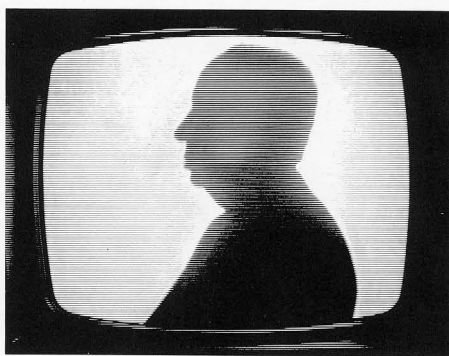
Hitchcock's first film made for television was *Breakdown* (1955), starring Joseph Cotten. It resonantly echoes familiar elements to a startling degree. Cotten plays a successful businessman on a working vacation in Miami. While dictating to his secretary, he's interrupted by a New York call from a distraught employee who has been fired. The man is crying and begging for a chance to keep his job. Cotten expresses disgust at the man's inability to control his emotions, saying to an associate, "Can you imagine that, he was actually crying." On his way back to New York by car, he approaches a construction detour where a prison gang is at work. Suddenly, a tractor hits him head on. He wakes up to find himself pinned under the steering wheel of his wrecked car, completely paralyzed. We hear his thoughts as interior monologue, while three men come and steal his tires and then some of the prisoners return to steal his clothes. Left alone again, he finds that he can wiggle his little finger, but everyone has interpreted his eyes-open stare as the look of a dead man. The law comes for him that night and he's moved to an ambulance, his little finger moving so slightly that it goes unnoticed. In a series of subjective shots, he is placed on a cart at the city morgue, where squeaky wheels prevent anyone from hearing his faint tapping. He is deposited in a drawer and left there for an autopsy the next morning. Morning comes, and he finds that his movable finger was



pinned under him as he was put in the drawer. The coroner is now ready to pronounce him dead. As the sheet is about to be spread over him, the coroner's assistant notices a tear in his eye. As "tears" drip on the camera lens (his eyes), he hears himself saved.

Breakdown's central situation remarkably anticipates *North by Northwest* (made four years later). In both, an unfeeling, overly assured businessman is plunged into chaos by the flimsiest of coincidence, and finds new capacities for feeling as he struggles to stay alive in a freshly hostile world. Where *North by Northwest* could more leisurely develop "a systematic stripping away of all the protective armor of modern city man" (to quote Robin Wood), the tractor crash in *Breakdown* is an abbreviated means of achieving the same ends, and Cotten is literally stripped as he lies paralyzed. The neat symmetry of beginning with Cotten's disdain for a man who cries and ending with his own tears saving his life encloses a refined near-ritual chastening process of a kind Rohmer and Chabrol have identified as common to many Hitchcock films. Another link to the features is the technical similarity to a basic *Lifeboat*-like situation, as Cotten lies motionless in his car for most of the program. His stare is also an archetypal case found in many of the TV films, here of special interest because it is interpreted as death by all who see him.

Hitchcock's best hour film (of the three he directed) tells virtually the same story as *Breakdown*. *Four O'Clock* (1957, for the *Suspicion* series) stars E. G. Marshall as a watchmaker who suspects his wife of adultery. He sets a bomb in his basement in order to abruptly halt her infidelity, but thieves come upon him as he is about to leave. They tie him up right across from the time mechanism set to go off in a few hours. This situation is highly contrived, of course, but Hitchcock's manipulation of rigorously minimal suspense elements is masterful. Again, most of the film takes place within a limited space, the confines of the basement, the camera entirely restricted to shots of the immobile protagonist (whose "thoughts" are heard as voice-over) and to his point of view. Small, everyday events (a gas man reading a meter, a little boy chasing a bug) assume life and death significance, as with Joseph Cotten's moving finger in *Breakdown*. (Hitchcock calls this kind of device "elevating the commonplace in life to a higher level" [Truffaut, p. 169]). *Four O'Clock* ends in a familiar shot: the Marshall character over the brink of madness, his face frozen in a trance-like stare.



The most fanciful of the shows, *The Case of Mr. Pelham* (1955), also ends in madness. The title role played by a stock Average Joe type, Tom Ewell, *Pelham* tells of a successful businessman whose meticulously organized routine is unsettled by the presence of an exact double gradually taking over his life. In an effort to trip up his replica, Pelham buys a garish tie and starts to behave in as unpredictable a fashion as possible. In their eventual face-to-face encounter, however, the real Pelham is labeled the phony because of his recent atypical activities. The double has the Pelham domain to himself now, as the first fellow is hauled off to the asylum.

Funny in a *Twilight Zone* manner, the developing terror is a bit too unnerving for the spectator simply to sit back and laugh. Behind Pelham is the exasperation that an ordered existence is being uprooted, with latent insanity just below the surface smugness. Hitchcock, here as often, delights in making the contrived seem possible by engaging audience sympathy and then severely subverting expectations. The initial plot novelty gives way to a veiled and characteristically Hitchcockian attack on personal security.

A group of the TV shows deal with "perfect" murders, and some of the more clever killers actually realize their goals. In all cases, gruesome murders or means of body disposal (grinding the remains in one, baking them in another) are treated with a heavy outer layer of facetiousness, recalling the plans that Hume Cronyn and Henry Travers kept concocting in *Shadow of a Doubt*.

Lamb to the Slaughter (1958), probably the most famous show of the *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* series, is about one murderess who gets away with her crime. Barbara Bel Geddes (who had a large part in *Vertigo* the same year) plays a pregnant wife whose policeman husband comes home and announces he wants a divorce. She falls into a disbelieving trance, goes to get the evening leg of lamb out of the freezer, and then clubs her husband over the head with it when he's not looking. Still in her trance, she puts the murder weapon/dinner in the oven. His police buddies come to investigate the murder, figure that a blunt instrument was the cause of death, but can't seem to locate it. The wife kindly offers them something to eat, and as they dig into their roast lamb, they still wonder where the weapon is. As one of them says, "For all we know, it could be right under our very noses."

Lamb to the Slaughter, like the other perfect crime episodes, is "an approach to a strictly British genre, the humor of the macabre," as Hitchcock described *The Trouble with Harry* (made two years earlier) to Truffaut. Truffaut's comment in this regard also applies to this group of TV films: "I must say you successfully demonstrate how horrible or terrible things—elements that might easily become morbid or sordid—can be filmed in such a way that they're never repulsive. Very often, they're even fascinating" (p. 169).

Besides the problem of getting rid of the murder weapon, there are three shows which are variations on the "how to get rid of the body" theme. In one of the strangest of the television shows, *Arthur* (1959), Laurence Harvey plays a New Zealand chicken farmer who grinds his wife's body into feed for his poultry, thus successfully avoiding detection. In *The Perfect Crime* (1957), Vincent Price plays a Sherlock Holmes-like detective who steps to the other side of the law to bake James Gregory's body in a pottery kiln (and gets away with it) after the latter informs him that he has been the cause of an innocent man's execution. Not so fortunate is John Williams (a very British type who appeared in *Dial M for Murder* and *To Catch a Thief*), who buries his wife in their basement in *Back for Christmas* (1956). The story opens with Williams measuring the eventual grave according to height given on his wife's passport. After adding two inches ("No use crowding"), he calls his wife down so he can make a visual comparison. They are planning a vacation, and after he dutifully assists her in putting covers on the furniture, they go

back to the cellar, where he finishes her off with a shovel blow. He embarks upon the vacation alone, only to learn that she had planned prior to her premature demise to have the cellar excavated for a wine cellar during their vacation as a surprise to him.

Another wife murderer is caught by chance in *One More Mile to Go* (1957), but this show is in the tight suspense genre, eerily anticipating major elements of *Psycho*. In a superbly executed opening scene (filmed in one continuous shot of at least a couple of minutes), we see David Wayne club his wife to death with an andiron. The vantage point is from outside the window, and muffled voices are all that is heard, thus leaving the motive for murder unspecified. He drags her body out to his car and places it in the trunk. Driving out on a lonely road to dispose of the body, he is stopped by a policeman because one of his tail lights isn't working. He goes to a gas station as the cop follows him, and on the verge of having his trunk pried open with a crowbar, the light goes on. He drives off, but the policeman still follows him. When the light goes out again, his luck runs out. The officer tells him to drive ahead to headquarters, where the trunk will be pried open to fix the light, thus revealing the body.

Hitchcock says in the Truffaut book that in order to build suspense, "whenever possible the public must be informed." *One More Mile to Go* is an elementary example of this. Most of the story is routine, almost banal, except for the audience's knowledge of the body in the trunk. As in the *Psycho* (made three years later) episode of Janet Leigh being questioned and followed by the highway patrolman, this like incident is suspenseful because the audience knows the hero to be in even greater danger than the law officers themselves suspect. (The show's other marked similarity to *Psycho* is in the sequence of Wayne dragging the dead body to the car and putting it in the truck. Some of the *Psycho* shots following the bathroom murder are practically identical to ones here, not to mention the repeated means of getting the body out.)

Still on the subject of uxoricide, *Mr. Blanchard's Secret* (1956) is a weak offspring of the 1954 feature *Rear Window*. In this one, a female mystery writer watches her neighbors from the bedroom window and assumes that the reason she doesn't see the woman next door is that her husband killed her. As it turns out, the murder is wholly imagined. The show is entirely without distinction, worth noting only for its connection with the earlier feature. This is fortunately the only case of a banal reworking of an old plot device in any of the Hitchcock-directed shows.

A wife motivated murder is the basis for the first televised episode of the *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* series in 1955 (although it was filmed after *Breakdown*). This episode, *Revenge*, is absolutely classic Hitchcock, and remains one of my favorite shows. (This is the episode mentioned favorably by Rohmer and Chabrol, p. 138.) Vera Miles stars as a recently discharged mental patient just settled into her new home with husband Ralph Meeker. He returns home from his first day at work to find his wife in shock on her bed. She tells of being attacked by an unknown assailant. From all outward signs, she appears to have lapsed back into insanity, and through the rest of the film speaks in a slow monotone and stares, wide-eyed, straight ahead. The police investigate the supposed crime, but they don't turn up any clues. Meeker decides to take his wife on a short vacation, but as they are driving through town, Miss Miles sees a man walking along the street and says to her husband, "That's him. That's the one." He promptly stops the car, follows the man up to his room, and kills him. Returning to his car, the couple continue their trip. A few moments later, however, she spots another man again says, "That's him. That's the one."

The irony of the title is most appealing, since Meeker revenges a crime that probably never occurred by killing a man who is guilty only of being in the wrong place at the wrong time. Miles thinks all men guilty, and the sup-



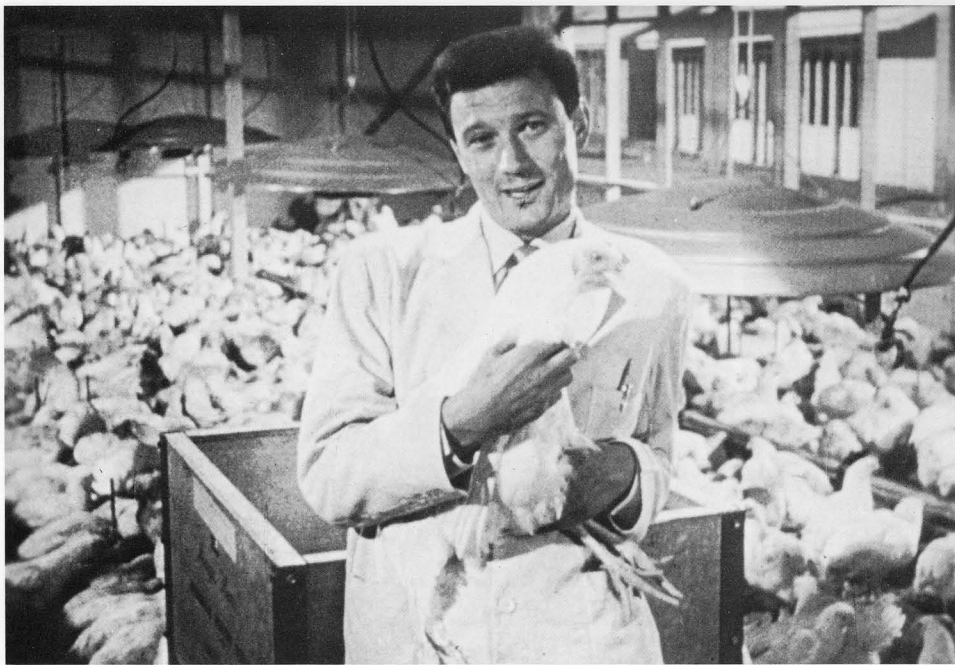
Breakdown: Joseph Cotten



The Case of Mr. Pelham: Tom Ewell, Tom Ewell



Lamb to the Slaughter: Barbara Bel Geddes



Arthur: Laurence Harvey



The Perfect Crime: Vincent Price and James Gregory



Back for Christmas: Isabel Elsom, John Williams

posed crime is most likely a fantasy reaction to the uncertainties of her new role as a housewife, and her being left alone so soon after being released from a mental hospital. So, in effect, Meeker is "revengeing" a crime he is responsible for. The "transfer of guilt," then, is a complex interplay of wife imagining crime the husband is guilty of, with the husband revengeing the crime by killing a man he imagines to be guilty, but who is in fact equivalent in the wife's eyes to all men, no doubt including the husband himself. This show comes closest to the Rohmer-Chabrol idea of interchangeable guilt; no one is entirely innocent, or completely guilty. A surprising depth of guilt possibilities is plumbed in the very brief twenty-three minutes. The particularly fine performance of Vera Miles is one of the foundations of the show's success, and she was to play a very similar role for Hitchcock in *The Wrong Man* four years later. (Hitchcock tells Truffaut that he originally had Miss Miles in mind for the Madeleine/Judy part in *Vertigo*, another role calling for a trance-like state, but had to go with Kim Novak because of Miles' pregnancy.)

Hitchcock's famous "mistake" in *Sabotage* (1936) is corrected in *Bang! You're Dead* (1961). The sequence in the British feature concerns a young boy who has to carry a package across town, not knowing there is a bomb inside. Through a series of delays, the boy fails to arrive at his destination and the bomb explodes while he is riding on a bus. Needless to say, the few minutes before the bomb goes off are taut with suspense (the audience, of course, has been made aware of the contents of the package and the exact moment it is due to explode). The Hitchcock dictum of suspense created by informing the audience transforms a brief, routine bus journey into a nightmare. As Hitchcock observes (Truffaut, p. 76), though, having the bomb explode and killing the boy makes the audience resentful because they have been so worked up by the sequence and have come to feel such sympathy for the boy. In *Bang! You're Dead*, Hitchcock performs essentially the same exercise but with a more satisfactory solution. The show stars Billy Mumy as a boy who accidentally comes into possession of a loaded gun, thinking it to be a toy. He spends most of the next half hour roaming around the neighborhood shooting the gun, which has only two bullets in it. Occasionally spinning the chamber, he plays inadvertent Russian roulette with a series of passers-by, from the postman to some people in a supermarket. He returns home one step ahead of his frantically searching parents, and he is about to draw bead on the maid when he is finally apprehended. A hasty yell causes him to deflect his arm just enough to allow the bullet to hit the wall instead of the maid. The boy breaks down and cries, realizing how serious his innocent game could have become.

This conclusion is much more satisfactory. If he had actually shot someone, the violence would have been gratuitous. Once the suspense potential has been played out, there's no need to end with a bang. The ideas of death at random and extreme possible danger in seemingly innocent situations (both common Hitchcock ploys) need not be carried to fruition for the concept to get across. This ending conforms to what Robin Wood calls the therapeutic theme in Hitchcock's films, the idea of a character living through the consequences of a weakness or obsession, as it is likely that the boy will never play with guns again.

Just about all the shows depend upon a surprise ending to deliver their punch. Unfortunately, a thirty minute suspense format (which works down to about 23 minutes of actual story time once commercials and introductions are subtracted) does not permit a great deal of freedom, and the driving force of these shows is usually the stock mystery device of keeping the audience guessing how things will turn out. The shows are somewhat O. Henry-ish, but this is a genre characteristic that the Hitchcock-directed episodes consistently transcend. Such devices as the tears in Joseph Cotten's eyes in *Breakdown* and Vera Miles' second



Revenge: Ralph Meeker, Vera Miles



Bang! You're Dead: Billy Mumy

"That's the man" in *Revenge* meet the shock ending requirement, but they are also comments on complacency and guilt (respectively) which are more sophisticated than the form requires. Nevertheless, even Hitchcock's features sometimes delight in shock endings, and the difference between the endings of *Vertigo* and the TV show *Revenge*, at the simplest level, is not pronounced. Both end with a character in stunned disbelief, possibly insane, over a chance, needless killing for which he is in strong measure responsible. While the features are richer in thematic complexities, TV shows like *Revenge* shed a good deal of light on the skeletal structures on which the longer films are built.

Another show depending upon madness is also one of the funniest. In *Dip in the Pool* (1958), Keenan Wynn plays a brash tourist on a ship cruise with his wife to Europe using "Aunt Jenny's \$4,000." They must watch their budget carefully, and after Wynn loses heavily at cards, he sees a chance to win some real money. A tradition on the ship is a nightly pool in which passengers wager on the number of miles the ship will travel the next day. He places a large bet on a low mileage number, assuming that the then raging storm will slow the ship down, causing him to win a sizeable sum. When he wakes to calm seas the next morning, all seems lost. But armed with a pragmatic business sense, Wynn seizes on the scheme of jumping overboard in order to delay the ship long enough for him to collect on the pool (thus the double entendre of the title). Choosing a woman whose powers of sight and hearing he first tests to function as a witness, Wynn takes the plunge. His best laid plans, however, go astray because the woman turns out to be a mental patient who is rapidly herded back to her room when she reports her story of a man jumping off the boat to her attendant. The liner steams on, as yet another Hitchcock-directed show ends in a close-up of an insane person staring straight ahead with eyes transfixed. This surprise ending is similar to the episode in *Marnie* where suspense is created by the proximity of a cleaning woman to the scene of a theft. In that case, though, the woman turns out only to be deaf, rather than insane. (*Dip in the Pool* is also the only TV show in which Hitchcock appears in the story, a *Lifeboat*-like appearance when a passenger on the ship is seen reading a magazine with Hitchcock's picture on it.)

A fixed gaze of a most unusual sort comes near the end of *The Crystal Trench* (1959), a face preserved in a glacier for forty years. Another strange tale, this is the story of a newly married bride whose husband falls down a cliff while trying to scale a dangerous mountain, and drops into the glacier. Enlist-

ing the aid of a scientist, she makes plans to wait for the day calculated to arrive some forty years hence ("probably in the morning" she is told) when the glacier will move sufficiently to once again reveal the body. The wife never remarries, and waits patiently for the day when the now aged woman can look upon the face of her long dead husband staring up at her through the ice in perfect youthful repose. Adding insult to injury, however, is the locket found on the deceased's person. Inside it is a picture of a beautiful woman, not his wife, thus indicating a secret infidelity of long ago.

A twist of a similar nature is all that distinguishes *Mrs. Bixby and the Colonel's Coat* (1960), a modest effort starring Audrey Meadows. The garment in question is a mink coat given to Mrs. Bixby at the conclusion of an adulterous relationship. Scheming to find a way to get it home past her dentist husband without arousing suspicion, she pawns it and then tells her husband she found the ticket in the street. She sends him to redeem it, but he returns with a scrawny fur piece instead of the luxurious coat. Her next trip to his office reveals his nurse wearing the mink, a nifty bit of "transfer of guilt."

The Horseplayer, like *Mrs. Bixby*, is one of the few Hitchcock-directed TV shows not to deal with murder or death. In fact, no real crime is involved at all. Claude Rains plays a priest who finds out that the large donations that have been turning up in the collection plate every Sunday come from a gambler who claims that praying enables him to pick winners successfully. Needing a new roof for the church, Rains lets the man bet \$300 from the building fund on a "sure thing." Guilt feelings get the better of him, however, and he prays for the horse not to win. It turns out, though, that while the horse comes in second, only the gambler loses all his money because he put the church's money on the horse to place while he was betting on a win.

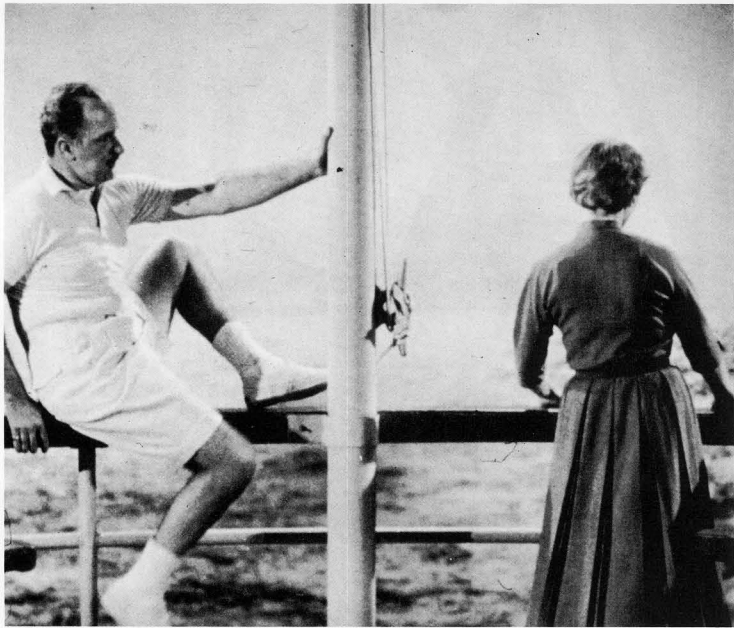
The Horseplayer might seem fertile ground for interpretation that would play up the theological dimension often noted in Hitchcock's work. The story centers on several confessions, first the gambler to the priest and later the priest to the gambler, but the symmetry is more playful than profound. Hitchcock was probably attracted to the story because of the light humor of the situation of a priest turning to gambling to improve his church, and also for the chance to direct Claude Rains, who played in *Notorious*. Again, a rather complex transfer of guilt is involved, with the priest first finding fault with the gambler for using prayer as a device for winning but then turning to gambling himself, and finally reconsidering and praying for the horse not to win. The final irony of his win-

ning while the gambler loses is close to the situation in *Strangers on a Train*, where Guy has his murder committed for him, while Bruno winds up getting killed himself.

Wet Saturday (1956) isn't quite the vehicle for Sir Cedric Hardwicke that *The Horseplayer* is for Claude Rains. Hardwicke plays the head of a well-to-do English family whose daughter kills her boyfriend with a shovel. This event happens early in the show, and the rest of the story is an elaborate accounting of the means successfully employed to frame a neighbor for the killing. On a simple level, transfer of guilt is again a theme, with Hardwicke accepting responsibility for the murder in a sense because his daughter acts like an hysterical idiot who can't be held responsible for any of her own acts. The portrayal of the mad daughter is again of interest, yet another Hitchcockian portrait of insanity.

Banquo's Chair (1959), while edging towards the supernatural, is richly redolent of numerous other Hitchcock situations and devices. The show, like *Psycho* (which it precedes by a year), begins with a series of superimposed titles announcing the specific place, date, and time, as the camera tracks down a street and in on one particular house. John Williams plays almost his exact role from *Dial M for Murder*, a detective with a wily scheme to catch a murderer. (It is as if we are seeing the same character later in his life.) While he has been retired for two years, he has kept interested in a murder case of his that has remained unsolved. He hits upon a plan to ensnare his prime suspect by hiring an actress to play the ghost of the murdered woman and confronting the murderer with the accusing ghost of his victim during a dinner the detective plans. He arranges the ruse with some friends ("We won't bring her on with the soup, that would be rushing it. We'll bring her on with the pheasant"), and all goes according to plan. The murderer breaks down after seeing the "ghost," and is promptly carted off to jail. The twist, though, is that the hired actress then walks in and apologizes for not arriving on time! The film, like so many of the Hitchcock-directed shows, ends with a close-up of Williams staring into space in shocked disbelief.

Banquo offers a field day for Hitchcockian cross-references. Since retirement, Williams has taken up bird-watching, and his sly line "You'd be surprised how many people are intrigued by it" certainly includes Hitchcock himself, evoking a whole range of associations, especially James Stewart in *Rear Window* and Anthony Perkins in *Psycho*. Birds are an insistent motif in *Banquo*, with emphasis upon the similarity between detective-work and bird-watching, and the connection of each with hunting. During the dinner,



Dip in the Pool: Keenan Wynn



The Crystal Trench: Patricia Owens

conversation is dominated by talk of birds, including Williams saying he caught a brace of partridge last week, at a market. Throughout, his references to bird-watching suggest he is involved in it at the moment, in watching the murderer. Indeed, the dinner table sequence in *Banquo* is like the dinner in *Shadow of a Doubt* and the famous breakfast scene in *I Confess* (cf. Truffaut, p. 152), where questions of murder and guilt are hidden beneath conversations of trivialities, with doubts and suspicions suggested through visual means (slow tracks in on characters, cutting to a close-up of the suspect on a key word). And finally, of course, Williams own secure world is upset, as he turns out to be as surprised by the ghost as the murderer himself. So while *Banquo's Chair* is an ironic tale of a fake ghost that turns out to be real, it is still very much a Hitchcock film.

Besides *Four O'Clock*, Hitchcock directed two other hour television films, and while they are both rather unexceptional, neither is entirely without interest. *Incident at a Corner* (1960, for *Ford Star Time*) starts intriguingly with the same incident repeated from several different viewpoints—a school crossing guard reprimanding the PTA president for careless driving. The guard (Paul Hartman) is later dismissed from his job on the basis of an anonymous note accusing him of being too friendly with little school girls. His daughter's boyfriend (George Peppard) takes up his cause, assuming that the PTA president sent the note out of spite. An hour later, it turns out that the note was sent by a woman living across the street from the school who knew Hartman from another city and feared he would expose her past life. Except for the novelty of the multiple viewpoint opening (which includes one shot from the point-of-view of the woman who turns out to have sent the note), with its connection to the repeat action flashback in *Vertigo*, the film is extremely pedestrian. (*I Confess* and *Torn Curtain* also have scenes of repeated action as witnesses tell about what they saw at the time of murders, and in each case the flashback shows the earlier scene from a different viewpoint.)

I Saw the Whole Thing (1962), starring John Forsythe, is also disappointingly routine, especially since it centers on a nice transfer of guilt situation. Forsythe plays a man accused of a hit-and-run accident. In court (where most of the film takes place), he breaks down a series of witnesses, proving each of them to be unreliable. The twist here is that the actual culprit turns out to be Forsythe's wife. The only interesting moment in the film is the accident itself, where we see each of the eventual witnesses in a rapid series of five shots as they hear the sound of

the accident, before the accident itself is seen. Hitchcock refers to this in the Truffaut book (p. 194, without naming the show), and presumably this is what attracted him to the project. As is often noted in the Truffaut book and elsewhere, Hitchcock excels in stretching out time at key moments (a good example from many instances is the few seconds before the cymbals clash in *The Man Who Knew Too Much*). Unfortunately, *I Saw the Whole Thing* has nothing else to commend it, save for these few seconds.

Hitchcock put his television experience to work on *Psycho*. He tells Truffaut: "It was an experiment in one sense: Could I make a feature film under the same conditions as a television show? I used a complete television unit to shoot it very quickly" (p. 211). The cameraman on *Psycho* was John L. Russell, who shot most of the Hitchcock-directed TV shows, rather than Robert Burks, Hitchcock's usual cameraman since *Strangers on a Train*. Except for the bathroom scene, which took seven days to shoot, the film was shot very quickly. The psychiatrist's scene at the end was all shot in one day. When the previously mentioned influences of two of the TV shows, *One More Mile to Go* and *Banquo's Chair*, is added to this information, it should be clear that Hitchcock's TV work was of direct use in this film. While a number of instances of the TV films anticipating elements of later features have been referred to here, *Psycho* remains the clearest case of the influence of the television shows on the features.

These nineteen television shows, then, are rich in connections with Hitchcock's features. The frequency of appearance of stars from the films (Joseph Cotten, Vera Miles, Claude Rains, Barbara Bel Geddes, John Williams), the consistent thematic congruities, and the visual similarities (especially in the death and madness "looks" of *Breakdown*, *Revenge*, and at least five others) mark them as unmistakable Hitchcock. The best of the shows (*Breakdown*, *Revenge*, *Lamb to the Slaughter*, *Banquo's Chair*, *Bang! You're Dead*, *Four O'Clock*) are so good that they really should be more accessible, and none of the shows deserves its present obscurity. Hitchcock's remark about taking stories to direct simply as they cropped up turns out to be a typical understatement. Hitchcock is too much a film-maker not to leave a strong imprint on nearly eleven hours of "entertainments." ★

Filmography

All the television films, except where noted, were photographed by John L. Russell, and all were produced by Joan Harrison. The half-hour shows are approximately 23 minutes long (and were shot in 3 days), and the hour shows (noted) are about 53 minutes (shot in five days). All shows, again except where noted, appeared in the *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* series.

1955

Revenge. Script: A. I. Bezzerides and Francis Cockrell, from a story by Samuel Blas. Cast: Ralph Meeker, Vera Miles, Frances Bavier, Ray Teal.

Breakdown. Script: Francis Cockrell and Louis Pollack. Cast: Joseph Cotten.

The Case of Mr. Pelham. Script: Francis Cockrell, from a story by Anthony Armstrong. Cast: Tom Ewell, Raymond Bailey, Kirby Smith.

1956

Back for Christmas. Script: Francis Cockrell, from a story by John Collier. Cast: John Williams, Isabel Elsom, A. E. Gould-Porter.

Wet Saturday. Script: Marian Cockrell, from a story by John Collier. Cast: Sir Cedric Hardwicke, John Williams, Tina Purdom.

Mr. Blanchard's Secret. Script: Sarett Rudley, from a story by Emily Neff. Cast: Mary Scott, Robert Horton, Dayton Lummis.

1957

One More Mile to Go. Script: James P. Cavanagh, from a story by F. J. Smith. Cast: David Wayne, Steve Brodie, Louise Larabee.

Four O'Clock. Hour. *Suspicion* series. Script: Francis Cockrell, from a story by Cornell Woolrich. Cast: E. G. Marshall, Nancy Kelly, Richard Long.

The Perfect Crime. Script: Stirling Silliphant, from a story by Ben Ray Redman. Cast: Vincent Price, James Gregory.

1958

Lamb to the Slaughter. Script: Roald Dahl, from his own short story. Cast: Barbara Bel Geddes, Allan Lane, Harold J. Stone.

Dip in the Pool. Photography: John F. Warren. Script: Francis Cockrell, from a story by Roald Dahl. Cast: Keenan Wynn, Louise Platt, Fay Wray, Philip Bourneuf, Doreen Lang.

1959

Banquo's Chair. Script: Francis Cockrell, from a story by Rupert Croft-Cooke. Cast: John Williams, Kenneth Haigh, Reginald Gardner, Max Adrian.

Arthur. Script: James Cavanagh, from a story by Arthur Williams. Cast: Laurence Harvey, Hazel Court.

The Crystal Trench. Photography: John F. Warren. Script: Stirling Silliphant, from a story by A. E. W. Mason. Cast: James Donald, Patricia Owens.

1960

Incident at a Corner. Hour. *Ford Star Time* series. Script: Charlotte Armstrong, from her own story. Cast: Vera Miles, Paul Hartman, George Peppard.

Mrs. Bixby and the Colonel's Coat. Script: Halsted Welles, from a story by Roald Dahl. Cast: Audrey Meadows, Les Tremayne, Stephen Chase, Sally Hughes.

1961

The Horseplayer. Script: Henry Slesar. Cast: Claude Rains, Ed Gardner.

Bang! You're Dead. Script: Harold Swanton, from a story by Margery Vesper. Cast: Biff Elliott, Lucy Prentiss, Billy Mumy, Steve Dunne.

1962

I Saw the Whole Thing. *Alfred Hitchcock Hour* series. Script: Henry Cecil and Henry Slesar, from a story by Slesar. Cast: John Forsythe, Kent Smith, Evans Evans, John Fiedler, Philip Ober, John Zaremba.

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