



Introductory Note

Speakers at the *I Confess* Symposium were each given a 30-minute slot to deliver their paper and respond to questions. In preparing for this collection, all the papers have been revised and several have been considerably developed to provide additional context, argument and analysis. Apart from changes in format introduced to create a unified document (and in one or two cases to integrate images), the papers appear as the writers submitted them for this publication.

The papers are arranged alphabetically by author.

Papers presented that are not included had either already been published or were committed to publication prior to the conference.



**Alfred Hitchcock and *I Confess*, 70 years on:
an international symposium.
University College London: 7/8 September 2023**

This is the fourth in a series of events that bring scholars together for discussion of classic films directed by Alfred Hitchcock in the course of his 50-year career. He has become the most studied and most honoured of all film-makers; in the words of Paula Marantz Cohen, ‘The appeal of Hitchcock to the theorist and historian of film is impossible to overstate. To study him is to find an economical way of studying the entire history of cinema’.

The first symposium in the series was held in Dublin in 2018, marking the 60th anniversary of *Vertigo*, which in 2012 had headed the British Film Institute’s poll of nearly 1000 critics worldwide, asked to vote for their Top Ten films. Papers from the event were collected in a handsome book edited jointly by Sid Gottlieb in the US, and Donal Martin in Dublin: <https://iupress.org/9780861967421/haunted-by-vertigo/>

This was followed in London in 2019 by a symposium on the 70th anniversary of *Under Capricorn*, for the shooting of which Hitchcock had returned from Hollywood to his native England. Papers from this can be read in an online collection: <https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/scapvc/film/movie/capricorn/>

Plans to mark the 80th anniversary of Hitchcock’s first Hollywood film *Rebecca* in Cornwall – setting of book and film, though it was shot in California – had to be put on hold for covid reasons, but the symposium was held there successfully in 2022, and there was strong support for continuation, with a preference for his 1953 film *I Confess*. This will now go ahead at UCL in Central London on **Thursday 7 and Friday 8 September 2023**, with a welcoming reception there the previous evening. A 35mm archival print of *I Confess* will be screened on Thursday, at the Cinema Museum with a further screening of Robert Lepage’s *Le Confessionnal* at Birkbeck College.

I Confess occupies a unique place in Hitchcock’s canon in that it was the only film to engage directly with his own lifelong Catholic faith: the central figure, played by Montgomery Clift, is a priest, and doctrinal issues are crucial to the film’s suspense narrative. Yet despite the fact that his faith remained manifestly of central importance to him, neither this film nor this faith have received much in the way of scholarly attention, relative to the mass of other Hitchcock literature. The symposium aims to at least begin to redress this imbalance.

Many of those who attended early symposia will be returning for this one, but we have already lined up other participants, and will welcome others, whether to give papers or simply to attend. The programme

will include, as a minimum, speakers from the UK, the US, France, and Ireland – Ireland being crucial, in that Hitchcock's faith derived from his Irish mother, and that *I Confess* was banned outright by the Irish censor of the 1950s.

Charles Barr, Stéphane Duckett & Laura Mulvey

**Alfred Hitchcock and *I Confess* 70 Years On
An International Symposium
7 & 8 September 2023**

Day 1

9:00	Registration (and uploading of all Day 1 Presentations powerpoint/AV)
9:30	Welcome and introduction to the day
9:45	Richard Allen: The Passion of Father Logan
10:30	Tea
10:45	Amy Lawrence: Hitchcock's Mephisto: O.E. Hasse and <i>I Confess</i>
11:30	Jean-Loup Bourget: Hitchcock as Catholic Auteur: <i>I Confess</i> seen by <i>Cahiers du Cinéma</i>
12:15	Tifenn Brisset : The French Reception of <i>I Confess</i>
1:00	Lunch
2:00	David Greven: Men in Black- <i>I Confess</i> , Film Noir & the American Gothic
2:45	John Bruns: The Jaywalking Priest- Going Off the Grid in Hitchcock's <i>I Confess</i>
3:30	Tea
3:45	Sidney Gottlieb: Alfred Hitchcock's <i>I Confess</i> & Robert Lepage's <i>Le Confessionnal</i>
4:30	Discussion & Questions
5:00	Close for the day
7:30	35mm screening at: The Cinema Museum 2 Dugard Way, Renfrew Road London SE11 4TH

**Alfred Hitchcock and I Confess 70 Years On
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Day 2

9:30	Announcements and uploading of all Day 2 Presentations
10:00	Murray Pomerance: 'All the Sounds of the Earth Unite' - a secular look at <i>I Confess</i>
10:45	Tea
11:00	Mark Padilla: Fathers & Scapegoats- Thinking about <i>I Confess</i> through the lens of Sophocles <i>Oedipus the King</i>
11:45	James Bogdanski: Sacrificial Bodies: Locating the Holocaust in <i>I Confess</i>
12:30	Danny Nissim: Robert Burks - Out of the Shadows
1:15	Lunch
2:15	Sebastian Smoliński: Catholic Director in a Catholic Country? <i>I Confess</i> and the Polish reception of Hitchcock
3:00	Stéphane Duckett: Hitchcock's Catholicism
3:30	Alice Guy <i>Conscience de prêtre</i> (1906)
3:45	Tea
4:00	Rod Stoneman: Other Confessions
4:45	Discussion & Questions
5:00	Close for the symposium

The Spectre of the Holocaust in Hitchcock's *I Confess*

James Bogdanski

'My theory is that everyone is a potential murderer'. – Bruno Anthony, *Strangers on a Train*.

'I learned in the war that civilization anywhere is a very thin crust'. John Buchan, *Huntingtower*.

The mortal sin at the heart of Alfred Hitchcock's *I Confess* (1953) arguably springs from a single murder committed off-screen—as such, bloodless, obfuscated—and yet this act, bound up as it is in the hands of an opaque Hitchcock villain of Germanic origin, carries vestiges of the 20th century's greatest crime, the Holocaust. In the now famous series of interviews conducted by François Truffaut in 1962, Alfred Hitchcock, speaking of *I Confess*, described it as 'heavy-handed' and blamed this on his Jesuit upbringing. Truffaut dissented, stating, 'There's something very good in the picture, I feel'. Certainly, there exists a heaviness to the film but it is very much of the metaphysical variety. And despite Truffaut's dismissal of Hitchcock's self-diagnosis, the film – beyond the explicit Catholic trappings of its premise – bears a distinctly Jesuit sensibility, one concerned not only with guilt and its apportionment but also with the accountability of culture and institutions in meting out violence to victims and perpetrators alike. Released in 1953, only eight years after the end of World War Two, *I Confess*, like the two men at its centre, is shaped by its propinquity to that conflict. Indeed, the dark entanglement of Father Michael Logan (Montgomery Clift) and Otto Keller (O. E. Hasse) becomes fully legible only by situating it in the shadow of the Holocaust. Though never directly depicted, its atrocities have cleaved deep psychic scars onto these two men, locking them in each other's orbits long before their fateful pre-dawn confessional. Their doubling is twofold, with both torn between their past selves and the tenuous post-war identities they have forged. Clift, as the bigger star and conventionally attractive leading man, is given ample narrative space to imbue Father Logan with the requisite pathos. By contrast, Hasse as Keller remains on the periphery, a Dantean tormentor who is himself tormented by demons that Hitchcock leaves unnamed and barely glimpsed.

Hitchcock's films in the decade leading up to the war with Germany reflect a keen attention to the rising authoritarianism in Europe. Ina Rae Hark asserts that Hitchcock's spy thrillers of the 1930s, like his wartime films of the 1940s, take as their subject threats to democracy and a vulnerable populace 'ripe for totalitarian subjugation' (1990: 9). Likewise, Sidney Gottlieb, glossing the work of Sam Simone, writes that Hitchcock's wartime films form 'a coherent group demonstrating Hitchcock's deep commitment to political democracy' (1996: 118). Britain's official policy of appeasement toward Nazi Germany, coupled with the British Board of Film

Classification's rule cautioning against upsetting 'the susceptibilities of foreign people,' buried any critique of Hitler's regime in everything but the most anodyne of subtexts (Billheimer 2019: 36). It also muzzled what the British press could report in terms of events happening in Germany itself. As John Billheimer notes, this reluctance impacted two of Hitchcock's anti-espionage films, *The 39 Steps* (1935) and *The Lady Vanishes* (1938). Both featured Teutonic villains who could credibly be seen as agents of the Third Reich, but the BBFC gave its approval on the condition that their nationalities remain unspecified (ibid). Hitchcock's anti-Nazi cinema became more emboldened, though, through his association with producer (and longtime mentor) Michael Balcon, head of Ealing Studios, who had been hearing first-hand accounts from the Jewish actors fleeing Nazi barbarism and working in his employ. Balcon hired Hitchcock to complete a series of films he had devised to warn the British public of the fascist threat abroad. This partnership lasted from 1934's *The Man Who Knew Too Much* to 1938's *Jamaica Inn*. Perceptive audiences would surely have gleaned Hitch's intent in the allusive details of these productions, such as Charles Laughton's turn as the Hitler-like leader of a marauding band of ruffians concealing his actions behind a facade of upper-class propriety. Before releasing *Foreign Correspondent* in 1940, Hitchcock and producer Walter Wanger appended 'an unmistakably anti-isolationist coda' written by Ben Hecht (Criterion 2014). Bill Krohn reads *The Lady Vanishes* as a political allegory about the Munich Agreement, whereby Britain and France allowed German annexation of the Sudetenland. *Lifeboat*, perhaps Hitchcock's most strident denunciation of the Nazis, offers the character of Willie (Walter Slezak), the German officer deceitfully rowing American and British survivors of a submarine attack not to safety but to a concentration camp. **(Figure 1)** Krohn views Willie as embodying 'the prewar German culture that Hitchcock knew and loved—he and Slezak had both worked at UFA—but in Willie's hands that culture has become a sophisticated form of barbarism' (2020: 93). This disillusionment had been creeping into Hitchcock's films for years. Krohn notes the sinister overtones that German culture had acquired by the time of *Suspicion* (1941), when Cary Grant's silhouette brings the poisoned milk up to Joan Fontaine to the subdued strains of Strauss's *Wiener Blut* (Vienna Blood). Indeed, Alain Kerzoncuf and Charles Barr go so far as to assert that '[n]o director of the 1930s had shown himself more alert than Hitchcock to the threat of Nazism and the volcanic violence it was ready to unleash' (190). While Jane Sloan cautions (and Sidney Gottlieb concurs) that these current events naturally held a general interest for Hitchcock without necessarily confirming any grand ideological design on his part, their preponderance in his work forms a pattern that culminates with his direct involvement in exposing the crimes of the Holocaust.



Figure 1: *Lifeboat*: Willie (Walter Slezak) rows his unsuspecting passengers to their doom.

John Orr traces the post-war shift away from these romance thrillers of the 1930s to Hitchcock's return to the United Kingdom in 1944 during which time he witnessed the destruction inflicted by German bombers upon his native city. Hitchcock's close friend Sidney Bernstein, whom he had known since Bernstein's co-founding of the British Film Society in 1924, had contracted him to direct two propaganda films (*Aventure Malgache* and *Bon Voyage* [both 1944]) to be screened in France as part of the Liberated territories Section programme (Gladstone 2005: 53). However, the resonance of the Holocaust – with its systematic extermination of Jews and other ethnic minorities – and its centrality to *I Confess* must surely be linked to Hitchcock's work compiling and editing documentary footage from Bergen-Belsen and other concentration camps shortly after the liberation of Europe when he accepted a commission to make a final war film for Bernstein. The film, *Memory of the Camps*, made jointly by the British and American governments in 1945, had been conceived of as a means of confronting German citizens with their government's crimes. The assigning of guilt was therefore central to this undertaking. One of Hitchcock's primary duties was to accentuate the proximity of the camps to German towns in an effort to show that ordinary Germans, as Bernstein said, 'must have known'. Hitchcock foresaw that many would disbelieve the footage, and that accusations of fakery would be leveled at the Allies. Credited as a 'treatment advisor', Hitchcock's involvement lasted only a month (though Bernstein maintained Hitchcock 'outlined and planned it [i.e., *Memory of the Camps*]'). He made two major contributions to the film. First, he insisted that complex editing be avoided in favor of long shots and panning shots with no cuts, so as to emphasize the veracity of the images. Second, he recommended the inclusion of footage of German villagers being forced to visit the liberated camps. This would, he hoped, have the effect of collapsing boundaries, of disabusing people of the notion that the horrors of the camps took place away from humanity. The project, however, remained unfinished due to concerns that it might undermine the goal of German postwar reconstruction. A work print was found in the Imperial War Museum in 1984, completed, then broadcast on PBS in 1985.

Originally a POW camp, Bergen-Belsen acquired a special designation in March 1943 when Heinrich Himmler (chief of the SS) ordered that part of it house prominent European Jews (Gladstone 2005: 35). It was alternately called a 'transit camp' and a 'death chamber'. By the time Allies liberated it, the prisoner population had grown to 60,000. Of that number, 28,000 succumbed to an outbreak of typhus. The Allies found cadavers everywhere, 'tens of thousands of bodies strewn among survivors' (Comolli 2010: 51). According to Geoffrey Macnab of *The Independent*: 'The British Army Film Unit cameraman who shot the liberation of Bergen-Belsen concentration camp [...] used to joke about the reaction of Alfred Hitchcock to the horrific footage they filmed'. When Hitchcock first saw the footage, he 'was reportedly so traumatised that he stayed away from Pinewood Studios for a week'. From this account, it follows that exposure to these recorded atrocities (some 30,000 corpses) not only left an indelible mark upon Hitchcock but also found an expressive outlet in his longstanding fascination with the macabre. Peter Tanner, the editor of *Memory of the Camps*, confirmed that Hitchcock proposed the sequence in the final reel that detailed the possessions of the dead at Auschwitz (Gladstone 2005: 56). Steven Jacobs rightly observes that, along with Buchenwald footage of tattooed skins and shrunken heads, these morbid sequences 'acquire an uncanny meaning in light of Hitchcock's fascination with fetish objects' (2011: 269). The impact of the camp footage can be felt as late as *Psycho* (1960), which Robin Wood sees as emerging from the deadly genesis of the Holocaust's twin horrors, 'the utter helplessness and innocence of the victims, and the fact that human beings, whose potentialities all of us in some measure share, were their tormentors and butchers' (2002: 150). What has yet to be considered is how a film as steeped in the esotericism of Catholicism as *I Confess* can function as a plangent meditation on the Holocaust.



Figure2: *Memory of the Camps: A shrunken head among the Nazi memorabilia found at Bergen-Belsen.*



Figure 3. Under Capricorn: the hand of the devious Milly (Margaret Leighton) removing the shrunken head she has placed in Henrietta's bed to drive her mad.

If *Memory of the Camps* became a kind of unfinished *histoire d'horreur*, buried in the vaults of the Imperial War Museum, how apposite, then, that Bernstein and Hitchcock would later develop *I Confess*, a film whose conscience-stricken characters are still metaphorically mired in the theater of a war long since ended. Though financial troubles with Bernstein's production company caused him to withdraw from the project, his influence, like Hitchcock's on the atrocity film, endures. *I Confess*, with its multi-hued prism of Catholic guilt, has been overlooked as a continuation of Hitchcock's pre- and post-war meditations on the traumas of fascism. Even the film's opening shots of desolate urban streets feel limned with residual violence of the Second World War, nearly devoid of life, their oversized traffic signs directing us to a clandestine murder committed within its supposedly civilized environs. Such absence prefigures, in a way, the tendency in Czech films of the 1960s dealing with the Holocaust to use empty city streets as a signifier of deported and exterminated Jews. Eric Rohmer and Claude Chabrol, writing on *I Confess* but also encompassing Hitchcock's entire oeuvre, cite the 'profane nature' of his works, a 'characteristic that bears the mark of Christianity' (1979: 113). They go on to describe this notion of a 'community in sin, the ethical or religious recto of that which, in the form of 'transfer' we have often seen as the esthetic and psychological verso' (1979: 114). So much of the sin on display in the film is rooted in the past – not just that of Father Logan, whose romantic travails prior to the priesthood are exposed through flashback, but arguably the murky origins of the enigmatic Otto Keller, as well. As Rohmer and Chabrol rightly claim, the weight of the past 'is always so heavy in Hitchcock', and it is Logan and Keller's discrete wartime traumas that make their eventual doubling a *fait accompli*, compelling the former to become a scapegoat for the latter's crime (1979: 116).

David Greven notes that '[t]hroughout Hitchcock's work, he makes use of the figure of the *doppelgänger*, or double, to contrast and explore the many distinct kinds of subjectivity' (2013: 61). Importantly, Greven underscores how this theme is a direct borrowing from the German Expressionist cinema that informed Hitchcock's work his entire career. (The Hitchcockian aesthetic

is thus always already suffused by a fraught, prelapsarian moment – the interwar years of the Weimar Republic.) In Otto Rank’s formulation, the double transforms one’s own narcissistic self-love into ‘the feared and loathed other of one’s own desires’. Keller emerges as Logan’s sinister double as soon as he appears. The first time we see him, he is in a state of chameleonic survival, casting off a spare cassock in the aftermath of murdering the unsavory lawyer Mr. Villette (Ovila Légaré). ‘I wore a cassock to avoid attention’, he explains to Father Logan. Like a mask that transforms him into a monstrous double, the ecclesiastical attire grants him a certain immunity through concealment and (un)intentionally directs blame for the murder onto Logan (whose own cassock becomes a kind of prophylactic, warding off the unextinguished ardor of his pre-vow paramour Ruth, played by Anne Baxter). Keller’s identity remains slippery throughout the film. He is a floating signifier, one devoid of a clear referent. Even the surname ‘Keller’ resists tidy classification – it can be found amongst the Ashkenazi Jews but not exclusively so. In German it means ‘cellar’. Often associated with the Freudian unconscious, the cellar is the place ‘to which fearful and painful memories are consigned by a process of repression’ (Bateson 1972: 135). Logan may be the one obviously saddled with a past full of regret—namely, his thwarted romance with Ruth and her subsequent marriage to another man during his deployment overseas—requiring Inspector Larue (Karl Malden) to act as analyst to dredge them into the open, but Keller is the more repressed figure. Neither Larue nor Logan has time or opportunity to speculate on Keller’s motive for killing Villette apart from his self-confessed need of money (to ‘start a new life’, he tells Logan). If, as his surname makes plausible, Keller is Jewish, then nothing in *I Confess* brings together the discordant notes of the Holocaust more than this repressed part of his identity.



Figure 4: *I Confess*: *Otto Keller (O.E. Hasse) disguised in a cassock after the murder.*]

During the Nazi regime, but dating back to medieval times, Jews would submit to baptism to save themselves from persecution. When done so as to secure greater economic opportunities in Wilhemine and Weimar Germany, it would normally take generations, many intermarriages,

‘possibly a change of name and residence, before the past of the new Christian faded into invisibility. Jews generally despised their baptized brethren as renegades, Christians despised them as opportunists’ (Gay 1978: 98). Pressed by Logan to say when he last confessed, Keller cannot remember. Concerned by this evasion, atypical even for a lapsed Catholic, Logan asks if Keller can remember ‘approximately’. No reply is forthcoming as Hitchcock cuts to a close up of Keller’s face through the confessional lattice. Keller equivocates, stating, ‘I have killed Mr. Villette’ before adding, ‘I’m not a murderer’. Hannah Arendt stresses that the first essential step for totalitarian regimes seeking total domination is to ‘kill the juridical person in man’ and destroy their individuality (1973: 447). By placing certain categories of people outside the law and creating conditions in the concentration camps under which ‘conscience ceases to be adequate and to do good things becomes utterly impossible, the consciously organized complicity of all men in the crimes [...] is extended to the victims [...] forcing [inmates] to behave like murderers’ (Arendt 1973: 452). She further postulates, ‘What meaning has the concept of murder when we are confronted with the mass production of corpses?’ Suddenly, viewed through this Arendtian lens, Keller’s plea to Logan ‘Aren't you human? Haven't you ever been afraid? You are so good. It's easy for you to be good. Have you no pity for me?’ reads as a caustic rejection of moral absolutes in a post-Auschwitz world in which many Jewish survivors abandoned their faith in God altogether after experiencing the inhumanity of the camps.

For Hitchcock, in this film, the figure of the immigrant is one of tragic uncertainty. Keller and his wife Alma (Dolly Haas) are both played by German actors, and Hitchcock intends for the audience to regard them as German refugees. As he approaches Logan in the empty nave after the murder, Keller reflects on the debt he owes the priest: ‘You gave my wife and me a home, a job, even friendship. [...] So wonderful a thing for a refugee, a German, *a man without a home*’ (emphasis mine). Though the Kellers hold jobs in the rectory thanks to Father Logan’s charity, their position within its hierarchy remains subordinate. Keller serves as gardener and handyman whilst Alma cooks and performs the duties of a maid. Their situation must be one of precarity for, after all, Keller moonlights as Villette’s gardener to make ends meet and that is still not enough (hence his stealing from Villette). His outsider status in the parish thus heightens his liminality, mirroring that of the Jews in Wilhelmine Germany, the culture in which Keller would have grown up.

Despite the Act of 1869 granting civic equality to Jews in Germany and ushering in a period of assimilation (one accelerated by the First World War), Jews still occupied a kind of double consciousness. As Paul R. Mendes-Flohr puts it, ‘German Jews [...] were painfully aware, as the liberal rabbi Benno Jacob put it in 1927, that they were but ‘assimilated in the accusative’—that is, they assimilated the cultural values of Germany—and not ‘assimilated in the dative,’ that is, they were not assimilated into German society’ (1999: 3). Many traits marked German Jews of this period as ‘bifurcated (*zweiseitig*)’, Jewish and German, to use Walter Benjamin’s term (ibid: 51). Coming

out of the ghetto, Jews spoke *Judendeutsch*, an amalgamated language. Peter Gay insists that this linguistic shift toward German as their first language induced a ‘psychological transformation, a transvaluation of identities’ (1978: 109). They were also described as *Grenzjuden*—‘literally ‘Jews at the border,’ straddling boundaries between cultures’—and *Grenzverwischer*—‘an eraser of boundaries—as Jewish cosmopolitans were frequently pilloried’ (ibid: 21, 30). Keller may find himself in a state of penury but he hints at a cosmopolitan, or at least comfortably middle-class, existence that he formerly enjoyed with his wife. He laments what toil has done to his beloved Alma: ‘It made me cry to see her work so hard. Those poor hands, such beautiful hands’. Hitchcock even makes a point of showing Alma engaged in such menial labor as she polishes a table full of candlestick holders.



Figure 5: *I Confess*: The placeholder for the shadow life Logan (Montgomery Clift) could have lived.

As Logan’s double, his ‘shadow twin’, Keller shares with him an identity defined by dislocation (Rosenblatt 2004: 39). Both lead double lives in a host of ways. Logan sublimates his passion for Ruth into the priesthood, foregoing domesticity for celibacy (though a case could be made for Logan’s asexuality, given that he voluntarily enlists and uses patriotism as an excuse to part from her). Hitchcock manifests this duality when Logan has his ‘dark night of the soul’ peregrination through the city before turning himself in. He pauses before a storefront window displaying a headless mannequin in a three-piece suit epitomizing bourgeois heteronormativity – the phantom self Logan sacrificed on the altar of his faith. Keller, as a murderer, masquerades as an innocent man. He also exists as a stranger in a strange land. To consider the alienness of Keller-as-Jew in Quebec is to grapple with his status as an outsider divided between cultures. Georg Simmel explored this type of duality in his 1908 essay ‘*Der Fremde*’ (The Stranger). In any given society, the stranger must be thought of ‘not...as the wanderer who comes today and goes tomorrow, but rather as the person who comes today and stays tomorrow’ (Simmel 2011: 143). According to Peter Gay, ‘The stranger, for Simmel, is a dual being: he is part of a group, but in a curiously impermanent sense’ (Gay 1978: 12). He exists as a paradox, simultaneously both insider and outsider. ‘The stranger becomes a member of the ‘host’ society, yet remains apart, bearing the marks of his origin’ (Gay 1978: 22). Like most

Hitchcock antagonists, Keller exists in the margins through a combination of antisocial inclination and self-protective instinct. The latter one may attribute to his closeted guilt alone, but overlaid with his Germanness, his refugee status, and his ostensible Jewishness, he becomes the quintessential Simmelian stranger. As she is leaving the church after failing to persuade Logan to avoid arrest and somehow exonerate himself in Villette's murder, Ruth collides with Keller as he enters carrying a bundle of flowers to replace the wilting ones at the chancel. She apologizes but so does he, saying, 'It was my fault, madam' (an ironic admission since the ordeal ensnaring Logan and Ruth *is* partly his fault). By framing this collision at a threshold, Hitchcock reinforces doubts about where Keller belongs. Keller then hounds Logan as the priest ascends the altar, wanting to ensure that he will remain his double—his scapegoat—thereby taking his place in the hangman's noose (so fitting that Hitchcock has Hasse continue to hold the dead flowers during this exchange).



Figure 6: *I Confess: Keller (O.E. Hasse) besieges Logan (Montgomery Clift) out of fear that the priest will break his vow of silence.*

Depending on when Keller arrived in Canada, he could have been interned as an 'enemy alien' in one of the camps that existed in the country between 1940 and 1943. The majority of these "enemy aliens" were Jewish refugees from Austria and Germany fleeing Nazi oppression. Canada accepted less than 5,000 Jewish refugees between 1933 and 1948, the smallest number of any Allied nation. The dread that engulfs Keller after the murder when he tells Alma that 'no one knows' speaks to the instability of their lives, a sense that a final 'at homeness' may forever elude them (Steiner *Survivor* 1968). Hitchcock stages this as a doubling of the previous scene with Father Logan in the church. Indeed, Hitchcock dissolves from the confessional to the Kellers's bedroom, with Otto now onscreen left where Logan had been and Alma onscreen right, taking the place of her husband (Roger Dann), as if to suggest the inseparability of husband and wife in their shared plight. This scene begins with a repetition of the very same line that ended the preceding scene, 'He [Villette] was going to call the police'. Alma becomes Otto's confessor, carrying his secret just as Logan does, with perhaps greater comprehension of his fears. The summoning of the police could have led to Keller's deportation.



Figure 7: *I Confess*: Otto (O.E. Hasse) asks Father Logan (Montgomery Clift) to hear his confession.



Figure 8: *Confess*: A close-up of Keller (O.E. Hasse) in the confessional.



Figure 9: *I Confess*: Alma (Dolly Haas) learns of her husband's (O.E. Hasse) horrible crime.

As a film concerned with institutions – the church, the law, marriage – *I Confess* filters Hitchcock's pronounced reticence towards police through Keller in a most sympathetic light. When asked by Inspector Larue to share the details of discovering Villette's corpse, Keller replies: 'I wanted to run [...] There I was, a man without a country, alone, discovering a murder [...] I thought of the police. I'm always afraid of the police. That's a German fear, this fear'. (One could conceivably parse this to mean 'That's a *Jewish* fear, this fear'.) At the end of this line of questioning, Hitchcock dissolves from a shot centered on Larue to the Quebec Parliament Building, all but transmuting the inspector into a fleshy appendage of the faceless state. This 'German fear' is reminiscent of Arendt's observation that since the destruction of the temple during Roman times, Jews have always 'depended for their physical existence upon the protection of non-Jewish authorities' (Arendt 1973: xiii). Under such conditions, Arendt observes that 'in any contest of violence, no matter what reasons, Jews were not only vulnerable but helpless' (ibid). Regardless of his guilt, then, Keller's reluctance, his manic expressions of fear of the powerlessness and forfeiture of his life that would come from turning himself in, acquire an understandable persecutory paranoia. His cries that 'They will hang me!' are a desperate reassertion of his individuality that recall French writer and concentration-camp survivor David Rousset's words that 'The triumph of the SS demands that the tortured victim allow himself to be led to the noose without protesting'. Here, the protest is vocalized. Logan may be 'the wrong man', but Keller is 'the wronged man', made hollow by the war, his past life a shade that haunts him, just as he now menaces Logan.

Even in a free society such as Canada, Hitchcock shows that Keller's misgivings about the legal system have merit. In the original treatment, Logan is wrongly convicted and hanged for murder. In the filmed version, the exculpatory verdict that frees Logan does not sate the mob's bloodlust; the contagion of violence has spread throughout the community, like the madness that seized the maenads and provoked them to rend Orpheus limb from limb. Waiting for Logan in the corridors of the court and in the street are the murderous masses denoting an imminent collapse of the hierarchical social order. This flashpoint recalls René Girard's work on ritualistic sacrifice and the scapegoat mechanism. In Girard's paradigm, a community deceives itself into believing that its chosen victim is to blame for a given communal crisis and that peace will be restored after eliminating that individual. Crowds, in the throes of 'mimetic contagion', will seize upon the victim and refuse to exchange them for another since the 'time for substitutions is over, and the moment of violence has sounded' (Girard *Satan* 2001: 25). The intervention of a legal authority can be seen by the crowd as constraining (in both Girard's theory and the film) when it proves incapable of exacting the violence deemed necessary to purge the infection. Girard views the doctrines of National Socialism as rooted in this illusory and dangerous 'endeavor to return to a quasi-archaic sacrificial culture' (Palaver 2013: 548). The taint that has unfairly affixed itself to Father Logan, his

interchangeability with Keller, plays out this latent impulse—the bloodthirstiness of mob violence—atop the freshly dug grave of fascism.



Figure 10: *I Confess*: The crowd awaiting Father Logan (Montgomery Clift) outside the courthouse.

George Steiner sought to articulate the psychic ravages afflicting the Jewish diaspora using language reminiscent of Simmel's stranger:

The [E]uropean Jew did not want to remain a guest. He strove, as he has done in America, to take root. He gave strenuous, even macabre proof of his loyalty. In 1933-4, Jewish veterans of the First World War assured Herr Hitler of their patriotism, of their devotion to the German ideal. Shortly thereafter, even the limbless and the decorated were hauled to the camps. In 1940, when Vichy stripped French Jews of their rights, veterans of Verdun, holders of the *Médaille militaire*, men whose families had lived in France since the early 19th century, found themselves harried and stateless. In the Soviet Union a Jew is so designated on his identity card. Is it foolish or hysterical to suppose that, labor as he may, the Jew in a gentile nation-state sits near the door? Where, inevitably, he arouses distrust [...] To a man who may tomorrow be in desperate flight across his own border [...] the nation-state is an ambiguous haven. Citizenship becomes not an inalienable right, a sacrament of *Blut und Boden*, but a contract which he must renegotiate, warily, with each host (*Survivor* 1968).

Mobility (and its absence) often serves as a signifier of freedom, entrapment, and even threat in Hitchcock's wartime/post-war films, such as *The Lady Vanishes*, *Notorious*, *Under Capricorn*, *Strangers on a Train*, and *North by Northwest*. It animates Keller, who seems poised to flee Quebec with Alma should Logan divulge his secret. Instead, he rejects it for a rootedness safeguarded by the inviolability of the confessional. (Logan's perambulations about the city hint at the possibility of flight, too, with Hitchcock again emphasizing his doubleness through a comical montage of police stopping the wrong priests.) Although Keller participates in Logan's trial as a witness, he places his faith (and here I use this term in its most secular sense) in a religious institution, though one with its own chequered associations with fascism.

Hitchcock, while not explicitly offering a critique of the Catholic Church, does not exculpate it either from the accusations that arose over its complicity with the Third Reich. Initially, much hostility existed between the Catholic Church and the Nazis. Prior to 1933, Catholics were told by their bishops not to join the Nazi Party. However, in the initial months of 1933, 'all bans against Nazi membership were withdrawn and Catholics in Germany, including Catholic bishops, allowed their enthusiasm for the 'values' of the Nazi state to blossom and flower' (Margolian 2000: 48). Ample documentation has also shown the well-orchestrated creation of so-called 'ratlines' in the years after the war that aided the secret relocation of known German war criminals. The Church provided false identification documents to these former Nazis to escape to South America, with Canada also emerging as a haven for a small number. Father Millars (Charles Andre) remarks to Logan that in only the six months Keller has worked for them, he has fixed drains and windows: 'One can learn a great deal from him'. Keller exists for Millars purely in terms of his utility to the Church; it lends him a pleasing, inconspicuous façade that obfuscates questions about his past and masks his sinful nature. This opens a second line of inquiry into the innate duality surrounding Keller's identity, one further compounded by Hitchcock's decision to cast Polish-born German actor O.E. Hasse in the role. Hasse served the Third Reich when he was conscripted into the Luftwaffe in 1944. He was also gay, a status that would for most men have led to imprisonment under Paragraph 175, a German statute prohibiting homosexuality, but he received a special permit from Joseph Goebbels to continue working. A comment like the one Keller makes to his wife Alma that 'no one knows' about the crime he has committed thus accrues a metatextual significance that speaks to this entanglement of loyalties that Hasse embodied during the war. Motivated to steal Vilette's money to elevate his wife from the drudgeries of menial work, Keller's sole possession of any note happens to be a firearm of questionable provenance. If Keller's villainous associations needed any further distillation, it comes in his choice of weapon – a Luger – the perennial signifier in Hollywood cinema of a character's ties to a fascist, militarized Germany. Cornering him at the climax, Larue asks whether he's done enough harm. Keller, Luger in hand, issues a threat – 'I could do more!' – full of chilling ambiguity.



Figure 11: *I Confess: Keller (O.E. Hasse) wields his hidden Luger (but does he aim at Alma or Logan?).*

Just as Bettina Rosenblatt links Uncle Charlie's thinking to fascists in *Shadow of a Doubt*, narrative recesses exist in *I Confess* where authoritarianism lurks, albeit obliquely. The scene where Fathers Millars and Logan discuss the ongoing painting project at the rectory figuratively points to the moral compromise required of the wartime arrangement between the Church and Nazism. Millars ponders the existence of an odorless paint, telling Logan, 'I only ask because the smell makes one quite ill really'. Strangely innocuous, the line yet contains an eeriness that recalls how soldiers, while liberating Bergen-Belsen, 'smelled a horrific stench lingering in the air' (Michalczyk 2014: 31). The large-scale extermination of the camps – 'factories' of death both efficient and invisible – has morphed, in post-war consumerism, into products that conceal their own unpleasantness. Millars admits to seeing advertisements for such an odorless paint but says, 'One finds it difficult to believe that there are paints with no smell. Do you know of any paints that do not smell, Father Michael?' Logan responds in the negative, to which Millars asks, 'Does it matter?' The exchange would be trifling if not for Millars's later use of it as a metaphor for the impugned reputation of the Church during the search for the cassock-wearing murder suspect. He tells Logan in the presence of Officer Murphy: 'Oh, I believe this room has given this gentleman from the police department the idea that we hide grime with paint. But it is not so, Mr. Murphy. We have made certain that the walls underneath are spotless'. And yet Keller's killing of Vilette in cold blood, and even Logan's tormented, unresolved affair with Ruth, dispel the notion that the Church's house is in order, as it were. There is clearly a snake in the garden, to mix metaphors, one invited in willingly.



Figure 12: *I Confess*: *The white paint, 'covering up the grime,' sits between Keller (O.E. Hasse) and Logan (Montgomery Clift).*

Although Logan recoils at the doubling that threatens to conflate his identity and deeds with those of Keller, the film initially insists on a pretense of dissimilarity between the two men. Keller himself belies as much in his resentment of Logan, saying 'It's easy for you to be good' and 'It would be better if you were as guilty as I'. Yet in Bernstein and Hitchcock's original treatment for *I Confess* – much disdained by the Catholic-dominated Production Code Administration – Logan commits a sin by having an illegitimate child with Ruth. Vestiges of this imperfect, fallen version of the priest linger in the finished film and further instantiate the doubling between the two men. Their culpabilities seem rooted in a past of which Hitchcock permits only glimpses. A wounded melancholia comes through in the scene when Larue mentions Logan's being awarded the military cross – 'Well, I survived', Logan says. Ruth later confesses that the war 'changed him', perhaps fundamentally, a soul-deep anguish. Like so many WWII servicemen, like Hitchcock with the Bergen-Belsen footage, Logan has seen (and perhaps done) things he'd preferred he hadn't. The untold horrors of that experience are gleaned in Ruth's prophetic utterance as she narrates the flashback of her final night with Logan before his deployment: 'I thought the world was coming to an end. I suppose there were millions of people feeling the same way that night. You don't think of millions of people. You think of yourself and the one you're in love with'. Though ostensibly speaking of other young couples separated by the exigencies of war, Ruth's words unconsciously conjure not only the countless slain Allied service members but also the specter of the six million

dead in the concentration camps and how the mind strains to imagine anything approaching that magnitude.



Figure 13: *I Confess*: Logan (Montgomery Clift) embraces Ruth (Anne Baxter) before his deployment to Europe.

To posit Keller as a Jew is not without its interpretive drawbacks. In the final reckoning, he murders one man, accidentally murders his wife (while attempting to shoot Logan), and has little compunction letting a priest face a possible death sentence on his behalf. But does imputing Jewishness to Keller unearth strains of anti-Semitism in the text? The one overt instance of anti-Semitism in a Hitchcock film can be found in *Juno and the Paycock* from 1930. In adapting the play of Seán O’Casey, Hitchcock alters the nondescript character of the tailor, Nugent, into the stereotypically Jewish tailor, Kelly (Yacowar 2010: 94). In his role as usurer, Kelly goes to the Paycock’s house to collect money borrowed against the Paycock’s promised inheritance. Jack Morgan notes how Kelly is ‘drawn—intentionally it is clear—with dark, Shylockian overtones’, an ‘ample middle-eastern nose’, and a Yiddish accent, ‘arguably shot in such a way as to elicit repulsion’ (2011: 173). He attributes Kelly’s shadowy and conspiratorial mien with ‘a German-expressionist sinisterness’ that goes well beyond what the scene would seem to call for (ibid). With Keller, by contrast, Hitchcock eschews any such stereotypes. Indeed, it is Keller’s opacity that prevents a textually rigid imputation of anti-Semitism. His liminal status hearkens back to the ‘intolerable and undignified ambiguity’ of the Jewish position within Wilhelmine German society (Bilski 1999: 21). Moreover, a harsh appraisal of Keller would still not obscure Alma’s eventual sacrifice in exposing her husband’s crime. Indeed, the spectacle of the crowd mauling Logan outside the courthouse is what spurs her into action. Hitchcock places the viewer in Alma’s subjectivity at this moment of brutality, cutting back and forth between the battered priest and her increasingly pained expression. No one else amongst the onlookers appears perturbed. Tellingly, only when Logan’s elbow breaks the window of the police car against which he is pinned does Alma push her way toward him through the throng. The shattering of glass triggers something in her, and it takes no logical leaps to figure out what association this would have for a German of her generation: *Kristallnacht* (‘Night of Broken Glass’). Her dying words, muttered to Logan in German (which he

translates for Larue), are ‘Forgive me’. If the (Jewish) Keller is the ‘bad German’ of post-war Hollywood cinema, then Alma is unquestionably the ‘good German’.



Figure 14: *I Confess*: Alma (Dolly Haas) stares, appalled, as the mob attacks Father Logan (Montgomery Clift).



Figure 15: *I Confess*: Father Logan (Montgomery Clift) gives absolution to a dying Otto (O.E. Hasse).

Shoah director Claude Lanzmann once said that the Holocaust cannot be represented and is itself a kind of negative sublime (Jacobs 2011: 273). Camp survivor David Rousset famously described it as a separate reality, a ‘*univers concentrationnaire*’. Even *Memory of the Camps*, intended by Bernstein as a hermeneutics of atrocity, runs up against the Holocaust’s ontological incomprehensibility. Jean-Louis Comolli believes the confusion felt by the film’s makers (Hitchcock presumably amongst them) attests to ‘an as yet unresolved (but nonetheless filmically documented) opacity, as though there were promise of meaning still to come. The film contains a meaning that is not yet defined’ (2010: 65). I argue that this extends to *I Confess* as a film whose own meaning is also not yet fully defined as it draws upon the anguish of the Holocaust. The Catholic milieu of the story sets up a false Manichean dialectic, with Keller as Satan to Logan’s Christ. Hitchcock, however, has little interest in playing their dark mirroring ‘straight’. Their doubling renders Keller a multivalent figure – Janus-faced, both Nazi and Jew, and yet neither, made enigmatic by the noirish ambiguities in which the film cloaks him. The final confrontation between the two men, which closes

the film, occurs in front of an empty theatre stage, visually drawing these doubles together again in a performative space (just as they are in the confessional at the film's start). With Ruth having departed with her husband safe in the knowledge that Logan's innocence has come to light, Logan informs Keller that Alma has died by his hand. 'Then I am as alone as you are', Keller says. Despite Logan's repudiation of this characterization, it affords penetrating insight. As Keller stands bleeding, he offers Logan death, as if to complete their mergence as doppelgängers. 'To kill you now would be a favor to you. You have no friends. What has happened to your friends, eh, Father? They mob you; they call to you'. He speaks not only as the Simmelian stranger (projecting old psychic wounds onto the priest), but also as Logan's hidden self, signaling his recognition of what it feels like to be ostracized by one's society, to have the crucible of war lead one to acts of desperation. It recalls the lamentation from John Buchan's novel *Huntingtower*: 'I learned in the war that civilisation anywhere is a very thin crust' (Kerzoncuff 2015: 189). How easily mobs form, how powerless are those chosen as their scapegoats. Here, Hitchcock muses on the violence that unites the two men—the murders of Villette and Alma, yes, but also the antecedent deaths that drove Keller from Germany and resulted in Logan being awarded the Military Cross. In performing his priestly duties, Logan makes the sign of the cross over Keller's death-stilled face. The absolution comes too little, too late, Hitchcock seems to suggest, for both men, as well as for the legacy of horrors that culminated in their tragic twinning.

Footnotes

1. Ironically, it was Michael Balcon's veiled insult about Hitchcock's weight preventing him from contributing to the war effort in England that prompted the prodigal son to journey back across the Atlantic, a sabbatical from Hollywood and his contract with Paramount that producer David O. Selznick was loathe to approve.
2. Orr's timeline somewhat conflicts with that laid out by Steven Jacobs, who lists Hitchcock's time in London for the Bernstein-initiated propaganda films as being from December 1943 to March 1944. Michael Brooke hews closer to Orr's estimation, putting the production between January 1944 and February 1944.
3. Three versions were envisioned: one to be shown to German civilians, one to German prisoners of war, and one to neutral and liberated territories (Gladstone 2005: 53).
4. As the project took shape, it acquired a very definitive aim for the British: 'To resist any German attempt, either now or later, to deny or minimize the charge of German atrocities, or to deny that any particular section of the German population [...] was unaware of them. It is further desired to show how ordinary men and women have been systemically brutalized so as to tolerate or take part in such activities' (Gladstone 2005: 55).
5. Or, as Jean-Louis Comolli so hauntingly puts it, 'The Nazi death machine is even more terrible when it is seen in comparison to 'normal life,' to the world of men, to the place where there is also peace, desire, and love' (2010: 64).
6. Bernstein appears to have been 'determined to make a definitive full-length work on the concentration camps,' but the Foreign Office withdrew support (Gladstone 2005: 62). The growing ambition of the project delayed its completion and put it at odds with incipient Cold War sensibilities. By late 1945, Allied priorities were 'to minimize the culpability of the German

- people and to interrupt collaboration between Anglo-Americans and the Soviet people' (Comolli 2010: 55).
7. The footage shot at Belsen was the first concentration camp footage to be admitted as evidence to a war crimes trial. It was shown in court in Luneberg during the trial (17 September – 17 November 1945) of the Belsen guards (Gladstone 2005: 33).
 8. Jacobs mentions the jewelry in *Shadow of a Doubt*, *Under Capricorn*, *Rear Window*, and *Vertigo*; spectacles in *Strangers on a Train*; hair in *Vertigo*, *North by Northwest*, and *Psycho*; a shrunken head in *Under Capricorn* (2011: 269).
 9. Together, Bernstein and Hitchcock had formed Transatlantic, an Anglo-American studio that released both *Under Capricorn* and *Rope* (the latter being a stinging rejection of the Übermensch concept espoused by the Nazis).
 10. Most notably in *Romeo, Juliet and Darkness* (Jiří Weiss, 1960) and *The Fifth Horseman Is Fear* (Zbyněk Brynych, 1965). See Ivan Avisar's *Screening the Holocaust: Cinema's Images of the Unimaginable* (1988).
 11. George Steiner wrote that "the holocaust may be said to mark a second Fall," one that can be interpreted as "a voluntary exit from the Garden and a programmatic attempt to burn the Garden behind us" (*Bluebeard* 1971: 46).
 12. Bettina Rosenblatt states that Hitchcock was 'familiar with and fond of the important texts of the literature of the double' (2004: 39). Donald Spoto echoes this by noting that Hitchcock familiarized himself with E.T.A. Hoffman and the fairy tales of the Grimm Brothers.
 13. René Girard points out that doubles convey certain 'hallucinatory associations' (Girard *Violence* 1977: 79).
 14. George Steiner may be credited with this metaphor when he sought to explain Freud's tripartite theory of mind. 'I put forward [...] the suggestion that the famous division of human consciousness—the id, ego, superego—has in it more than a hint of the cellar, living quarters, attic anatomy of the middle-class home in Vienna at the turn of the century' (*Nostalgia* 1997: 14). The surname is also apt given a priest's comment that before Keller, the drains didn't work at the church.
 15. Equally plausible is that Keller chose 'the perilous path of conversion' because he fell in love with a Christian, namely, Alma (Gay 1978: 97).
 16. In autocracies, identity often remains perspectival, something enforceable by the ruling class. As Moritz Goldstein wrote, 'But though we may after all feel totally German, the others feel us to be totally un-German' (Gay 1978: 20). Or, in the words of notorious Nazi Hermann Göring, 'It is up to me to decide who is German'.
 17. 'We are bifurcated—Jewish and German'. This comes from a 1912 correspondence to Ludwig Strauss. Benjamin goes on to say that Jews affirm only the German side of their being, 'the Jewish side having but an exotic (worse: sentimental) aroma' (Bilski 1999: 51).
 18. Gay notes that after Simmel's death, when Jews have been 'targets of projection, compelled into alienation and self-awareness as strangers [...] his work has been lent, posthumously, an intention it did not have, and did not display, in his lifetime' (1978: 124). That said, Simmel's own position must be taken into account. His parents converted to Christianity before his birth but he was still treated as a Berlin Jewish intellectual.
 19. Ruth is being far from selfless here; she also wants to prevent knowledge of her one-time dalliance with Logan whilst she was a married woman from coming out in court (the very thing Vilette was blackmailing them over).
 20. When asked how many Jews would be admitted into Canada after the war, an anonymous high-ranking Canadian official told journalists off-the-record in 1945, 'None is too many' (Abella 2017: xix).
 21. Taken to perverse extremes, this primitive mechanism reappears in the modern world in forms such as 'Hitler's systematic destruction of European Jews' (Girard *Satan* 2001: 158-59). This fits with Hannah Arendt's assertion that 'Jews must be accorded first place among [the mob's] favorite victims' (1973: 108).
 22. I consider *North by Northwest* to be a wartime film in that it traffics in the anxieties of the Cold War, with Phillip Vandamm as a nefarious fifth column.

23. Hitchcock uses this device again in *North by Northwest* with Cary Grant's character Roger Thornhill fleeing his pursuers at a train station by blending into a crowd of like-suited businessmen, proving that clothes make the man.
24. The acquiescence of the Catholic Church to the Nazi regime is far too complex a subject with which to grapple in an essay of this scope. Notably, however, the Church did not sign the Barmen Declaration of 1934, which saw Protestant churches band together to oppose the racist and antisemitic German Christian movement of the Nazis.
25. Hitchcock does, at times, presents characters with Nazi associations in complex (even sympathetic) ways despite always showing their doctrines to be abhorrent. In *Notorious*, both Alexander Sebastian and Alicia Huberman (whose father was a Nazi) are depicted as nothing less than flawed, pathetic figures with great psychological depth.
26. Like Hitler and the Nazis, Uncle Charlie 'thought it necessary to purge the world of useless 'degenerate' undesirables such as Jews' (Rosenblatt 2004: 60).
27. Morgan speculates that 'these brief Juno frames could have [...] been influential upon the directors of Nazi propaganda films in the late 1930s and early 1940s—even the virulent *The Eternal Jew* (1940) where the close-up, gritty focus on Semitic faces in sinister urban shadows is not unlike that employed in the Joxer-Kelly scene in Juno' (2011: 173).
28. Her need for the truth to come out, which costs Alma her life, evokes Hitler's cruel jibe that 'conscience is a Jewish invention' (Steiner *Bluebeard* 1971: 36). In the end, Otto, too, asks Logan for forgiveness.
29. This quote seems to follow Hitchcock throughout his career. Firstly, he planned a film of Buchan's novel in 1926. Secondly, Peter Wollen has used the line to illuminate the strong affinity between Buchan and Hitchcock. Thirdly, Richard Crossman, scriptwriter on *Memory of the Camps*, used a variation of it to describe the Nazi camps: "Dachau was the most recent, and perhaps the most violent, of a long series of experiences which all seemed to illustrate that European civilisation is not a stable and settled way of life, but a thin crust, constantly threatened by the volcanic violence of vast and un-understood forces just below the surface" (Kerzoncuf & Barr 2015: 190).

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Hitchcock as Catholic *auteur*

Jean-Loup Bourget

It has become almost an article of faith in Hitchcock studies that the French critics, especially the young French critics writing for the monthly *Cahiers du Cinéma* in the 1950s and early 1960s, are responsible for today's nearly universal recognition of Hitchcock as a major film *auteur*. The gradual process of this recognition has been charted in particular by Antoine de Baecque, a historian and himself a former editor of *Cahiers du Cinéma*, in his *La cinéphilie. Invention d'un regard, histoire d'une culture 1944-1968* ['Cinephilia, or the invention of a way of looking at motion pictures and the history of the creation of a specific film culture 1944-1968']. Chapter 3 is devoted to 'L'affaire Hitchcock' or 'The Hitchcock case', with the subtitle 'Scandals, polemics and revelations in French film culture (1949-1966)' (2003: 97-133). I shall try to sum up de Baecque's demonstration : from 1952 onwards, several of the younger *Cahiers* critics, 'Rohmer, Rivette, Godard, Truffaut, Chabrol', argue, rather provocatively, for the pre-eminence of Hitchcock and Hawks, of B movies and of 'mise-en-scène'; Godard (writing as Hans Lucas) praises *Strangers on a Train* (1951) (1952: 59-61), Rohmer (writing as Maurice Schérer, his real surname) takes advantage of a reissue of *The Lady Vanishes* (1938), then and to this day one of the best-liked of Hitchcock's English films, to argue for the superiority of Hollywood-made *Rope* (1948), *Strangers on a Train* and *Spellbound* (1945) (1952: 63-66). A little over a year later, after the release of *I Confess* (as *La Loi du silence*) on June 24, 1953, Rohmer as Schérer has a long piece on 'Three Films and a Certain School'. In fact Rohmer deals with two sets of three 'modern' films by three directors. The first set is comprised of Renoir's *The River* (1951), Rossellini's *Stromboli* (1950) and Hitchcock's *Strangers on a Train*, hesitantly preferred to *Under Capricorn* (1949). The second trio, more recent and – according to Rohmer himself – a more convincing illustration of his argument, is made up of Renoir's *The Golden Coach* (1952), Rossellini's *Europa '51* (1952) and Hitchcock's *I Confess*. Rohmer's piece is dense and complex. While he regards these various films as masterpieces of 'modern' cinema, his opinion is provocatively confirmed by the critical contempt and the injuries of their reception. To his mind the films are comparable and equal in value to the works of earlier writers, especially Goethe and Balzac, the difficulty being that contemporary audiences have been presented with too many examples of the mechanical rather than the spiritual, and of antiheroes and failures rather than saints and heroes. The plot of *Europa '51* is no more incredible than that of Corneille's *Polyeucte*, a 1641 play dealing with an early Christian martyr. While not mentioning him explicitly, Rohmer clearly refers to Bazin's 'ontological' view of cinema, pointing out that cinema can resort to 'evidence' by showing reality directly, without the medium of sign or symbol, but maintains that the themes treated by cinema are the classic antinomies of man vs nature, spirit vs matter, determinism vs freedom,

desire and greed vs heroism and grace. His conclusion dwells on *I Confess* and on the accusation of murder and the quasi lynching of Father Logan (Montgomery Clift), a perhaps unwilling Christ figure, shown by Hitchcock not in a 'formalist' way, but in a form that could only be cinematic (1953 [2]: 18-25). The same issue of *Cahiers* contains Rivette's long and highly laudatory review of *I Confess*. Entitled 'The Art of Fugue', the review carries an epigraph, a quote from Corneille about his tragic Christian hero Polyeucte. The title's reference to Bach is justified by the statement that 'the highest thought of our time' is expressed by cinema and that Hitchcock is the modern equivalent of Bach in his time: modern cinema, like Bach's music, expresses itself in a way that cannot be translated into some foreign language, but will remain inaccessible to a superficial audience, that is to say an audience that sees or hears only the 'surface', the outside appearance, of cinema or of music. Rivette proceeds with an analysis of the *I Confess* theme, showing that it is the most elaborate form of the 'transfer of guilt' theme already found in several Hitchcock films, arguing that Karl Malden (Inspector Larrue) plays a 'mechanical' Hitchcock figure that forces Father Logan to take upon himself the guilt of the self-confessed murderer Otto Keller (O.E. Hasse), to the point of accepting martyrdom and thereby assuming sanctity. This illuminates the Polyeucte epigraph. In his conclusion Rivette returns to the sacrificial motif, 'already present in *Under Capricorn*', a motif that is akin to those of renouncement and abandonment to God, found in Renoir and in Rossellini. Although Rivette does not specify what films he has in mind, it is fair to assume that he is thinking of *The Golden Coach* and *Europa '51* respectively, both recent titles also mentioned in Rohmer's piece in connection with *I Confess* (1953: 49-52). De Baecque is right to characterize *I Confess* as 'the key film in Rivette's and Rohmer's awareness' and recognition of Hitchcock's status (2003: 119). One may surmise that the two critics must have discussed *I Confess* at length: while their writing styles are very different, Rivette being much tauter than Rohmer, who tends to stray and try to make too many points not obviously compatible, the shared references to *Polyeucte* and to Renoir and Rossellini, the use of the 'mechanical' concept, the comparison with another artistic medium, all testify to common sources of inspiration.

Thus 1953 witnesses the 'first stage' of the recognition of Hitchcock as an *auteur* and more specifically as a *modern auteur*, a recognition based on Bazin's concept of the 'ontological' nature of cinema yet paradoxically resisted by Bazin himself, as we shall see. According to de Baecque, the 'next stage' is reached in the special Hitchcock issue of *Cahiers du Cinéma* (n° 39, October 1954), that features an introductory piece by Rohmer as Schérer, arguing in favour of Hitchcock's modernism and of his *mise-en-scène* that, contrary to appearances, deals with interior, innermost problems of the soul, but reverses his earlier statement and now describes Hitchcock as a 'formalist'. The films quoted by Rohmer are *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943), *Under Capricorn* and *I Confess*. They demonstrate that Hitchcock is able to express 'the most subtle of all relationships between two human beings'. The essay includes a shot of Hitchcock directing Anne Baxter in *I Confess* and, more intriguingly, two shots from *The Ring* (Hitchcock, 1927) and *Rope* respectively, pointing out the

similarity of two sets in films twenty-one years apart and highlighting the stylistic consistency of English Hitchcock and Hollywood Hitchcock (1954: 6-10). The special issue also features an essay by Chabrol, 'Hitchcock devant le mal' ('Hitchcock facing evil'), with an appropriate epigraph by Saint Basil of Caesarea, and references to many Hitchcock films, including several to *I Confess* (1954 [1]: 18-24). Chabrol also relays the story of his and Truffaut's bizarre interview with Hitchcock, in which the French pair asks the filmmaker in rather broken English about his supposed leitmotifs of 'good and / or God' and of 'evil and / or the Devil' (1954 [2]: 30-44). De Baecque observes that from then on all Hitchcock interviews become 'confessions', that the 'spiritualist' sympathies of the young *Cahiers* critics have been underestimated and that Hitchcock, taught by the Jesuits, was only too happy to play the game of what Pierre Kast, among other Hitchcock sceptics, saw as 'une intense rigolade', 'a hearty laugh' (2003: 114-118).

The final stage begins with the enthusiastic reception of *Vertigo* (1959) and the almost universal retrospective recognition of Hitchcock as an *auteur*, and culminates in the *Hitchbook* project (1962-66), Truffaut having inherited or appropriated the mantle previously held more or less jointly by Rohmer, Rivette and Chabrol (2003: 120-133).

While I agree with the gist of de Baecque's summary, I should like to express some remarks and reservations on a few specific points. To begin with, I think he underestimates the status that Hitchcock had enjoyed in his British or English period – not perhaps as an *auteur* but certainly as an extremely talented innovator and formal inventor whose melodramas, often combined with romance, were highly thought of by many English-speaking critics (with the notable exception of Graham Greene) and regarded as much better than their Hollywood counterparts. Secondly, his demonstration is a bit too neat both in the successive stages he describes – what is the exact progression from 'form is meaning' to moral, metaphysical or theological meaning, and then on back to the invention of filmic forms emphasised in the *Hitchbook*? – and in the way he speaks of the 'young *Cahiers* critics' as a homogeneous group rather than as separate individuals whose undoubted admiration and praise of Hitchcock may have been tinged with polemic exaggeration or subtle irony or both.

De Baecque's summary is also slightly biased in the way he mentions, as the first step towards the recognition of Hitchcock as an *auteur de films* (a phrase which, by the way, goes back a long time, at least to Marcel Carné writing in 1930), a long piece on *Rope* (with several references to *Spellbound*, *Under Capricorn* and *The Paradine Case* [1947]) by Jean-Charles Tacchella and Roger-Marc Thérond published in *L'Écran français* (January 1949). De Baecque fails to mention that the text includes long quotes translated from Hitchcock's 'Film Production Technique', simultaneously published in *The Cine-Technician*, and dwells exclusively on the *making of* the films. In other words, both its lengthy references to the director's own statements and its emphasis on technique rather than theme or meaning herald the supposed 'culmination' of the *Hitchbook* (2003: 97-98).

Although de Baecque mentions Rohmer's piece 'Suspicion' of May 1952, already referred to, he underestimates the uncanny extent to which it seems to anticipate the as yet unrealised *I Confess*. Rohmer writes about 'les deux consciences', using the word in the psychological sense of consciousness rather than the moral sense of conscience, yet – perhaps accidentally – thus echoing *Nos deux consciences*, Paul Anthelme's play of 1902 on which the script of *I Confess* is based, and praises Hitchcock as a 'genius' on a par with Kafka and Dostoievski. It becomes apparent that Rohmer, especially, was groping for the proper defining 'concept' for Hitchcock – was it *suspicion*, as suggested by the article's title? the *transfer* of guilt from one consciousness and / or conscience to another ? or simply the *wrong man*, going all the way back to Hitchcock's *The Lodger* of 1927? – and would find it superbly expressed in the Roman Catholic terms of *I Confess*, of the priest hearing the murderer's confession, thereby being bound to secrecy and as a consequence turning into a scapegoat or Christ figure (1952: 63-66).

In another chapter, 'La morale est affaire de travellings', a subtitle that reverses Godard's 'Tracking shots are an ethical matter', de Baecque describes the political background of France in the 1950s, mentions the Cold War and anti-Americanism, rightly sees that the *Cahiers* were rather right-wing, mentions Truffaut's abiding admiration for Rebatet, a talented but notorious antisemitic film critic and novelist, and recalls that, in his review of Bardèche and Brasillach's *Histoire du cinéma*, Truffaut argued that Brasillach's ideas were 'necessarily respectable' because he was shot – for treason, at the end of World War II –, to my mind an extremely specious argument (2003: 169-220).

De Baecque does not look in detail at the relationship of the various *Cahiers* critics to Roman catholicism and at its bearing on their reception and evaluation of Hitchcock. Rivette appears to be the most explicit and 'technical' in his analysis of *I Confess*. Rohmer, who was a practising Catholic of a fairly traditional mould, as would be made clear by *My Night at Maud's* (1969), seems to me to emphasise form and classical aesthetics rather than the finer points of theology. His aesthetic 'model' is pagan Greece as well as Christianity, as attested to by his notorious 'Revanche de l'Occident' piece praising Murnau's Polynesians as opposed to their depiction by 'decadent' Gauguin (1953 [1]: 46-48). In spite of his (probably tongue in cheek) quotation of Basil of Caesarea, Chabrol as filmmaker would give occasional vent to explicitly anticlerical touches, for instance in *The Cousins* (1959) and *The Ceremony* (1995), and his satire and irony, aimed at the then dominant Catholic church, are reminiscent of English Hitchcock and his occasional satire of Nonconformist Protestants, evident in *The 39 Steps* (1935) and in the 1956 version of *The Man Who Knew Too Much*. Writing about 'English Hitchcock', Chabrol had no hesitation in calling him 'a Catholic *auteur*', quoting as evidence *The Ring* (1927), *The Manxman* (1929) and *Blackmail* (1929), 'all films of Catholic inspiration', but he assumed that when Hitchcock adapted O'Casey's *Juno and the Paycock* (1929), the filmmaker, 'although a Catholic', must have been 'highly embarrassed' by 'O'Casey's Irish Catholic mysticism', an assumption based on ignorance of the playwright's religious background and

a complete misreading of his intentions (Rohmer and Chabrol 1957: 32-34). Unlike Chabrol, Truffaut had an interest in mysticism, as evidenced by one of his (to my mind) finest films, one of the least successful at the box office, *The Green Room* (1978), but he was less concerned with the subtleties of Catholic theology than with the practical and technical aspects of filmmaking, as evidenced by the Hitchbook. As far as Godard is concerned, his major and misleading contribution to Hitchcock studies was his early statement that Hitchcock was ‘the most Germanic of Hollywood filmmakers’ (1952: 60), a rather reductive definition that was taken up again later by Jean Douchet, another *Cahiers* critic and Hitchcock scholar (1985: 17).

To conclude, I should like briefly to return to Bazin’s reluctance and ultimate refusal to agree with his younger colleagues’ view of Hitchcock. A refusal which could appear paradoxical for at least two reasons: on numerous occasions, the young critics had described Hitchcock’s films in terms of ‘modern cinema’ and ‘realism’ as opposed to ‘formalism’; Bazin’s view of cinema, because of the photographic nature of film, was rooted in its ‘ontological’ relationship with the real world, expressed in such Christian terms as ‘Veronica’s veil’, ‘the coat without seam’ of reality or the Shroud of Turin, ‘which achieves the synthesis of the relic and of photography’ (1981: 14-15). Bazin himself had described William Wyler as a ‘Jansenist’ director. Yet in the already mentioned special Hitchcock issue of *Cahiers* (n° 39, October 1954), Bazin, in ‘Hitchcock against Hitchcock’, declares himself unconvinced in spite of his own efforts and those of ‘Schérer, Astruc, Rivette and Truffaut’, and explicitly mentions his ‘reservations’ about *Rope*, *The Paradine Case* and *I Confess* (1954: 25-32).

Almost four years later, in *Cahiers* n° 86 of August 1958, Bazin’s review of Rohmer and Chabrol’s *Hitchcock* (1957) combines extremely flattering appraisal (‘one of the finest examples of art criticism in French literature’) with a stubborn refusal to suspend disbelief and the reiterated statement that ‘their admirable argumentation does not carry my conviction’; ‘I am doubly grateful to them for letting me discover what I should admire, if they were right’; ‘Not admiring the Hitchcock I have seen, I am happy to admire the Hitchcock they show me’. Bazin stresses Rohmer and Chabrol’s platonism, their demonstration of the ‘moral concept’ of ‘exchange’ or ‘transfer’ which *they* find in every Hitchcock film. He quotes at length from their analyses of *Rear Window* (1954), *Strangers on a Train* and *Notorious* (1946). The excerpts take up as much space as Bazin’s comments. He makes it clear that to him the ‘Platonic’ interpretation is ‘brilliant’ but impossible either to accept or to criticise, as if it were self-contained and somehow, as suggested by the long preamble, a bit of an illusionist’s trick. He does not say one word about religion.

The ‘MacMahonians’, who shared many of Bazin’s ideas about cinema’s ‘ontological’ realism and systematised them, were more coherent than the ‘Hitchcocko-Hawksian’ *Cahiers* critics and rejected Hitchcock as well as Eisenstein and Welles as mere tricksters or manipulators of reality.

Finally I should like to ask the – very tentative – question of what may lie *behind* the Roman Catholic paraphernalia of *I Confess* – the *Shadows on the Rock* of Quebec City, the *labyrinthine ways* suggested by the visual leitmotif of the DIRECTION signs that lead nowhere, the confession and the cassock, the *Dies Irae* and the Latin language, the reproduction of Leonardo's *Last Supper*, etc. Is the core of *I Confess* the relation of the impossible, pathetic and possibly but improbably unconsummated love story between Father Logan and Ruth Grandfort (Anne Baxter) – she admits to being still in love with him, could it be that despite his tacit denial and his loyalty to his priest's calling, he is still in love with her? or should we come to the conclusion that Father Logan, like his interpret Montgomery Clift, is a repressed or silent homosexual, which would shed fresh light on his relationship not only with Ruth but also with the true murderer Otto Kruger ?

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The Reception of *I Confess* in the French Press

Tifenn Brisset

Generally speaking, the reception of Hitchcock's films in *Les Cahiers du Cinéma* is very well known and analysed. *I Confess* is at the core of the process of *auteurisation* used by the young critics such as Éric Rohmer, Claude Chabrol, Jean-Luc Godard, Jacques Rivette to show how deep and meaningful Hitchcock's films were, thanks to their *mise en scène*. However there are still many texts, articles and reviews that were published in French journals and newspapers at the same time. That's why the reception of *I Confess* in other journals is worth a closer look.

The Cannes screening

I Confess was shown for the first time during the Cannes Film Festival on 19 April 1953. The Grand Prix (the previous name for the Palme d'Or) was awarded to Georges Clouzot for *Le Salaire de la Peur* (*The Wages of Fear*). *I Confess* deeply suffered from the rivalry of *The Wages of Fear*, which was unanimously praised. Very little information is available about the screening and the presence of the crew at the festival. A paparazzi journal like *Ciné-Revue*, briefly mention the presence of Ann Baxter. The information is not very relevant, since the reader only learns that she speaks French like Jean Gabin and knows how to swear.

Let's take a glance at the reception in the French press, which is as lukewarm as the box-office: 'bowed by *Wages of Fear*, many French critics ignored *I Confess* altogether or mentioned it only in the context of also-rans' (Vest: 37). Among the available papers, the most anecdotal ones are the popular magazines *Mon Film* (n°368, third trimester 1953) and *Ciné-Revue* (n°18, 1 May 1953). They are *films racontés*: each issue tells the story of the film in details, using a narrative style, and in a romanticised way more or less faithful to the scenario. Along with the story, a small paragraph is dedicated to Montgomery Clift. The journalist speaks highly of the actor. His performance is so good that: 'immediately after the film presentation at the Cannes Films festival, we talked a lot about Montgomery Clift winning best male performance' (*Ciné-Revue*). But Charles Vanel won the price for Clouzot's film.

The majority of the daily and weekly newspapers reviewed the first screening Cannes screening. But *France-Soir*, *Le Figaro*, *Le Monde*, *Comedia*, and *Noir & Blanc* only wrote very short reviews, rarely more than a few lines. The reviews are not very enthusiastic and show that Cannes screening was a disappointment for most of the critics who were looking forward to it. That is what Jean de Barroncelli expresses in *Le Monde* (17 April 1953). After his 'love at first sight' for *The Wages of Fear*, he affirms: 'apart from two or three works, those from De Sica and Hitchcock, I don't see anyone capable of rivalry'. But his expectations are disappointed after the screening of the

‘awaited work of Hitchcock (*sic*).[...] We knew Hitchcock (*sic*) capable of the better and the worst. He just taught us he’s also capable of mediocre’ (*Le Monde* 21 April 1953).

France Roche expresses the disappointment of the spectators who expected to be scared and describes *I Confess* as ‘slow, prolix and very complicated’ (*France-Soir* 21 April 1953). Strangely, she says that it is ‘Hitchcock’s (*sic*) first American film. Jean-Jacques Gautier is as severe in *Le Figaro*. For him, 9 April was dull. The short movie from Walt Disney, *Water Birds*, was the highlight of the day and helped the spectators forget the ‘disappointment’ of the ‘eagerly awaited’ film by Hitchcock (*Le Figaro* 20 April 1953). Luckily, the film avoids being a ‘masterpiece of bad taste’, a pitfall that could have happened because of its plot. The very beginning is promising and ‘the film could win the prize for best introduction, but Hitchcock seems paralysed and the result is, overall, unworthy of Cannes’ (*Le Monde* 21 April 1953). As James Vest pointed out, ‘most of the French reviewers at Cannes agreed with Rey’ (Vest: 38). The Journalist Henri-François Rey also hits hard on *I Confess* in the magazine *Arts* on 24 April 1953, when he says that Hitchcock’s technical skills are a lot less effective than those of the winner of the Palme d’Or (Vest: 38).

24 June 1953: the release

The American reception is very briefly brought up by Donald Spoto, who only says that ‘In mid-February, of 1953, *I Confess* opened to lukewarm reviews’ (Spoto 1983:341). Patrick Mc Gilligan informs states that the film was a commercial success and that Hitchcock even made a profit (McGilligan: 466).

In France, the film premiered on 24 June 1953. According to the Centre National de la Cinématographie (CNC: 2019), a total of 2 367 709 tickets were sold from 1953, up to 2016. But in the first two years, the film didn’t make it to the top 50 either in Paris, nor in France. In 1984, *La Revue du Cinéma* (n°401, January 1985) compares the French box office of several Hitchcock films, on the occasion of their rerelease. According to the journal, *I Confess* sold 50,886 tickets, was not a box-office hit, with only tickets in *Première Exclusivité* (1) in 1953 and it was pulled off the screens after four weeks only (whereas *To Catch a Thief*, for instance, sold 414,000 tickets and stayed 17 weeks in 1955). *I Confess* was rereleased in 1962 and in 1984. That year, as few as 32,507 tickets were sold in four weeks, whereas *Rear Window* sold 409,284 tickets in 34 weeks. The authors come to the conclusion that *I Confess* remains in last position compared to other Hitchcock films like *To Catch a Thief* or *Rear Window*, by the time of its first release and in 1984. The film may have made some profits around the world and in France over the years, but the public showed little enthusiasm for the film in the early years of its life on screen.

Overall, what was written after the premiere of the film in cinemas doesn’t show a more enthusiastic reception than during the Cannes Festival. Baroncelli writes another little column after rewatching the film but remains unimpressed: ‘*I Confess* is a Hitchcock of poor quality, a lukewarm

Hitchcock' (*Le Monde* 3 July 1953). Françoise Holbane is as severe: 'one must, once again, blame the scenario' (*Comedia* 17 July 53). The moving potential of the secret of confession is sacrificed for the benefit of a 'pseudo crime melodrama turned into a high-society drama'. The film critic speaks highly of the 'easy, rich and clear cinematic language' of the director whose name is, once again, misspell written ('Hitchcock'). Montgomery Clift is dubbed as 'the most capricious Hollywood talent' and seems to be bored in the film; Ann Baxter is nicely described as 'full of merit' but in a role that is inconsistent, and Karl Malden 'plays his cards right as brilliantly as possible'.

Louis Chauvet (*Le Figaro* 19 June 1953) is not as severe than his colleagues a month earlier in Cannes. Certainly, the film is not appreciated in its entirety. Once again, the scenario is to blame, because the intrigue is sometimes heavy going and the end is artificial. The bias of telling a story through cinematic ways is at times a success but at times is 'ruined by useless excesses'. And O.E. Hasse's acting is not very subtle. Therefore, the film is far from being the best Hitchcock. But Chauvet identifies many qualities. The events about the crime investigation are smart and out of the ordinary, the stoicism of Logan who follows to the letter his apostolate is believable; and Hitchcock is very skilful at building suspense. Above all, he gives 'lessons of real cinema many times over', mentioning the neorealism of the streets in Quebec City, or the shooting of faces, among others. *I Confess* is thus a curious film and Hitchcock a skilful suspense artist.

Noir et Blanc is a weekly magazine published between 1945 and 1971. Hervé Lauwick (6 July 1953) celebrates the shots of the streets, just as well as the shot of the face of Inspector Larrue right after the murder. *I Confess* is compared to another film about a priest, *Le Journal d'un Curé de Campagne* (Robert Bresson, 1951). But the critic Hervé Lauwick doesn't explain why. The end of this small article is peculiar enough to be noticed: in order to illustrate the idea that *I Confess* is 'made for serious souls', he reports an event he witnessed in the streets of Paris:

The other day, we saw, at the corner of the cinema in Champs-Élysées, where the film is screened, a lovely young woman, one of the most beautiful one can meet in Paris. She stopped to look at the poster of the film and said to her friend: - Do you understand? He's a priest. A priest who... Well... There is a story of a secret... So the priest can't talk... Do you understand? The friend understood. Proof is, they both turned around without the slightest hesitation, and hurried up to the South.

Hitchcock had been criticised by many critics of the period for different reasons: he was usually seen as a very skilled technician, but he was also often seen as out of touch with the social problems of his time. The debate about him in the early 1950s was a political one, as Antoine de Baecque and James Vest remarkably demonstrated. The director has been defended from 1948 by critics of *L'Écran français* (2), then after by young critics of *Cahiers du cinéma*, who were fond of Hollywood cinema and had a 'spiritual approach of cinema' (de Baecque: 148). Therefore, *I Confess* was instrumental in Truffaut and Rohmer's defence of Hitchcock as a genius and an *auteur*, because

of the catholic dimension of the film and the moral dilemma of the priest. Another important point of the years to come for the 'young turks' in the years to come would be the idea that the content of the film does not lie so much in the subject, the scenario or the dialogues, but in the *mise-en-scène*. In 1953, such a statement is seen as a still a 'childish provocation' (de Baecque: 112). The established critics of the time, especially the left-wing journals like *Les Lettres Françaises*, *Positif*, etc., defend social and political subjects. Hitchcock's thrillers and love stories are usually judged with more or less contempt. That's why 1953 is such an important year in Hitchcock rehabilitation, and the controversy between his defenders and his detractors is fully noticeable in the French press.

Les Lettres Françaises is an art and political journal, clandestinely created in 1942 by two Resistants under the French Occupation. Georges Sadoul, film historian and critic, was one of its well known writers. He was in charge of the cinema columns and he also wrote in *L'Écran français*, *Cahiers du cinéma*, *Positif*, *L'Humanité*, etc. Sadoul was a Resistant during World War II. He was a committed communist, and was very influential among French critics in the 1950s. He took the lead of the cinema section of *Les Lettres françaises*, and was even the only writer in the columns for a decade. Sadoul's film reviews were always an opportunity to write essays about cinema or ideology, which is called '*la critique à thèse*' (de Baeque: 72). Therefore, it seems that the real subject of Sadoul's article about *I Confess* is in reality the rehabilitation of melodrama as a genre often dismissed by the critics (*Les Lettres françaises*, 2 July 1953). In order to do so, he defends the play *Germinal* by Émile Zola, the films *Umberto D.* by Vittorio de Sica, or *Les enfants d'Hiroshima* by Kaneto Shindō, shown at Cannes in 1953. Sadoul qualifies these works 'genuine melodramas'. Then, Sadoul defends what seems to be a good type of melodrama, against the constant criticism that the genre is the victim of. He takes the example of Zola to show what is supposed to be proper melodrama : a good and pitiful story. *Germinal*, with its characters dying of hunger and cold, is melodramatic by essence, it is 'a work of real pity'. Conversely, *I Confess* is looked down as being an example of 'the worst melodrama'. What is it to blame? For Sadoul, the scenario is too far fetched, because of its too many coincidences. It is true that coincidences, these random meetings of circumstances, are a mark of the melodrama. The Hollywood specialist Jean-Loup Bourget includes them in the definition of the melodrama as a genre: 'a plot involving providential or catastrophic events' (Bourget: 12). And without a doubt, coincidences are a hallmark of many Hitchcock's films. For instance, Villette was murdered by Keller disguised as a priest. Logan and Ruth spoke right in front of Villette's house after the murder, creating suspicion in the police's mind. Villette was also blackmailing Logan and Ruth, providing the police with a motive for the murder, etc. Moreover, the set of 'Montreal' (*sic*) is too quickly forgotten in aid of typical interiors such as luxurious living rooms, prisons, courts, where the moral dilemma of the characters takes place. All of these characteristics being all too trite. That's why, owing to him, *I Confess* has been unanimously

dismissed by the critics at the Cannes Festival, despite being one of the promising films of the American selection.

Therefore, even though Sadoul doesn't write it explicitly, the catholic and conservative aspects of *I Confess* must have been, even partly, at stake in the low opinion he has of the film. Yet, Sadoul's opinion about Hitchcock's work was not completely unfavourable. For instance, he says that his films are 'carefully engineered and calibrated'. He praises his ability to create an atmosphere but, these moments are far too rare to 'make us forget the wacky plots he takes delight in'. But in the end, his judgement of *I Confess* reveals the poor opinion he has of Hitchcock and other Hollywood filmmakers (3). His position is firstly a political one (de Baecque: 75).

Therefore, it is no surprise that *Radio Cinéma Télévision*, a weekly catholic journal (the later *Télérama*), is more enthusiastic about the film. Warm compliments are paid to the direction, and Hitchcock is acclaimed as a virtuoso with a remarkable visual sense: 'Hitchcock excels in creating this anguished atmosphere and giving the feeling to be committed with the accused, in a dead end street' (12 July 1953). As a catholic journal, the plot itself is spoken highly of. The moral dilemma of the priest and the sacrifice he is willing to make are applauded:

I think Hitchcock's film may produce the best effect on a large public. It will show that a priest, because he believes in his priesthood, is able to bear all the affronts without having to justify himself. Not only does he not betray the seal of confession, at the price of his own life, but he loves those who persecute him to the point he comes to their rescue when they suffer from their own faults (12 July 1953).

Once again, Clift's performance is acclaimed, especially the fact Logan's crisis of conscience is seen almost only through his eyes.

1957

In 1957, *Radio Cinéma Television* publishes a new review, showing how much interest the film has gained among the critics. It is the longest article so far (two whole pages), and it shows the influence of *Cahiers du cinéma*. Indeed, four years have passed, and the process of *auteurisation* is fully at work. That's why it is noticeable that *I Confess* is now analysed in the section called: 'every week, the analysis of a great film'. After a long summary of the plot, the authors carry on with criticism of the many improbabilities of the film but only to assert that: 'plausibility interests Hitchcock little'. The author knows precisely Hitchcock and defends the film as an example of recurrent themes noticeable throughout his work. *I Confess* 'reaches a peak in Hitchcock's career. It is in this film that he has expressed with the most freedom and openness. Never had he attained such a formal rigor' (19 May 1957). Apart from les *Cahiers*, it is the first time the film is as much appraised. The analysis of the critic (his/her name doesn't appear in the article) clearly follows the analytical path of *Cahiers*. The 'transfer of guilt', as a theme, is present in Hitchcock's work as early as in *The Lodger*,

Blackmail, and then in *Rebecca*, *Suspicion*, *Shadow of a Doubt*, *Rope* and *Under Capricorn*: ‘doesn’t the responsibility of the crime bounces from one individual to another? This is the question Hitchcock asks in all of his films’ (19 May 1957). This transfer of guilt leads to the solitude of the characters, called here ‘compartmentalisation’. A moral perspective is adopted to describe the egoism of many secondary characters, as much as in *I Confess* as in many Hitchcock’s films such as *The Lady Vanishes* and *Rear Window*. Hitchcockian characters don’t care about their fellow’s misery. In *I Confess*, every character is alone, even if they are all related to one another. For example, Pierre is married to Ruth, who doesn’t love him and tells him out loud. Ruth faces no sympathy during her confession and the humiliation of her statement ends by being of no use for Logan. During the trial, she’s betrayed by the prosecutor who doesn’t hesitate to denigrate the woman who used to be her friend. Alma finds out that her husband is a murderer and is shot by him just as she was about to denounce him. But Logan is the most lonely character: ‘Logan’s solitude is at the centre of the film’ (19 May 1957). He is constantly asked for help (by Keller, by Ruth, by inspector Larrue), but it seems that nobody can help him. That’s why his personal and moral strength is praised in these columns. The *mise en scène* is also glorified, and the critic quotes André Bazin, in order to praise Hitchcock’s ‘poetry of anguish’. Not only does the *mise en scène* create anxiety, but its ‘rigorous symmetry’ is constantly at the service of the subject. The attention to the form as a way to access the content, the seriousness of Hitchcock’s films and the theological analysis: the style of *Cahiers* is easily visible. In the end, the tone of *Radio-Cinéma-Télévision* is so complimentary that it doesn’t only show the influence of the *auteurisation*, it actively promotes it. Who, if not a Hitchcock fan would write: ‘Hitchcock possesses at the highest degree the sense of cinematographic effectiveness. From all the directors, he has the sharpest gaze’?

The 1960s

In 1962, three articles are published about *I Confess*, on the occasion of a re-opening of the film. But the critics who saw it were, again, quite disappointed.

Combat was born clandestinely in 1941 and was the press organ of the Resistance movement also called *Combat*. Deeply left-wing, it comes as no surprise that the film is dismissed as ‘Hitchcock’s most questionable film’ (12 June 62). The only positive element is the presence of Montgomery Clift, who is said to have been the rising star of many Hollywood directors, but his appearance has changed because of his accident (which happened in may 1956).

But *France Catholique* (14 June 1962) is not much warmer either. The critic also mentions Clift’s accident. They don’t hesitate to criticise the ‘big tricks’ and regret the impossibility to access Logan’s psychology, which makes him a conventional character and little comprehensible to the non-catholic public. In order to create suspense, certain doubts about his moral attitude are allowed.

The only other mention during the year 1962 is in the special Hitchcock issue of *Premier Plan*. Created in 1959 by Bernard Chardère (from *Positif*), the journal is 'typical of the anti-Hitchcock literary critic' (Prédal: 142). Therefore the journal dismisses the film, qualified as 'boring' and it might 'offend some Christians'.

The 1970s

1971 is an important year for the French reception of Hitchcock's work. *Études cinématographiques* was founded in 1960 by Henri Agel and Georges-Albert Astre. Issued at irregular intervals, it dedicates each issue (often double or triple) to a director or a theme with theoretical texts, with the intention of deepening the knowledge, with some critical distance. It is not a news magazine. The issue 84-87 (9 July 1971) is dedicated to Alfred Hitchcock. *I Confess* is mentioned a few times by René Prédal in his lengthy essay, 'La peur et le destin'. Firstly, *I Confess* illustrates the idea that 'wrong guilt' is at the core of every Hitchcock film: 'Isn't each Hitchcock film a bit like *The Wrong Man*, that is to say the story of a man accused of a crime he didn't commit?' (Prédal: 109). Here, the wrong guilt theme is linked to religion and to the secret of confession. That's why guilt is central to both Keller and Logan: Keller 'tried to free himself from his angst through confession but the fault is too big and his fear has only increased tenfold by crystallising on the possibility of being exposed, now that is he not the only one to know anymore' (Prédal: 109). Prédal goes much further, saying that Logan is guilty too because of his past affair with Ruth. He supposes that his feelings are as vivid as hers, that's why he accepts the transfer of guilt and is willing to be accused of a murder he didn't commit. Prédal goes further and affirms that Logan may have sometimes thought about committing this murder. That's why he serves a sentence, not in front of the justice of men but in front of God: 'Logan knows that God doesn't punish him for the murder, but for the forbidden love' (Prédal: 110). *I Confess* is not a film like others. Prédal thinks (like *Cahiers du Cinéma*) that Hitchcock's vision is highly Christian. He 'sees human adventure in terms of the Passion of Christ: fault, ordeal and retribution or innocence, pain and relief'. *I Confess* deals explicitly with this theme, which is detectable as hallmark in many other Hitchcock films. Logan 'is a modern embodiment of a painful Christ and humanised by the exactitude of his motivations' (Prédal: 134). He has embraced priesthood just as from vocation as out of loving despair. Keller and Logan thus incarnate an incomplete version of Christ (Logan incarnates the temptation of dying for someone else, and Keller dies like a Christ) and both of them reunited complete the Christ figure of the film.

The 1980s

When Hitchcock dies in April 1980, he is unanimously praised in France. Many specialised journals like *l'Avant-Scène cinéma*, *Études cinématographiques*, *La Revue du cinéma*, *Communications* pay

tribute to him, proving that the critics' old quarrels are over. But only a few mentions of *I Confess* are available.

In July and August 1980, *Cinématographe* publishes an issue dedicated to Hitchcock, with more than twenty articles (n°59). *I Confess* is mentioned five times, but only two of them illustrate an idea (the other ones only mention Hitchcock's collaborators). In 'L'ordre et l'insécurité du monde' by Philippe Carcassonne, Otto Keller is seen as one of the greatest evils in Hitchcock's work, because of the richness of his character. In 'Quelques idées reçues', Bruno Villien says that Hitchcock's anti-clericalism becomes a recurrent feature in his work and that it culminates in *I Confess*, where the director 'takes pleasure in having the priest being beaten up'. In January 1982, Bruno Villien talks very briefly about *I Confess* in *Cinématographe* n°74: 'Canadian society, hypocritical and bigoted, takes it for its rank. The film is filled with visual symbols, and praises celibate masochism and pleasure to legally condemn'.

In 1984, because of its re-release in theatres, critics can discover *I Confess* more than thirty years after its first release. As far as we know, six articles in 1984 and one in 1985 are available.

The weekly newspaper *Nouvel Observateur* (17 August 1984) characterises it as a 'a cast-iron melodrama' with 'a rare baroque solemnity'. The unusual angles are praised and the recurrent image of the cross is seen as the sign of the weight of the sin and the search of redemption.

Le Quotidien de Paris (23 August 1984) runs as a headline: '*I Confess*: a Hitchcock at the top'. The secret of the confession can be awkward to the spectator who may not understand why the priest could not tell Keller's secret if his own life is at stake. But altogether, the film is fascinating and 'beautifully built' on the idea that Keller is also a victim and that the murder he committed could have served Logan's interests. Montgomery Clift's acting is 'tremendous, deep, varied while still making it seem like a single strength, a moving strength that the director literally shows us: Logan walks, endlessly'.

In *Le Monde* (22 August 1984), Michel Perez (who worked for *Positif*, *Charlie Hebdo*) reminds the 1984 reader that the film was firstly misunderstood, partly because it came out after the worldwide success of *Strangers on a Train*. Indeed, our study has demonstrated that it was not appreciated neither at Cannes, or by the public, nor by the established critics, not even by Hitchcock himself (4). Moreover, Perez also reminds us that the first and only defenders of the film were *Cahiers du Cinéma*, who acclaimed it as a model of Christian films. The reason of this dislike may have been the 'outdated' intrigue that may not have pleased a public more accustomed to Hollywood's sophistication. But 'with time, the functioning of its mechanisms appears more evidently and it's a pleasure to see them work'. What are these mechanisms? The foolproof construction of each shot, the formalism, all of it takes supersedes the criminal script: 'No longer do we care about the fate of the heroes, or about the course of a criminal case whose outcome may have become indifferent to us; it is the fate of each new shot, the course of each new direction taken by the

camera'. Hitchcock's pure formalism may have been a 'poison' for the box office, but the fact remains that *I Confess* is a Hitchcockian show of the highest quality. Logan's priesthood as a way to reinforce the moral dilemma of the hero is the most powerful.

In *Télérama*, Louis Marcorelles (who also wrote in *Le Monde*, *Cahiers du Cinéma*, *Sight and Sound*) understands the 'delusions of theoretical interpretation of *Cahiers du cinéma* at the time of their Christian militancy'. The film is wobbly but moving, and not only because of the exchange of crimes. Marcorelles supposes that maybe Hitchcock was completely sincere with his film, contrary to what is said.

The weekly satirical newspaper, *Le Canard Enchaîné* (29 August 1984), shows a rather negative opinion, insisting (in a very short text) on its melodramatic and religious aspects, which make the film irritating: 'For the liturgical suspense, Hitchcock didn't have the calling'.

But, apart from this, tide has turned. Indeed, in the 1980s, Hitchcock's work is praised all over the world, the battle of the *auteur* theory has won. That's why *I Confess* is not longer dismissed. Overall, the critics at that time praise the solidity of the narrative construction, the profound originality of the *mise en scène*, and seem to put the religious dimension aside. There is no more criticism about the lack of depth of the scenario, because the depth of a Hitchcock film comes from its formal characteristics. The heritage of the *auteur* theory is, from now on, deeply ingrained in the French reception.

2000

In the 'special Hitchcock' section of the issue n°470 of *Positif*, *I Confess* is entitled to a three page article called '*I Confess*, Le mal aimé d'une filmo'. Cieutat defends vigorously what this unloved film, that he considers to be 'a flawless film'. In order to do so, he expresses the need to reevaluate this underrated film: 'If I may shock some people, I might as well maintain that this 39th film is, to me, not only one of his best, but also one of his most beautiful'. And Cieutat is dithyrambic. The scenario is exemplary. Contrary to those who preferred the initial ending showing Logan's execution just before he was exonerated (5), the exoneration of Logan by the court - for the benefit of the doubt - leads to the powerful scene of the lynching, which emphasises the Christic figure of the priest. Logan is a modern Jesus. Another element of the scenario is defended: the flashbacks during Ruth's confession. They used to be criticised because they broke the narrative and the formal unity. But, owing to Cieutat, these flashbacks are very efficient for several purposes. Not only do they create doubts about Logan's real motivation for priesthood, but they also show Ruth's adultery and love for Logan which can only backfire on him, all of this while being formally subtle. *I Confess* also has a 'permanent plastic beauty' with its expressionist beginning and its slow rhythm which immediately creates the atmosphere of moral ambiguity. The aesthetic is claustrophobic because of the darkness of the images, which symbolises the impossibility to escape. The *mise-en-scène* is meticulous and

combines to the perfection functionality and ‘search for aesthetically singularity’. Low-angle shots, flattening depth of field and de-framings incarnate the ineluctability of the situation. Cieutat also points out the ‘perfection’ of the rhythm of the dialogues and the excellence of the montage:

‘Perfection of a rhythm which is sustained from start to finish by a cutting and an editing (excellency of the storyboard) where no shot is useless, where the multiplication of shooting angles (in the trial scene), makes the spectator become a febrile Argus, where the use of ellipsis (Keller starts to confess to the priest and continues to his wife) transforms time into an infernal machine, a rhythm which literally rivets the spectators to their chairs and forces them to share the powerlessness of the hero facing an impossible dilemma’.

Of course, the acting of Clift is praised, just as it already was in 1953 (‘he has the uncertain walk of those whose soul left to wander, the hunched back of those who will yield faced with the weight of contradictions’). The rest of the cast is also applauded. Ann Baxter ‘is very beautiful and expresses with accuracy and strength her loving passion that she betrayed’. Dolly Haas (Alma’s character) ‘incarnates with a painful blending of self-effacement and grace’. The acting Karl Malden and O.E. Hasse are praised for their sobriety.

Therefore, Cieutat considers *I Confess* as ‘one of Hitchcock’s masterpieces’. These lines show a legacy from the religious and formalist perspective of *Cahiers du cinéma* in the 1950s, particularly noticeable in a journal that has had a long history of rivalry with it: ‘Hitchcock has never ceased to do and redo the same film, polishing his characters, improving his criminal circumstances, but above all making guilt and the impossibility to expiate the driving force of his stories’. Ultimately, *I Confess* being called ‘the unloved of a filmo’ shows all the contradictions of the reception of this film in the French opinion at the time of its release, claimed by ones, dismissed by others at the time of its release. And yet, like every other Hitchcock film, *I Confess* is now praised unanimously.

Footnotes

1. Due to the rare numbers of copies at that time, a film first premieres in « Première exclusivité » in Paris and sometimes, in another big city. Usually, the Première exclusivité lasts between one to six weeks (CNC). No exact numbers are available for the first release of *I Confess* in France, since it hasn’t reached the 50 best results. The source of the box office in *La Revue du Cinéma* is not specified. By comparison with other Hitchcock films for which numbers are available on the box office of the CNC (*To Catch a Thief* and *Rear Window*), one can conclude that the numbers from *La Revue du Cinéma* concern the Première exclusivité and the rereleased, both in Paris.
2. See Brisset, Tifenn, « Hitchcock and *L’Écran français*, at the roots of the *Politique des auteurs?* », in. Robert Kapsis (ed.), *Re-viewing Hitchcock: New Critical Perspectives* (Bloomsbury, to be published).

3. Sadoul wrote several reviews about Hitchcock in *Positif* and was very fierce. See Brisset Tifenn, « Poussah, tricheur, mineur ! La réception critique d'Hitchcock dans la revue *Positif* : 1952-1989 » (dir.) Frédéric Cavé, (D')Après Hitchcock – Reprises, théories, lectures. Éditions The Searcher, 2022, p. 296-322.
4. Hitchcock: 'Actually, this film should not have been filmed' (Truffaut: 170)
5. See David Sterritt, 'From Transatlantic to Warner', in Thomas Leitch and Leland Poague (ed.), *A Companion to Alfred Hitchcock* (Chichester: The Wiley-Blackwell Companions to Film Directors, 2011) p. 323 : 'Unlike those films, however, *I Confess* was to be a tragedy, with the protagonist unjustly put to death and only then being publicly absolved. In addition, the priest would be burdened not only with the confession he cannot reveal but also with his own secret of having fathered a child before taking on his vocation'.

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Biographical note

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Hitchcock's Catholicism

Stéphane Duckett

'When we think of any performance we must never ignore the religious element.' Jean Renoir: *My Life and My Film*

In 1973 Hitchcock was asked by his former school newspaper whether he thought of himself as a religious man. He replied enigmatically: *'Religious, that is a pretty wide term. It is a question of one's behaviour pattern and a claim to be religious rests entirely on your conscience, whether you believe in it or not. A Catholic attitude was indoctrinated into me. After all I was born a Catholic, I went to a Catholic school and I now have a conscience with lots of trials over belief.'*(1).

Hitchcock's response is telling in two ways. First, that he does not altogether answer the question. Like many Europeans who experienced either directly or indirectly the horrors of two World Wars their faith was sorely challenged and that maybe what he was referring to with 'trials over belief' (2). But as some religious-social commentators have noted (3) many Britons as a consequence retained the customs as well as values of their faith if not the more ethereal aspects of their beliefs. That Hitchcock maintained his Catholicism as a moral compass with respect to his expressed values throughout his life I believe is very much in evidence in a number of ways, particularly with his TV work.

The second element worth noting in his reply was his first remark : *'It is a question of one's behaviour pattern.'* His choice of words is significant here.

St Ignatius was a Jesuit school. Founded on the 16th century teachings of Ignatius of Loyola, the central tenet of this brand of Catholicism is the notion of *effective love*. Put crudely it argues that belief is not enough, but must be accompanied by action, but not action in promoting belief directly so much as a love for Jesus and his teachings. It is for this reason that Jesuit priests are often referred to, within religious circles at least, as hyphenated priests, that is they usually have some active profession alongside their religious commitment, often in teaching but also medicine and other socially engaged professions.

There are several other distinguishing traits to Jesuit teaching. The emphasis on effective love and action has often meant that enormous value is placed on working - a trait that was very much in evidence with Hitchcock throughout his very prolific life. Whilst the Jesuits unsurprisingly became one of the wealthier orders as a consequence, the ostentatious display of wealth was to be eschewed - indeed a vow of poverty was required of a Jesuit. This did not, however, mean an abnegation of worldly engagement but quite the contrary, as I shall explain shortly.

What it did mean were certain quite explicit proscriptions with respect to dress, for instance. Jesuit priests who went out of country were expected to a degree to accommodate local dress customs, or at least acknowledge local dress in some way, but more importantly dress down: dark and modest (conservative) clothing.

Much has been made by some Hitchcock commentators about his clothing habits. He would make a point of showing his wardrobe to visitors with uniform suits of slightly varying sizes to accommodate his volatile weight. The plainness of his clothing can be understood in this context.

Charlotte Chandler was at dinner with Hitchcock and Henri Langlois who were amusing themselves by looking around at the other customers and trying to decide how they would cast them in a murder mystery. When they were trying to identify who would be the villain Hitchcock said, '*See that man? He's wearing expensive shoes. You can tell a great deal about a man from his shoes.*' (Note the introduction of Bruno and Guy in *Strangers on a Train*).

From the Jesuit perspective this was not about a denial of worldly pleasures but simply an empathetic regard or compassion for those in need in not highlighting one's wealth. Jesuit priests were not expected to abuse their bodies as an expression of penitence. Quite the contrary, Jesuits were/are very much about the corporeal realization of God's will (his love) and not a denial or renunciation of the corporeal world.

Hitchcock came out of a background where there was the threat of poverty as can be seen from the Booth Poverty Maps. He knew the devastation that poverty, as he had witnessed in the East End, could bring. Undoubtedly part of his work ethic was also informed by this concern and as a consequence both he and Alma accumulated a considerable fortune (they also gave away a lot, for instance, the vineyards on his Santa Cruz ranch to the Catholic church), however by Hollywood standards they did not live ostentatiously at all. This in fact became a problem later in life when they both needed the presence of carers- their house was not large enough to accommodate this.

Work for the Jesuit priest is not for its own sake, but must be in aid to his neighbour and thus is contained in the prescription of *service and humility*. The humility however had an added dimension in that it was not just about appearance or the expression of material wealth, but with respect to your conduct. This *self-forgetfulness*, as it is sometimes referred to, is contained in the phrase *men for others*. Just as Jesus experienced contempt and was made to suffer humiliation, a good Jesuit must similarly in striving to express selfless love turn the other cheek to ridicule. This has perhaps been the hardest part for many commentators on Hitchcock to understand; his at times extraordinary capacity for selfridicule and genuine humility. Given his accomplishment it has appeared disingenuous to some, but I believe McGilligan had it right when he notes '*Hitchcock was the rare director who could stand to blame himself. In later years, he would admit on more than one occasion that he committed mistakes. Had never conquered the material.*' (p 184). Truffaut and others also made similar observations of Hitchcock. Unfortunately for Hitchcock however on

occasion the self-ridiculing may very well have contributed to the failure of some critics - particularly English - to take him seriously (4). This is why it becomes all the more fascinating to try to understand why Chabrol and Rohmer did take Hitchcock seriously with the publication of their book on him in 1957.

Chabrol and Rohmer recognised in Hitchcock a Catholic artist, but I believe what they meant by this has more to do with his morality than his overt faith. To support this contention they cite an interview of Hitchcock by the French film critic André Bazin (quoted in Chabrol & Rohmer p.83) *'L'ancien élève des Jésuites, a de nombreux moments, a tout d'un Janseniste qui s'ignore, qui ignore meme le terme: <what is Jansenist?>'* (The former Jesuit pupil seemed ignorant of his own faith to the point of not knowing the term Jansenism.)

However, that Hitchcock had not heard of Jansenism is not at all surprising. Jansenism has, with its central notion of preordination, far more to do with Calvinism than any branch of Catholicism arguably and as such would not have featured in a Jesuit education except in a theological class as an example of heretical thinking. Durnat is simply wrong in describing Hitchcock's films as *'Calvinist machines, the suspense lies in their predestinatory operations'* (5). Quite the contrary, the suspense lies in anything is possible! Bazin believed he had detected Jansenism in some of Hitchcock's themes. Durnat explained it as the influence of being brought up in a Protestant country and, indeed, repeatedly refers to Hitchcock as Protestant. However, here again I suspect what Bazin was responding to were the class related themes that have preoccupied Hitchcock through much of his cinema.

When Truffaut first contacted Hitchcock to propose a book length series of interviews in a letter (June 2 1962) it clearly took Hitchcock by surprise. He wrote back to say that Truffaut's letter had its recipient in tears. Truffaut's attention to Hitchcock was first drawn by his fellow *Cahier du Cinema* contributors Chabrol and Rohmer. They in turn were inspired by Alexandre Astruc's article in the very first issue of *Cahier* in 1951. Astruc, along with Maurice Scherer (Rohmer's pen name), were the first to suggest that Hitchcock needed to be taken seriously as a director. Rohmer (under his pen name) wrote *'Les amants du Capricorne comme un eblouissement au point de donner tout Stromboli* [the Rossellini film starring Bergman that came out at the same time] *pour ce seul plan d'Under Capricorn ou le visage d'une femme est tout a coup plus vaste que la mer'* (Just one frame showing a woman's face as vast as the sea from *Under Capricorn* is worth more than the whole of *Stromboli* -6).

Reception for Hitchcock however in French critical circles was not all praise. André Bazin was ambivalent at best; whilst acknowledging his brilliance, Bazin saw no moral depth or message at all. He saw Hitchcock as a bit of a charlatan, and a sadistic one at that. What was it therefore that prompted this in some ways most improbable wave of praise? Ever since his days at Gainsborough it appears that Hitchcock was very much associated with commercial cinema and that did not change

with time. Indeed when the Truffaut interviews first came out a number of British critics ridiculed both Truffaut and Hitchcock for this attempt to raise Hitchcock to a 'higher critical plane'.

There were several factors that Chabrol and Rohmer identified. Whilst they clearly highlighted his Catholic background it is not central to their 'ownership' of Hitchcock. The moral dimension undoubtedly appealed to them. The fact that at the time they wrote their book Hitchcock had just completed *The Wrong Man*, a film that quite obviously was not produced with monetary gain in mind as they pointed out, supported their initial impression. But it was also the complexity of moral issues that comes through in Hitchcock's work so effectively that drew them to it. France was a country that was at that time very much struggling with its recent past: the complicity of French conduct during the war and the futility of much of the violence that had ravaged France during the occupation. It was Hitchcock's non-judgmental stance and openness to acknowledging the morally fraught nature of our lives that caught Chabrol and Rohmer's attention. The concern was not with passing judgement so much as highlighting how life circumstances can sometimes lead to moral conflict. What sense do we make of it? It was Hitchcock's deeply humanitarian and non-judgmental approach, to the point of making for instance even Nazi Alex (Claude Rains in *Notorious*) appear pitiful and to a degree sympathetic, that most profoundly appealed to Chabrol and Rohmer and post-Vichy France. As they expressed it: '*Ou est le crime, ou est le droit? Ou la vérité, ou l'erreur? Ne jugez point... vous n'avez pas le droit de juger*' (p 81) is how they characterize Hitchcock (Where is the crime or the right? The truth or the error? Don't judge, you don't have the right).

Chabrol and Rohmer were also clearly impressed by the humanity of Hitchcock's wartime resistance films and in so doing they are making a point of identifying with Hitchcock's Catholicism.

What justification can there be for this claim for Hitchcock's Catholicism outside of his adherence to custom? Sadly with English (and American) commentators all too often the focus on Hitchcock's Jesuit education has been on the 'paddle bat', ignoring the fact that a Catholic education, particularly a Jesuit one, is a lot more complicated than can be summarized as simply violence towards children (7). Part of the difficulty has been that Hitchcock did not speak much about his Catholicism (8). There were many reasons for this, some having to do with the very real anti-papist attitudes Hitchcock grew up with that still permeated to a degree well into Hitchcock's adult life (9). The other aspect was that Hitchcock viewed it as a very private matter - this in itself is a central aspect of Jesuit teaching. Whilst there are proscriptions, some quite detailed, which exist for the conduct of a Jesuit it is wholly left to the privacy of the individual to realize their own path to effective love.

Hitchcock has been described as deeply pessimistic. '*How can we live [life] is up to us. We can live in a state of constant anxiety about the future, always afraid that in the long run the bad guy wins, injustice triumphs, and mankind will destroy itself. Or we can use the gift creatively, help men of goodwill to win, justice to triumph, and believe that the drama of man must end in happiness. In*

other words, we can live in a state of chronic despair, or we can live with faith in the future, even though it is hidden from us. Yes the best thing about the future is that it comes one day at a time. And I thank heaven daily that tomorrow does not belong to any man. It belongs to God.'(10)

For the Jesuit that there is suffering in the world is a given. The way to counter such suffering from a Jesuit point of view is to *'embrace God's love through the sacraments of the church and lose oneself in working for others'* (11). The path you chose to realize this is left to you to decide. You arrive at this personal realization through what are called *examine of conscience*. Ignatius designed month long sets of recitations to be repeated each year to help in this process. Hitchcock's biographer, McGilligan notes that whilst Friday confessionals were optional at St Ignatius College, the yearly all school 3-day retreat for spiritual reflection was not optional. Whatever path the individual meditation might arrive at from these retreats it had to arrive at an activity which would seek to influence the world in embracing the values and teachings of Jesus.

One very curious consequence to Jesuit prioritizing teaching is, oddly enough, the enormous interest they had with theatre and entertainment. As McDannell notes *'[Jesuits] used theatre as a venue for cultivating the whole person [i.e; mind and body]. ... As early as 1565... Jesuits not only wrote plays, they also produced dramas dominated by special effects and sophisticated set designs.'*(p.210)

Dance was also an important aspect of this. Jesuit ballet masters travelled from Jesuit school to Jesuit school *'since this dance was performed on magnificent Jesuit sets, ballet became equated with both dazzling movements and stage settings. Jesuit theatre and ballet sought to be flashier than the secular theatre of the day in order to lure influential people into considering Christian values. If biblical drama did not move and motivate, what good was it? Who would be persuaded to be pious by cheap special effects? The creators of Jesuit theatre... all understood that theatre must engage the emotions... Jesuits understood the power of entertainment'* (McDannell cited).

Is there evidence that Hitchcock used his entertainment to forward a moral message in the same way Jesuits had exploited the theatre? In his preamble to his first Hitchcock Presents TV episode, *Breakdown*, Hitchcock says *'in each of our stories we strive to tell a story or tell a 214 moral'*. Or again in *The orderly world of Mr Appleby* (1956) *'once again we have tried to make the world a better place to live'* or in *Never Again* (1956) about the problems of alcohol *'If this helps somebody somewhere...'*

It was also very much in evidence with his cinema, the difference with his television was that, as already noted, he enjoyed a degree of freedom to express himself more forcefully in a way that would have been not possible with his cinema.

Footnotes

1. McGilligan p 20
2. see also F3080: Memory of the Camps
3. Voas 2010
4. Wood famously posed this question in 1965. He had a lot of difficulty getting his article published. It was turned down by Sight & Sound before finally finding its way onto Cahier du Cinema.
5. LaValley p 72
6. quoted in D. Rabourdin's introduction to Chabrol and Rohmer, 1986 edition.
7. Paul Merton 2011 Introduction to 39 Steps live presentation at the Barbican.
8. There is one mention in Gottlieb's collected Hitchcock writings p 141, and that is very indirect.
9. For instance note the difficulties Kennedy's presidential campaign had over his Catholic background in the late 1950s.
10. Hitchcock 'Would you like to know your future?'-1959 as cited in Gottlieb p.141.
11. McDannell p. 215.

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Robert Lepage's *Le Confessionnal* and Recalibrating Alfred Hitchcock's *I Confess*

Sidney Gottlieb

Hitchcock's influence is of course visible far and wide in films, but there are very few examples where a Hitchcock film is written into a later work as deeply, extensively, imaginatively, and provocatively as is the case with Robert Lepage's use of *I Confess* (1953) in *Le Confessionnal* (1995). My focus is on how Lepage's inventive adaptation and reconstruction of *I Confess* changes, expands, and enhances how we approach and understand Hitchcock's film.¹ While there has been some very valuable critical commentary on *I Confess* – commentary that I rely heavily on in my approach – and while some of the established lines of critical analysis are well worth pursuing further, I think that in general we have a foreshortened approach to and understanding of the film. In particular, attention to Catholic theology, the vocation of the priesthood, and the seal of the confessional have overshadowed attention to what else there is in the film. The Catholic law of silence is something more than what I am tempted to puckishly say is a MacGuffin, the pretext rather than the text of the film, but is perhaps something less than a matter of overriding Ultimate Concern and uncontested value that it is often assumed to be. Hitchcock was right to worry about a limiting of appeal if his film was if not exclusively then fundamentally about a fine point of Catholic doctrine. He told François Truffaut that 'the trouble with *I Confess*' is that it rests so heavily on a Catholic knowledge of and concern for 'the secret of the confessional' that 'the Protestants, the atheists, and the others' all think of as 'Ridiculous!' – and for that reason 'we shouldn't have made the picture' (1983: 204). But the film in fact has an often underappreciated power and resonance and meaning because it includes but goes far beyond that theme. Our

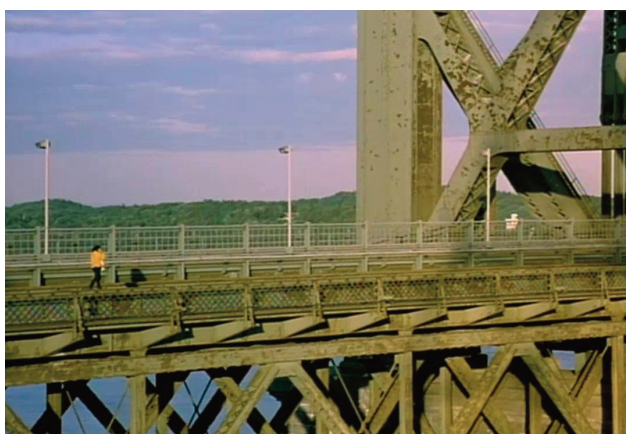


Figure 1

conference program promises to give us extensive looks at the secular and non-theological as well as the Catholic in *I Confess*. Perhaps at the end we may have a sense that these elements don't necessarily have to cancel each other out, but do need to be rebalanced.

I've chosen several areas to focus on illustrating how *Le Confessionnal* contributes to a revisionary understanding of *I Confess*.² First, *Le Confessionnal* is a model of the value of the mantra of yesteryear that has faded a bit: always historicise. History is the subject and substance of *Le Confessionnal*. The film opens and closes with a voiceover announcing that 'In the city where I was born, the past carries the present like a child on its shoulders', and when the film ends with an actual presentation of a man carrying a child (although in his arms, not on his shoulders) on a precarious walk over a suspension bridge, heading toward some unknown future (fig. 1), what may strike some as unimaginatively literal strikes me as a touchingly effective and affective moment very much in keeping with the effort throughout the film to turn the metaphoric and abstract into the concrete and experiential – something that Hitchcock was a master of, especially when it comes to personalizing and embodying the weight of history and what suspense looks and feels like.

The voiceover at the beginning of *Le Confessionnal* further specifies the historical 'moment' of the film as characterised by three things: the 'arrival of TV', significantly a force not only of



Figure 2

modernisation but one that magnifies the impact of history; the reelection of Maurice Duplessis as premier of Quebec, a figure standing for repressive backward looking authoritarianism and a period of difficult tensions and transitions; and the 'presence of Alfred Hitchcock'. *I Confess* is deeply woven into *Le Confessionnal* not only as a film but as a historic series of events, what Lepage repeatedly refers to in interviews as a myth – not that it is fabricated or untrue but that it is foundational and constantly referenced and renarrated. While *Le Confessionnal* focuses extensively on personal history – the lives of its characters – all this is shown in the context of larger happenings, with context being defined not, as it often is, as background, but as part of a continuity and interpenetration of the personal and the public, the micro and the macro. One quick example: Pierre (Lothaire Bluteau) goes to China, to study art, and after he returns, China goes to him, on television in his room showing scenes of mass demonstrations and repression at Tiananmen Square (fig. 2), in video clips of fiery clashes and a news segment narrated by real-life newscaster Renee Hudon, who

played one of the young girl witnesses in *I Confess*. The film shows that the lives of individuals are exemplary – in some ways they represent history; that they are shaped by history – nearly every scene of the film dramatises external pressures on individual action; and that in fact the lives of individuals are not just in history: they are history. Lepage’s comment on his method in a later



Figure 3

theatrical presentation, *The Far Side of the Moon* (2000), describes his approach in *Le Confessionnal* as well: ‘I’m trying to tell history with a capital H through histories with a small h’ (Badham 2018).

History is everywhere in *Le Confessionnal*, on and beneath the surface. The following is one among numerous examples, but a particularly important one. The film calls attention to a variety of oppressive and constricting social and institutional forces in Quebec, especially in the parts of the film set in 1952, but with a power that extends even to the 1989 setting, a power perpetuated and magnified by memory, our personal historian. In many ways the film is intended to be a portrait of the aspects of the era of Duplessis that rightly earned the designation of it as *La Grande Noirceur* (‘The Great Darkness’). (I haven’t come across any indication that Lepage was aware of it, but Hitchcock met with Duplessis in person as part of the festivities preceding the premiere of *I Confess* in Quebec [‘Quebec is Going All Out for First Gala Premiere’], and Duplessis actually makes a brief appearance in the film: a portrait of him hangs on the wall in the background of a scene in Inspector Larrue’s (Karl Malden) office, as if presiding over and authorizing the detective’s intrusive investigation and interrogations (fig. 3). Hitchcock’s film is a dramatisation and critique of a ‘great darkness’ set in Quebec, but as I go on to argue, his eyes are very much on a darkness elsewhere as well.) Especially relevant is that then and now the name Duplessis would specifically call to mind, among other things, the ‘Duplessis Orphans’.³ Between 1949 and 1956 more than twenty thousand children ‘of unmarried, often young, women’ were born in Quebec province, and there was a policy of forced institutionalisation of these children, sending them to places, often run by the Catholic Church, that were frequently havens of abuses of all kinds. A critical background to Rachel’s (Suzanne Clément) distress and ultimate suicide is surely the fact

that at this time ‘It was not uncommon for unwed mothers to be shamed into surrendering their children to the church; a powerful stigma was attached to unmarried motherhood, and abortion and the sale of contraception were criminal offences’ (‘Duplessis Orphans’). Rachel’s individual crisis is powerfully dramatic and moving, and takes on extra meaning when it is seen as a crisis forced by shameful institutional conditions around her that could and should have been otherwise. A Catholic Church abuse scandal as a context for a film about confession? This is inescapable as we watch *Le Confessionnal*, and perhaps unexpectedly but powerfully relevant and resonant in contemporary times as we watch *I Confess*, attuned to how it ironises, problematises, and challenges the sanctity of the seal of confession and the valorisation of secrecy.

Le Confessionnal helps alert us to the ways that history is behind and in *I Confess*, and not just as an abstract force but as a topical, although not always obvious presence. The general invisibility of and disregard for this continues to surprise me. Bear with me for a little exercise: Imagine a film made in America in the early 1950s that focuses on two generally sympathetic characters being relentlessly pressured by insensitive and not particularly likeable detectives and prosecutors to reveal intimate details about their lives and their relationship, naming names (who were you with and when?) and revealing private details that would hurt each one of them and others as well. This pressure soon seems not only incessant but purposeless, providing information that is not serving any real use, and the process is so excruciatingly painful and unfair that one of those forced to



Figure 4



Figure 5

confess tearfully cries out in protest, making us question the decency of the proceedings (fig. 4). Then the other person forced to confess is judged ‘not guilty’ but has had his character and reputation irreparably devastated by the proceedings of the law and is publicly harassed and assaulted (fig. 5). Does any likely, even obvious contemporary historical reference point come to mind?

For many years, viewers and critics did not make any connections between *I Confess* and the various HUAC investigations, the mechanism of the Blacklist, or the climate of repressive surveillance and questioning that was a notable presence at the time of the making of the film even before the McCarthy hearings of the year following the release of the film. These socio-political elements are displaced, not overt, but they are there, readable and essential parts of the film. More than forty years ago William Rothman noted perceptively and succinctly that the story of *I Confess* ‘about the courage and despair of a man scorned for his refusal to testify under interrogation is a thinly veiled allegory’ of the historical – and hysterical – circumstances I just outlined (1982: 248), and thirty years after that Robert Genter (2012) followed with a painstakingly researched and persuasively argued essay expanding on that point. But this more than sub-text is still not routinely integrated into discussions of and critical work on the film. Hitchcock’s comments (not to mention those of Truffaut and then Eric Rohmer and Claude Chabrol) hold sway, and tend to make us think of *I Confess* as primarily akin to, say, a film like *Diary of a Country Priest* (Robert Bresson, 1951). Looked at with a fuller awareness of its historicity, it may equally call to mind, say, *On the Waterfront* (Elia Kazan, 1954), as a fable of conscience and confession specifically echoing contemporary circumstances.

Looking at Hitchcock socio-politically and historically alerts us to another important dimension of *I Confess* that is usually passed over quickly: the significance of the war (a topic examined in detail by James Bogdanski in his conference presentation [2023]). Father Logan’s (Montgomery Clift) experiences in the war are treated briefly and elliptically, and the war as it appears in Ruth’s (Anne Baxter) narrative seems to be not a cataclysmic worldwide disaster but a

personal inconvenience, basically an interruption of her relationship with Logan. But even though we don't know the details – we see Logan vigorously telling Ruth about his experiences, but don't hear what he is saying – the war has left its mark on him. He comes back a substantially changed person, and while there is some buoyancy in him in his reunion with Ruth, he soon conveys a sense of seriousness and torment, silence and distance, determined separation from intimacy, and resolve to become a priest. The few references in the trial to his time as a battlefield soldier awarded a medal are intended to portray him as a person capable of violence and therefore a



Figure 6

plausible suspect for the murder of Villette (Ovila Legare). To me they more plausibly hint that what he may have seen and may have done in the war have had a traumatic effect on him, and that he is troubled by secrets he is keeping that go far beyond the information that Otto Keller (O. E. Hasse) has confessed to him.

Specific details confirming this are elusive, in part because they are subtly allusive. For example, a common element in a war film revolves around what a returning soldier does with their uniform. We tend to think of Father Logan in his cassock, but that is not the only signifier of his identity: he also wears part of his military clothing when he is painting in the church quarters, a task that Father Millais (Charles Andre) jokingly but defensively suggests is mistakenly assumed by the suspicious detectives to indicate an attempt 'to hide grime with paint' (fig. 6).⁴ However subtly and suggestively, we are alerted to his military service as an essential part of Logan's backstory – in a film premised on the insistence that backstories don't stay in the background. In Ruth's voiceover narration, when she describes meeting him on his return, in uniform, her comment has both an immediate and retrospective component: 'He had changed, I suppose, but I didn't notice it'. Film historians routinely note the complex and lasting imprint of war experiences on films of the 1940s and 1950s, often literally in stories of returning soldiers, as in *The Best Years of Our Lives* (William Wyler, 1946), and also more generally in noir or noir-inflected films depicting or set against a background of anxiety, violence, and trauma. *I Confess*

can usefully be grouped with such films. It may also in some ways be comparable to *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (Robert Wiene, 1920), a film that presupposes and registers the traumatic effects of war without ever directly mentioning the war.

The second broad area I want to address may seem a bit paradoxical: Lepage fashions *Le Confessionnal* quite consciously as a multi-generic film, even as he conceptualises and orchestrates his film as fundamentally a melodrama. Lepage's stage works are notoriously mixed-media, genre bending, and adventurously eclectic, and it is no surprise that his films are all this as well. He uses a wonderful phrase for the hybridity of *Le Confessionnal*, describing it as 'this spaghetti of films. . . . What you are going to see is more than a film. Actually it's four or five or six films'. *Le Confessionnal* is a mystery and suspense thriller, and plays with both Hitchcockian and quite self-consciously anti-Hitchcockian forms of mystery and suspense; it is a historical fable, at times a *cinema a clef*, as it were, with personal and autobiographical elements; at various points it is an experimental art film, with what we might call surrealistic special effects; it uses contemporary music so prominently that sections of it seem much like a music video; there are efforts throughout and especially at the end to frame the backstory and the search to reveal the backstory as mythological (a quality which Lepage in one interview associates with Hitchcock);⁵ it is a romance, with multiple love stories; and finally, all these various genres are set within the very capacious frame of melodrama.

It is not exactly a startling revelation that *I Confess* is several kinds of films: a Hitchcockian mystery thriller; a film noir, an association played up in the trailer and promotional posters and blurbs about the film; a war film, as I have just argued; and as the most influential critics have insisted, a Catholic fable about an exchange of guilt and drama about the strains of faith, especially when divine law and church practice make demands that seem incommensurate with human values and inclinations. Additionally, some of the best commentary on the film recognises that melodrama is at the core of *I Confess*: I am thinking in particular of enormously insightful and expansive essays by Victor Perkins (2000) and Murray Pomerance (2004). But there is still a need to push this approach to the film as a multi-layered melodrama further.

Richard Allen's conference paper (2023) is a great help in expanding our understanding of *I Confess* as a melodrama, thematically, structurally, and tonally. I hope that my emphasis on some secular components of melodrama will balance his very interesting analysis of Christian melodrama. My focus will be on two key non-religious markers of melodrama evident in both *I Confess* and *Le Confessionnal*: a dramatisation of a full array of problematic family and interpersonal relations, with a particular concentration on painfully and disappointingly constraining and oppressive domestic as well as social circumstances, all presented at a high emotional pitch; and an emphasis on the home as both a setting and embodiment of values that are cherished and under attack, but also, as modern writers on melodrama call attention to, often

critiqued and reconfigured. Traditional melodramas emphasise the precarious life circumstances and victimisation of women, but one of the particularly intriguing developments in the deployment and study of the genre is the ‘male melodrama’, highly visible in both films.

Lepage uses multiple settings in *Le Confessionnal*, but goes beyond *I Confess* in identifying the home as a key location, locus of problems and concerns, and focal point for the actions of the



Figure 7



Figure 8

characters. The establishing shots at the beginning of the film show the family home, both in the past and the present, alerting us that much of what follows will revolve around portraying not only what happened in the home then (fig. 7) but what happens in the home now (fig. 8), especially the effort to reimagine the past, understand it, and survive. Recurrent events are leaving and returning home, and attempts to redecorate the home and ultimately to reconfigure the home and the family.

Conventional homes are so filled with tension, bullying, violence, and other kinds of abuse that the alternative home and family structure that Manon (Anne-Marie Cadieux) maintains for her son with Marc (Patrick Goyette), despite the trappings and red flags of dysfunction, presents a not entirely ineffective environment of real care and concern, constructed under duress and out of far from optimal materials (fig. 9). We also see homes that are not really homes: for example, the hotel setting



Figure 9

that is so prominent becomes particularly meaningful when seen as an ersatz home. And Marc's homelessness becomes especially significant and poignant against a background of homes that are in reality, to use the currently common shorthand, toxic. But the notion of home as a longed-for ideal persists. Real change is difficult, but the possibility of achieving this ideal surfaces at the end of the film, which shows a reconfigured family, with Pierre replacing but also embodying Marc as his son's caretaker, companion, and guide – father, if you will. The film pointedly does not show a physical home here, but perhaps allows for the possibility that a home of some kind lies across the bridge they are walking on (see again fig. 1). The suggestion, here and elsewhere, is that what is most valuable about a home is a beneficent state of mind and mutually beneficial relationships, not necessarily a place or edifice.

Recognizing home as one of the key settings in *I Confess* should reaffirm the importance of Ruth and her domestic situation as far more than secondary. But there is resistance to this. Recall that Ruth basically disappears from the film in the account of Hitchcock and Truffaut and Rohmer and Chabrol, and this has certainly contributed to her effacement in critical discussions. (The essays by Perkins [2000] and Pomerance [2004] are notable exceptions to this.) But properly understood, *I Confess* is Ruth's story as well as Logan's, and in ways that go beyond the fact that her story is connected with his.



Figure 10

The ‘places’ of *I Confess* are primarily the hotel, the church, the city streets, the offices of the police investigator, and the courtroom, not domestic spaces. And Logan, rarely out of the frame and frequently in close shot, is clearly the character we follow most constantly and closely. But the few scenes in Ruth’s home are critically important, establishing it as a site of tension and disappointment, distracting frivolity, uneasy compromise rather than fulfillment, and separation and distance rather than intimacy (fig. 10). Perkins is right to identify all this as the familiar ground and circumstances of melodramas like *Letter from an Unknown Woman* (Max Ophüls, 1948), which are structured to deeply engage us with the character under such stress (2000: 37); and Pomerance’s insistence that ‘The secular confession of Ruth Grandfort is the dominant confession in *I Confess*’ prompts and supports a reorientation of our understanding of the film (2004: 178).⁶ What her confession – actually multiple and ongoing confessions – reveals is how her life revolves around romantic love and the ensuing roller-coaster ride of exhilaration and painful disappointment. (*I Confess* is perhaps unexpectedly linked to *Vertigo* [1958] in this way as well as by its focus on the often damaging persistence of the past.) For long moments we forget



Figure 11



Figure 12

completely about the seal of the confessional, concentrate on matters of the heart, and follow a character who solicits our engagement – in marked contrast with the parts of the film where we follow a character who resists certain kinds of engagement, audience and otherwise.

Ruth's adds not only another 'story' to the film – along with Logan's and Keller's and, let's not forget, Alma's (Dolly Haas) – but another ending that puts Logan's ending in perspective. Ruth comes to a resolution, and the painful and brave process of confessing painful experiences is cathartic as well as revelatory: she arrives at a clearer sense of herself and of Logan, the impossibility of her love for Logan, and the real value of her relationship with her husband (Roger Dann), based on a much more solid and satisfying foundation than romantic love. When she smiles and says simply 'Pierre, take me home' this is a moment of real accomplishment and triumph, not a capitulation to convention (fig. 11). Much in contrast with this, Logan's 'triumph' is at best equivocal, and from my perspective hollow. Though he is finally free from the complex burden of Keller's secret, the final shot of Logan is enigmatic (fig. 12). Our response to his expression is a real litmus test of our overall take on the film, especially whether we think the ending ratifies the sacred seal (and ordeal) of the confessional or further complicates and challenges it, heightening our awareness of the need for solutions beyond absolution.



Figure 13

I'll conclude with brief comments on the central topic of confession, particularly how it is defined, dramatised, and commented on in both films. I offer a cluster of observations, revolving around two topics: the way the films ironise confession and elaborate on its multiplicity.

The 'confessional' referred to in Lepage's title turns out to be plural and sardonic: the title card of the film shows a straight razor pushed through the initial 'o' in *Le Confessionnal*, foreshadowing that what follows is no Sunday school or doctrinaire take on a religious rite (fig. 13). And it is part of the witty design of the film to liken the literal church confessional booth to numerous other sites, many of them unexpected. This desecration of confession goes hand in hand with the insistence that conventional confession in the church is, to say the least, troublesome, and

that other sites might be preferable. Confessions occur in lots of other places than the church, sometimes less problematically so. Referring to the private booths in the club where Manon dances unclothed for men for money as a confessional may allude to both the tarnished notion of confession tied to a corrupt and abusive church and an ironic appreciation of the value of naked truth and honesty about sexuality and desire. Throughout the film we sense that confession is a powerful urge and need that must take various forms and happen in numerous settings. So there are confessions in cars, taxicabs, and gay bathhouses, framed as sometimes drunken, sometimes desperate conversations. Lepage balances a dual take on confession in a sometimes vertiginous way, with quick shifts from confession envisioned as a potentially therapeutic resource to startling visions of how confession can accelerate and deepen rather than resolve problems. It does not save Rachel and Marc from suicide. Knowing and telling the truth does not always set one free – more than coincidentally, this is a key bit of Hitchcockian wisdom, dramatised recurrently in his films. And Lepage recognises and dramatises a deeply sinister side of confession: that it is a mode of power. For all the beauty and pageantry of the physical church and its rites and services, the film pictures the church as basically a seat of crass rather than salvific control that does not demonstrably serve its members well and victimises even its own inner circle, in the form of the young priest Massicotte (Normand Daneau), who sincerely though unsuccessfully tries to use confession as a beneficent force. Ironically, later in life he proves to be the prime example of someone using confession for manipulation, control, and personal gain.

I Confess shows Hitchcock's deeply perceptive understanding of the variety, the dynamics, the promise, and the abuses of confession. In this film he does not go nearly as far as Lepage in describing a wide territory for confession – in other films he does⁷ – but he establishes several types and settings and plays intriguing variations on a theme in the different profiles he presents: of Keller, first seeking relief and then coming to exercise a demonic power by exorcizing his secret; of Logan, wrestling of course with the strains of bearing someone else's secrets – Keller's and also Ruth's – but also plagued by his own secrets and inability to confess; and of Ruth, an essential 'center of consciousness' in the film, whose process of confession is the most protracted, dramatic, revelatory, and therapeutic.

Hitchcock does not deny the positive value of confession: the healing power of truth about oneself recognised and testified in the presence of another; confession as a mode of bonding and as a confirmation and creator of trust; and confession as a vehicle for forgiveness, not necessarily invoking and involving the divine. (Hitchcock also gravitates to confession for artistic reasons, because of how it lends itself to drama, narrativity, and emotionality, all key components of his cinema.) But in *I Confess* he has a particular interest and insight into the ineffectiveness of and especially the abuses of confession, and it is not only or even primarily the church that presides over the latter. Hitchcock examines the tensions and complexities of making and hearing

confessions. But perhaps the most chilling moments of the film are his dramatisations of not only the forcing but the framing of confessions: Inspector Larrue and Chief Prosecutor Willy Robertson (Brian Aherne) frequently ventriloquise confessions for Ruth and Logan. Hitchcock has rarely been so perceptively Orwellian – perhaps not surprisingly in a film made during a time when some conditions in American society were so palpably Orwellian.

My closing words will be very brief, in part because this presentation is an interim report on work in progress. I hope even my preliminary comments based on a side-by-side view of *I Confess* and *Le Confessionnal* prove to be a useful conversation starter as we turn more attention to a film that has often been somewhat narrowly examined. As I have tried to demonstrate, further work on the film might usefully recall the truth of the saying ‘Trust the tale, not the teller’: Hitchcock the teller, especially in commenting on the film as a theological fable, is in some ways a mis-director, whether intentionally or not. Looking at these two films together also illustrates how much value there is in trusting the retelling of a tale: *Le Confessionnal* embodies, supports, and inspires valuable new ways of understanding and appreciating *I Confess* as about much more than a Catholic priest’s spiritual and vocational crisis.

Acknowledgments

This essay is a revised and expanded version, with added illustrations and references, of my presentation at Alfred Hitchcock and *I Confess* 70 Years On: An International Symposium, University College London, 7-8 September 2023. I am enormously grateful to the encouragement and support of the event coordinator, Stephane Duckett, which included scheduling a screening of *Le Confessionnal* as part of the program. I have benefited greatly from comments by others at the symposium on Lepage’s film, on my presentation, and also from the other papers presented and the discussions and conversations that followed, all of which has substantially expanded the foundation we work from in our ongoing work on Hitchcock’s challenging film. Numerous exchanges with Mark Padilla and Randall Spinks about these two films have been very helpful to me. Eric Monder sent me a copy of *Le Confessionnal* when I could not find one, allowing for repeated viewings required for grappling with Lepage’s extraordinarily complex and accomplished film.

Notes

1. In various interviews, Lepage emphasises his complex ‘dialogic relationship’ to Hitchcock’s films (and *Le Confessionnal* relies heavily on more than one), noting shrewdly that Hitchcock himself was ‘exploring’, ‘playing’ with, and ‘testing’ numerous themes in *I Confess*, and that he aimed to ‘use Hitchcock as a departure point, not an influence *per se*’ (Danielson 1996: 25). Among critics who examine the complexity of Lepage’s relationship to Hitchcock, Peter Clandfield approaches *Le Confessionnal* as both a ‘tribute’ and a ‘going-beyond’ (2003: 5); and Christopher Gittings uses Stephen Neale’s phrase ‘repetition *in* difference’ to characterise the postmodernism of *Le Confessionnal* (2002: 132).
2. It is important to acknowledge that by focusing on the few specifics I have chosen, I of necessity am leaving out much of importance. Perhaps the most important of what I am not discussing here is

the way that both films are studies in sexual identity and sexual politics. I use these broad terms purposely, rather than the perhaps more predictable term 'queer'. Lepage took great pains in some of his interviews to point out his hesitancy in defining *Le Confessionnal* specifically as a queer film. For example, in speaking with Stéphan Bureau he describes being taken aback when he went to buy a dvd copy of *Le Confessionnal* and found it 'in the gay section of the video store': 'I said to myself: "Come on, that's not relevant, it's not a film about that, that's not the theme of the film". There is indeed a character who is gay, in there, but it's not a gay film. What is that doing in this department?' (2008: 65; my translation). Nevertheless, Lepage's film is frequently examined as a notable example of New Queer Cinema (see, for example, Dickinson 2005); few critical examinations of it fail to discuss its complex portrayal of homosexuality; and viewing *I Confess* in the light of *Le Confessionnal* usefully contributes to the growing attention to the queer elements of *I Confess* (see, for example, Orr 2005 and Amy Lawrence's conference presentation, now revised and expanded [2023]).

3. Aleksandar Dundjerovic comments on *Le Confessionnal* as a meditation on the 'Great Darkness' and especially the Duplessis Orphans (2003: 35), although Peter Dickinson criticises him for overstating the latter as a key context for the film (2004: 87).

4. Painting is a motif from *I Confess* that Lepage elaborates on extensively and effectively in *Le Confessionnal*, associated with effacing a persistently troubling past – ultimately a futile and impossible effort. And both films mobilise wordplay around this theme: painting is associated with pain in *Le Confessionnal*, and the 'grime' that paint may cover up in *I Confess* is evidence of a 'crime'.

5. In an interview with Sid Adilman, Lepage said that *Le Confessionnal* is 'very coded', and he identifies 'Mythology' as one of its key codes: 'If you want a good story, often you have to have mythologies; that is something Alfred Hitchcock said. There has to be something mythological about the text' (1995). With this connection of Hitchcock and mythology in mind, it is perfectly fitting that the climactic sequence highlighting the centrality of the Oedipus myth to the entire film is structured as a confessional story told in a taxicab to Hitchcock (Ron Burrage).

6. The centrality of Ruth's confession makes it that much more significant that when the film premiered in Quebec, two critical scenes of her confessing her love for Logan were removed (Barris 1953). Lepage makes this a key plot point: at what should be a triumphant moment following the well-received screening, Hitchcock is shown to be deeply disturbed that the censors took this action, without notifying him and even after he took great pains to work with church authorities as the film was being made. This incident is a further example of the pervasive oppressive institutional and in this case specifically clerical control that is one of the main themes of *Le Confessionnal*, and the presentation of a scene highlighting the shocking recognition of confessions being cut from a film titled *I Confess* is one of many masterfully ironic moments in Lepage's film.

7. For example, the films he made immediately before *I Confess* – *Rope* (1948), *Under Capricorn* (1949), *Stage Fright* (1950), and *Strangers on a Train* (1951) – revolve around confessions, and there's not a church to be seen in any of them. Throughout Hitchcock's films, and even in *I Confess*, confession is far more than – and maybe not even primarily – a theological matter involving a sacred setting. Lepage's witty and wise words describing his own main concern may be useful to keep in mind as we try to fathom Hitchcock's themes, settings, and the dramas he portrays: 'I don't think you need to be absolved. You need to solve things' (Alioff 1995: 14).

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Out of the Shadows: Robert Burks and *I Confess*

Danny Nissim

The opening credits for *I Confess* (1953) come up over the looming, dark skyline of Quebec. After the actors and writers credits, we get a single card with the main film crew, headed by Director of Photography Robert Burks ASC which stands for American Society of Cinematographers. And it is Burks's contribution to this and many other Hitchcock films which I would like to consider here.

If we look at Hitchcock's Directors of Photography (DOP for short), his most consistent photographer in the British period is Jack Cox, with eleven films, straddling the silent and sound period between 1927 and 1938. If we then turn to the American period, top of the list with twelve films, making him the overall favourite is Robert Burks, who between 1951 and 1964 covers the overlap between films in black and white and in colour.

It is worth outlining exactly what a DOP is responsible for. In a film from the classic Hollywood period, there are four people on the camera crew, in a strict hierarchy with the DOP as the head. His job – and until fairly recently the whole camera crew was male – was to light the scene by positioning the lights, setting the exposure and choosing the lenses. In effect he created much of the look and mood of the film, always with the aim of realising on screen the vision of the director. The camera itself was handled by the number two on the crew, the camera operator and beneath him were two assistants: the focus puller – the one you traditionally see with a tape measure between the camera and the star - and finally the clapper / loader, responsible for the slate board and loading and unloading the camera. Also answering to the DOP were the electricians, who fixed the lights in position, and the grip crew who worked the crane and dolly where camera movement was needed. So we have a large team of highly skilled technicians working under the supervision of the Director of Photography, who himself is both technician and artist.

If we consider Hitchcock's fifty years as a director from 1926 to 1976, the exact mid-point in 1951 emerges in retrospect as a crucial turning point. After the critical and commercial disappointments of his last few pictures, including *Under Capricorn* (1949) and *Stage Fright* (1950), both shot in England, Hitchcock returned to Hollywood and made what in Truffaut's words was a 'spectacular comeback' (1968: 162) with *Strangers on a Train* (1951). The film was part of his deal with Warner Brothers, and it was at that studio that he met Robert Burks, who would become one of his key collaborators throughout the next decade.

Burks had been working at Warners since he was nineteen, starting in the special effects department, building up an expertise which would stand him in good stead in his later collaboration with Hitchcock. He worked his way up from camera assistant, to operator to Director of

Photography in 1944, making him at age thirty-five the youngest fully accredited DOP in the business. His first film, *Jammin' The Blues* (Gjon Lili, 1944), was a stylish ten minute short featuring jazz saxophonist Lester Young, shot in dramatic chiaroscuro black and white. By the time Hitchcock came to Warners in 1951, Burks had an impressive record as DOP on movies like *The Fountainhead* (King Vidor, 1949) and *The Glass Menagerie* (Irving Rapper, 1950). These credits, along with his special effects knowledge would have given Hitchcock ample grounds for trusting him with the photography on *Strangers on a Train*, which involved not only a murder reflected in a pair of spectacles, but also some tricky back-projection and model shots in the final fairground scene. If *Strangers on a Train* was something of a test for Burks, he passed with flying colours. With Hitchcock's next film, *I Confess*, the collaboration was sealed and would continue unbroken for the rest of the decade. After Burks's contract with Warners ended in 1953, he would follow Hitchcock to Paramount and eventually Universal. If we ask why this collaboration lasted over so many films, we might reflect that Burks displayed two qualities which Hitchcock looked for on his team: professionalism and loyalty.

Hitchcock could be sparing in public acknowledgement of his professional colleagues. Incredibly, but characteristically, in the index of the Truffaut book there is not a single entry for Robert Burks. Hitchcock does tell Truffaut that from early in his silent career he himself knew enough about lighting to take over when his cameraman was ill (1968: 46). One of the few DOPs Hitchcock mentions by name to Truffaut is George Barnes, who photographed *Rebecca* (1940) and *Spellbound* (1945). Hitchcock disparagingly dismisses Barnes as a 'Hollywood-woman' cameraman – meaning that his main concern was to make the female star look beautiful (1968: 95-96). There may have been some truth in this, but Barnes won the Oscar for best black and white photography on *Rebecca*, and Hitchcock failed to win for best director that year, so there may have been a touch of envy there. Hitchcock of course never won a Best Director Oscar.

Another DOP who gets short shrift in the Truffaut book is Ted Tetzlaff who photographed *Notorious* (1946). According to Hitchcock, when he, as Director, suggested a lighting effect he wanted, Tetzlaff replied 'Getting a bit technical aren't you Pop?' (1968: 141). Did Tetzlaff feel that Hitchcock was trespassing on his terrain? With Burks, Hitchcock would at last find a DOP he could feel comfortable with.

If we look at Hitchcock's DOPs during his first American period, the 'Selznick' period, we see a continuous change – eight DOPs over eleven films between 1940 and 1948, all of them highly distinguished names in their field, two of whom (Rudolph Maté and Ted Tetzlaff) went on to become directors.

Burks's ten Hitchcock films in the 1950s reflect the changing landscape of Hollywood as it confronted the era of television. Following *Strangers on a Train* and *I Confess*, their first film together in colour was *Dial M for Murder* (1954), which involved the additional technical challenge

of 3D. *Rear Window* (1954) was another confined setting picture which involved a vast set with a huge number of lights, some of them operated by remote control. Then in 1955 *To Catch a Thief* was the first Hitchcock shot in VistaVision, a new wide screen format developed by Paramount, which involved special cameras running the film horizontally rather than vertically, giving a larger negative area than alternative forms of wide screen. Hitchcock never made a film in Cinemascope, an anamorphic system which was not popular with DOPs as it restricted the choice of lenses and made camera movement awkward. We can imagine a conversation between Hitchcock and Burks, by now his favourite DOP, discussing the advantages of VistaVision with its sharper image quality and comfortable 1 to 1.85 screen ratio, over Cinemascope with its more unwieldy width. Maybe Burks was the one to suggest VistaVision for the glamorous *To Catch a Thief*. In any event, the film proved an artistic and commercial success and they went on to use the format for *The Trouble with Harry* (1955), *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1956), *Vertigo* (1958) and *North by Northwest* (1959).

The Hitchcock / Burks run is broken by *Psycho* (1960), which was photographed with his TV crew, with John L Russell as DOP. (Russell was camera operator on Orson Welles' *Touch of Evil* (1958), which had some influence on *Psycho*.) But after *Psycho*, Burks returns as DOP for *The Birds* (1963) and *Marnie* (1964).

Marnie in 1964 was the last film Burks shot for Hitchcock. *Torn Curtain* in 1966 was photographed by John F Warren, whose main experience was in TV series. It remains unclear why Burks was dropped for *Torn Curtain*. As far as we know there was nothing along the lines of the famous fall-out with Bernard Herrmann. Patrick McGilligan suggests that Hitchcock wanted the film to have an East European flavour (2003: 682), and it may be that Hitchcock wanted a change from the expressively rich colour photography of *The Birds* and *Marnie*. In their discussion of *Torn Curtain* Hitchcock pointedly asks Truffaut 'What did you think of the photography?'. Maybe not wishing to offend, Truffaut blandly replies. 'It's very good'. Hitchcock goes on to defend the film's rather drab, flat look by explaining that the light was bounced off white surfaces and shot through a grey gauze. His telling phrase is 'We almost attained the ideal, you know, shooting with natural lights.' (1968: 261)

Tragically, Burks died in a fire at his home in 1968. Hitchcock was apparently very upset at the death of his long time collaborator who had become a family friend.

If we jump forward to Hitchcock's last film, *Family Plot* (1976), the DOP Leonard South had started his career as a camera assistant under Robert Burks, working on *Strangers on a Train* and *I Confess*, then graduating to camera operator from *The Trouble with Harry* on. So there is a pleasing continuity there.

But let us return to *I Confess*, and in particular its photographic style. When Hitchcock came to Hollywood in 1939 – the same year as Orson Welles – the photographic look of films was about to change. This was in part a result of technological advances in lights, film stock and lenses. *Citizen*

Kane (1941) famously paved the way for deep focus, acute shooting angles and complex flashbacks. Welles acknowledges his debt to Greg Toland, his DOP by sharing their credits on the same title card. This highly stylized expressionism was of course the visual basis of what came to be known as film noir.

At the same time, various factors were pushing Hollywood in another direction - towards greater realism on screen. Wartime restrictions on materials led to more location shooting outside the studio. Audiences were now used to seeing documentary war footage shot hand held on more portable cameras. And in the immediate post-war period the neo-realist films of European directors like Rossellini's *Rome Open City* (1945) shot on the streets of Rome, influenced films like *The Naked City* (Jules Dassin), shot in 1948 on the streets of New York.

Hitchcock, always highly attuned to audience tastes and, ever since the coming of sound, eager to embrace technical advances, was weighing up and absorbing the changing movie landscape. And we can see the influence of these two seemingly contradictory approaches – expressionism and realism – being played out in his films, with *I Confess* coming at a pivotal moment.

So, firstly we might ask, what does 'realism' mean to Hitchcock? We know that one of his chief concerns is to get his audience to identify with his protagonists. So it is important that his characters inhabit a real world which his audience will recognize. He usually preferred working in the studio where he could exercise total control rather than on location, but studio interiors would often be based on thorough location research: for Scottie's apartment in *Vertigo*, Hitchcock had his researchers photograph the apartments of retired San Francisco police detectives. Robert Belton has pointed out that even the barely glimpsed specially created magazines on Scottie's table are based on authentic originals (2021: 154-156). Details had to be accurate, whether for sets, costumes or casting.

This might mean photographing most of the population of Bodega Bay for *The Birds* or researching photos of real-life ambassadors when casting the second *The Man Who Know Too Much* (Truffaut 1968: 192). Or even checking what sort of tie a used car salesman would wear for *Psycho*. This need for authenticity extends to location shooting. A personal favourite is the taxidermist episode in the second *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, as it was shot very close to where I live in Camden Town, London, in a real taxidermist's shop, Edward Gerrard & Sons, sadly no longer there. The street exteriors and the interior were all filmed exactly as they were with no geographical 'cheats'. This search for authenticity is already central to *I Confess*. Evidence for this is provided in an article in *The American Cinematographer*, a monthly magazine aimed at professionals in the industry.

The article by Hilda Black on *I Confess* in the December 1952 issue is titled 'The Photography is Important to Hitchcock'. The title in itself is interesting, as it implies that this might not apply to all movie directors. The article quotes extensively from Burks himself, so provides a reliable insight into their working relationship.

Burks recounts the familiar fact that Hitchcock storyboards the film in advance but goes on to say:

But he never nails you down to those sketches. If, after discussion, Hitch finds that we can achieve better results in another way, he has no hesitancy in rewriting the action or dialogue. (1952: 525)

The words 'after discussion' suggests that Hitchcock had now found a DOP whose opinion he would seek and could respect. Burks goes on to discuss how they prepared for location photography in Quebec, and it is clear that he was involved from early-on in the pre-production process, which was by no means normal for DOPs in Hollywood at the time. He goes into detail on planning the style of the film. According to Black:

Burks and Hitchcock screened a number of pictures in search of an authentic realistic style of pictorial interpretation. Documentaries were given particular attention, as were films photographed almost entirely in actual locations. (1952: 525).

Then the article comes to the crucial point:

The study, however, was unproductive; none of the pictures possessed the authenticity and realism he – Hitchcock – sought. (1952: 525)

The reason given was that though the exteriors might be shot on location, most of the interiors in the films they viewed were shot in the studio and looked 'phony and artificial' (1952: 525). On *I Confess*, Hitchcock was prepared to relinquish the total control of the studio set for the authenticity of a location. Burks sums it up by saying: 'Ours became a struggle, not for perfection in the accepted Hollywood sense, but for realism' (1952: 525). And so it was clear that as much of the film as possible had to be shot on location in Quebec, interiors included. Burks states that all but three interiors were shot on location.

The number of large interior public spaces, often densely populated is impressive and adds to the documentary realism that Hitchcock was striving for. As well as several scenes in the church of St Severan, St John's Cathedral is used in the flashback to Father Logan's (Montgomery Clift) ordination. There is also the Parliament building, the courtroom and, in the final chase scene the kitchens of the Chateau Frontenac Hotel. This hotel, where the production was based, also provided the main ballroom, where Keller (O.E. Hasse) dies in the final shoot-out. Hitchcock must have been delighted to find a curtained stage with a proscenium arch for his villain to meet his end in a theatrical setting, a favourite theme, harking back to *The 39 Steps* (1935).

Burks mentions two other factors which added to the overall effect of naturalism. Firstly, many of the smaller parts were played by non-actors taking on their real-life roles. These included the hotel manager, the judge, chefs, waiters and policemen. And secondly, the lack of make-up for everyone except Anne Baxter, who wore very little, and Montgomery Clift, who needed some to 'Hide his heavy blue-black beard which shaving twice daily could not conceal' (Black 1952: 549).

When it came to the practicalities of lighting on location, Burks explains:

So if we hoped to establish and sustain the stamp of authenticity we would have to keep our lighting uniform. We would have to hide lights behind chairs or under desks. We therefore decided to use no overhead or backlighting whatsoever, except where they naturally occurred. Throughout the picture all lighting was from the floor. (Black 1952: 545)

So, we can see that the combination of location shooting, use of non-actors in minor parts, minimum make-up and naturalistic lighting all add to the authentic, documentary look which Burks tells us is what they were looking for. But where then does that leave expressionism in *I Confess* ?

Burks tells us that there was only one scene where overhead lighting was used: the exterior night scenes at the very beginning of the film. (Black 1952: 547). The long shadows, night location and tilted camera all give the look of a classic film noir. And in fact this overtly expressionistic style is far from abandoned for the rest of the film, despite the stated aspirations for a documentary style.

The film is full of strikingly strong images, low camera angles, and highly expressive lighting effects, giving it a visual impact which lead the critic Richard Schickel to describe it as 'More noir-ish than most of Hitchcock's movies' (*I Confess* [DVD]). To take one example, there is a striking long take in the flashback sequence where Logan and Ruth (Anne Baxter) are at a dance. The night exterior is dramatically lit and at one point there is an extreme focus-pull to the background and then back to the couple. Without a cut, Logan leaves the shot and Ruth turns to the camera, her face in extreme close up. The lighting and camera are doing much more than documenting reality here.

Our first sight of Father Logan in the church contains a heightened lighting effect. As he picks up the candle, this becomes the key light source in the dark church. Doubtless Hitchcock showed Burks the light in a glass of milk scene from *Suspicion* (1941). Though whether he mentioned the contribution of *Suspicion*'s DOP Harry Stradling is doubtful, bearing in mind that Hitchcock told Truffaut that the photography of *Suspicion* was too glossy. When it came to the glass of milk, he told Truffaut 'I put a light right inside the glass' – the key word here being the pronoun 'I' (1968: 118). As Logan approaches Keller, we cut to a close up of Keller with the moving light dramatically coming up on his guilty face. Within the first few minutes of the film, we have been introduced to a visual world of highly stylized lighting effects.

I Confess is often discussed in conjunction with *The Wrong Man*, which by 1957 was the eighth collaboration with Burks. There is the Catholic connection, but another piece in *The American Cinematographer*, returns to the issue of realism. Again, the article's title goes straight to the point: 'Hitch didn't want it Arty'. The film is based on a true story, so the use of the original locales made artistic sense, as well as being a good publicity angle. Burks quotes Hitchcock as saying: 'I want it to look like it had been photographed in New York in a style unmistakably documentary' (Foster 1957: 84). Of course by this time Hitchcock and Burks had worked together in colour, 3-D and

VistaVision in films which were a long way from documentary. And Burks had just won his Oscar – something which still eluded Hitchcock – for *To Catch A Thief*, making him the second of Hitchcock's DOPs to win the coveted award. This time Hitchcock used Burks's Oscar as an excuse to indulge in some wry teasing: When it came to *The Wrong Man* Burks quotes him as saying:

Perhaps you may not want to do this picture Bob. I wouldn't want the stark, colorless documentary treatment I expect, to reflect on your reputation as a photographer.

(Foster 1957: 85)

Of course Burks did shoot *The Wrong Man* in the way Hitchcock wanted. We can believe that they both enjoyed working in a style totally different from their recent work.

Did Hitchcock's insistence on 'An unmistakably (*sic*) documentary style' mean that he felt he hadn't gone far enough in that direction four years earlier in *I Confess*? In their discussion of *The Wrong Man*, Truffaut brings up the realism versus expressionism question head on, suggesting that Hitchcock's style of film making 'Happens to be in total conflict with the aesthetics of the documentary' (1968: 200). He goes on to question whether the expressionistic device of showing the prison cell's walls spinning in *The Wrong Man* were too anti-realistic for the supposedly documentary style of the film and the scene might have been better if he had simply shown Fonda sitting on a stool. Hitchcock, possibly a little rattled, responds with 'Maybe so. But wouldn't that be rather dull?', a reply which comes down firmly on the side of expressionism. He ends by conceding the point, 'Let's just say it wasn't my kind of picture' (1968: 203)

Today we need not be quite so dismissive. Hitchcock had absorbed the German expressionism of Lang and Murnau early in his career, and his use of lighting, framing and camera movement remained integral to his style and the emotional involvement of the audience. But everything had to be grounded in reality, and an attention to detail was paramount, whether on location or on a studio set. The cliché and the phony must be avoided at all costs out of respect for his audience.

There is one final aspect of Hitchcock's work with Robert Burks which we should not ignore. Though he may have been typecast as the Master of Suspense, Hitchcock was a truly experimental artist always looking for new approaches within his chosen genre. His career spanned silent and sound, black and white and colour, Britain and America. He worked with big stars and complete unknowns. His protagonists raced across the country or were confined to a single set. So it is no surprise that Hitchcock, the supreme expressionist was at the same time intrigued by the idea of documentary realism. And in Robert Burks, working together on twelve films, he found a worthy and trusted collaborator who was equally keen to extend the boundaries of his art.

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Biographical note

Danny Nissim is a retired television producer who made music videos in the 1980s. More recently he has worked with renowned arts documentary director Mike Dibb, including films on Astor Piazzolla, Keith Jarrett, Barbara Thompson, and Donny Johnson.