

A fix for the Hitchcock addict at the NFB

A review by R.F. MacDonald

Well, now that we've been totally spoiled by the cream of Alfred Hitchcock's output, where do we turn? True, those with access to VCRs can OD on such titles as *Stranger on a Train*, *Rebecca*, *The Birds*, and *Notorious* (try the place at 70 Lacewood Drive in Clayton Park- this is not a plug but a mission of mercy- I hate to see addicts in withdrawal). But what the rest of the unwashed masses? Ahh, Wormwood's, as usual, to the Rescue!

In their infinite taste and initiative, the fine people at Wormwood's have chosen Hitch's *The Paradine Case* and his most explicit and unrelenting film, *The Wrong Man*, on a fabulous double bill that will be the last cinema screening in the old NFB theatre.

There will be a month long break before screenings resume in a brand spanking newly renovated National Film Board Theatre. Why, it's almost worth it just for the memories (Think of the nostalgia value!).

Anyway, on to *The Wrong Man*. As I said, this is Hitchcock's most strict and formal adventure into the realm of ugly coincidence. Virtually transcribed from

an early 1950's *Life* magazine story about a musician, Manny Balestrero, who was falsely accused and tried for robbery, *The Wrong Man* reveals the horror of injustice from the accused man's point of view.

Rather than utilize suspense, Hitchcock here engages first our paranoia and then our sense of insecurity. The film is shot in a semidocumentary, neo-noir style that makes Henry Fonda (as Manny) something of the innocent everyman caught in a system that is not only threatening but ultimately monstrous.

Henry Fonda is of course perfect in the role of the accused. The case of mistaken identity could happen to anyone, yet Fonda is so malleable that he seems not only capable of the crime but also incapable of the crime. He reacts to the deepening crises with a combination of confusion and disbelief. His eventual stoic resolve enunciates Hitchcock's own rather deterministic view of the world, that of the resignation to fate.

Certainly the subject matter of *The Wrong Man* is as relevant as ever, particularly in the light of the Donald Marshall case.

Balestrero was a nightclub musician in New York, a quiet,

solid family man, but still, a musician in a nightclub. In other words, he was susceptible to all the anti-social clichés that are flung at musicians. He struggled to make ends meet, so in the eyes of the prosecutors he had a motive.

Of course the accusers retained only a sketchy image of the culprit. It is the accusers who come out badly in this film, pointing their fingers in a wild rush to judgement to assuage their own anger and loss.

Justice is to be achieved quickly and applied like some snake oil to make us all feel better and safer. Suddenly Manny Balestrero, like Marshall, is no longer a witness to a disorder of justice, he is now an innocent to be punished as a scapegoat, fodder for the cannon to blast away our collective sins.

The ugliest point about *The Wrong Man* is that it could happen (and has) to anyone. People do not serve justice, rather justice serves people and humanity's interests are often not the interests of justice.

Hitchcock's appears at the beginning of the film to state a disclaimer about the purpose of the film. He wishes less to scare you than to state the truth as clearly and simply as he can. Ultimately he ends up scaring us a lot more than in other major films because it is not just entertainment (the way he treated the same theme in, say *North by Northwest* or *The 39 Steps*), it is a journey into the inadequacies of human judgement. Consequently it is his most ruthless indictment of human nature, and it is his most stunning celebration of the human condition.

The Wrong Man is as close as Hitchcock got to making a personal statement in the absence of style; it is probably as close as we'll ever get to his own view of the world. Clearly, it is his most uncomfortable film. (I can't comment on *Paradine Case*, as I haven't seen it yet- so see you at the NFB!)

quadrivium



The Bishop is aided in removing bodies from the village cathedral bombed by Germans in a scene from Paolo and Vittorio Taviani's *The Night of the Shooting Stars* playing at the Rebecca Cohn Auditorium this Sunday at 8 p.m.

Quadrivium - Quiz 8408

Okay, you asked for it. Some of our readers think the quizzes are too easy. Any other opinions out there?

Here it is, the quiz supplied by J.H.O. which, I guarantee, will, as he says, "separate the ships from the boats."

Identify the novel or short story in which the following fictional warships appear:

1. U.S.S. *Torpex*
2. F.N. *La Renommée*
3. Batavian Republic Ship *Waakzaamheid*
4. H.M.S. *Viperous*
5. Soviet Navy *Lenin*
6. U.S.S. *Moulton*
7. Spanish Navy *Navarra*
8. F.N. *Guèpe*
9. H.I.J.M.S. *Akura*
10. S.M.S. *Essen*

Answers to Quiz 8407

1. *Crime and Punishment*
2. *Les Miserables*
3. *Uncle Tom's Cabin*
4. *The Red Badge of Courage*
5. *The Scarlet Letter*
6. *Anna Karenina*
7. *A Tale of Two Cities*
8. *Moby Dick*
9. *Ivanhoe*
10. *Tess of the D'Ubervilles*

Granted, last week's quiz was pretty easy so it was not surprising that we had a half dozen entries with all 10 answers correct. The winner of a double pass to see *The Night of the Shooting Stars* at the Rebecca Cohn Auditorium Sunday at 8pm will be selected randomly at the Thursday Gazette staff meeting and contacted. You'll see their name next week.

Remember, you can drop your quiz off at the Gazette office or the SUB information desk. Deadline is noon Wednesday following the publication of the quiz.



Hitchcock's "everyman," Henry Fonda. You can see the danger that the old adage about "being in the wrong place at the wrong time" is referring to in *The Wrong Man* playing at the Wormwood.



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