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murderer, who suddenly appears in his apartment, he does not even have the satisfaction of playing the sympathetic role.

"What do you want of me?" the murderer asks him, attributing the reason for the photographer's investigation to the most despicable motive, blackmail—a motive which is, however, less despicable than the real one: idle curiosity.

This film is one of those that best illustrates the cardinal virtue of Hitchcockian morality: *exigence.* We can never be hard enough on ourselves—such is its lesson. Evil hides not only under the appearance of Good, but in our most casual and innocent acts, those we think have no ethical significance, those which in principle involve no responsibility. The criminals in this universe are attractively portrayed only so that they can better denounce the Pilates, which in one way or another we all are.

It will be said that Hitchcock never goes beyond this simple denunciation: he severely scourges our egoism, but he doesn't really care to indicate the way out of it. The blasé irony of the ending in this film clearly supports this severe principle. A last shot shows our couple just as they were, as though nothing had happened.

Hitchcock may be a moralist, but there is nothing of the moralizer about him. As we have said, this is not his concern. His role is only to illuminate the situation and let everybody draw his own conclusions. And then too, this guilt which he is so skillful in bringing to the surface is perhaps less of a moral than of a metaphysical order. It is, as we have said—and let's not hesitate to repeat it—part of our very nature, the heritage of original sin. This is so much the case that without reference to Christian dogma, to the idea of Grace, the pessimism of this attitude would rightly make us angry, just as it irritates all those who try to base morality on human values alone. For Hitchcock, too, the heart of man is "hollow and a sink of iniquity"; those who reject this image can do so only from the viewpoint of atheistic angelism, thereby recognizing the logic of our interpretation. It is paradoxical, to say the least, to smile when offered theological keys to the work of our cineast and nevertheless to continue heaping upon him the same invective with which Christianity is attacked elsewhere.

Flowers of Rhetoric
To Catch a Thief (1955)

At the beginning of summer 1954, Hitch flew to France and, using the new Vistavision technique, filmed the location scenes of *To Catch a Thief* on the Côte d'Azur.

Everything in this "private joke" taken from a novel by David Dodge is redolent of vacation, of fantasy. The satire is still acid, but once its goal is attained it relaxes into a smile and not a grimace. Only eccentricities, not deep vices, are laughed at—or at least so it seems, because we have learned not to put too much trust in appearances. When questioned by reporters, Hitchcock spoke only of his return to the humor of the English films. It is a gastronomical tour, with merely the pinch of "suspense" necessary to bring out the flavor of the dishes.

The "falsely accused" of this romantic fairytale is no longer involved in murder but in theft. John Robie (Cary Grant), a gentleman thief, is enjoying a cozy retirement in his Côte d'Azur villa, a retirement that is in no way due to repentance. Suddenly there is a new outbreak of thefts in which the technique formerly perfected by the ex-"Cat" is used. To clear himself of suspicion, Robie has no recourse but to unmask his disciple by outdoing him, even at the risk of setting at his heels both the police and the justly alarmed confederates of the new "cat." The game is a dangerous one, but at least it wins our hero the heart of a rich American heiress (Grace Kelly), who obstinately insists on taking him for what he no longer is. Needless to say, he is not in too much of a hurry to disabuse her, since her error lends him a kind of cynical grace and permits him to play the moralist without being too heavy about it. A single, almost embarrassing, moment of cruelty—the one at the cemetery in which Robie, indignant at being publicly accused by the daughter (Brigitte Auber) of his former confederate, very cavalierly slaps her. Hitchcock, too, plays cat and mouse—with the feelings of the public; and he knows just how close one of his most sympathetic heroes can come to displeasing that public. Once the mystery has been cleared up, he will know

how to shame us for our indulgence of Robie by revealing that he is not a lout but a defender of the widow and the orphan. The athletic young girl is actually the "cat." It was she whom this professor-in-spite-of-himself had suspected all along.

Several familiar themes will be apparent in this summary: that of the power of the past, that of suspicion, that of responsibility, that of the exchange, and even that of an almost total identification with somebody else. Brigitte Auber copies Grant's feline behavior and even his striped jersey; though guilty, she usurps the pity due to innocence; though innocent, he does not object to any of the aces that the fact of being thought guilty slips into the hand he is playing. This sun-flooded vacation is a vacation from morality. Hitchcock, breaking for once with his taste for extremes, gives us an average, balanced example of his well-known formula of transmutation. Of all the innocents in the Hitchcockian menagerie, Robie is the one whose false guilt is most lightly borne. This is because of them all he is the least innocent. "Why should I steal?" he asks the Lloyd's investigator. "I'm rich." "How did you become rich?" "By stealing." But as the conversation continues, the good detective becomes aware that his own honesty is perhaps no less impure. There is a potential transfer, but one might as well try to analyze a sunbeam.

As for its form, *To Catch a Thief* offers a charming potpourri of the themes—including the musical themes of the score—of the American period, just as *Saboteur* did of the English period. There is no well-defined formal challenge. We are reminded of a concertante style—with each voice in turn making its own melody heard—rather than of the dense texture of a canon, or a highly complex fugue. And the "cadences" are numerous—bravura sections that are not simply exercises in cinematic acrobatics but a splendid visual festival. This is how we perceive the helicopter flight over the Corniche, the flower-market battle, the fireworks display—to which we will return—and finally the masked ball, a masterpiece of deliberate bad taste over which the director is not afraid to linger a bit at the decisive moment of the story, thus infringing the conventional laws of "suspense." Hitchcock, who has been so praised—a little superficially—for being above all a

good storyteller, here shows his clear desire—and this tendency will be confirmed in future films—to keep the story in the background. Despite the "discoveries" and "disclosures" in the film, scarcely a fourth of which was shot on location, there is a dominant documentary, almost neo-realistic, tone that constitutes its chief attraction and novelty.

Even the performances partake of this freedom. The mimicry of the actors—remember the scene in the water—has an unusual air of improvisation about it. But this charming relaxation in no way destroys the unity of style. Under the blue Mediterranean sky, this mosaic of bright colors never stumbles into dissonance. At the desired moment, this zig-zagging fantasia returns to a basic tonality, no matter how many the number and incongruity of the modulations. In this game of "cat and mouse," the theme of the chase constitutes the basic line on which will be perched, like so many bouquets, an abundance of cinematic set pieces. Since we cannot enumerate all these embellishments—which are like the embellishments of eighteenth-century music—we will cite only three of the most dazzling. They would merit a leading place in any glossary of Hitchcockian flowers of rhetoric.

The first is a simple *image*. It lasts only a fraction of a second and its metaphorical sense is not even hinted at. It is the image of a cigarette stubbed out in an egg. We have a foreshadowing of this in *Rebecca*—the cigarette that time being put out in a jar of cold cream—but here the presence of *color* strangely reinforces the strength of the impression. The fact is that Hitchcock is one of the few film-makers for whom color is an auxiliary and not a shackle, who keeps it from being a servile imitation of painting. Many images in *To Catch a Thief* are not free of cacophony, but these dissonances ought not to shock us more than do those in nature. Though "picture postcard" views abound, there are no more in this film than might be seen on a drive from Cannes to Menton. Consider also that in a painter, color is endowed with an existence anterior to the object, if it can be put that way. Promoted to the dignity of being, "blue" will be the common denominator of the sea, an eye, or a dress. In the movies, on the other hand, color is not an end but a means of providing a particular object with a

supplementary degree of reality. It is to this that we owe the sharp sense of the concrete. A black and white image would not have been able to provoke the strong impression created here by the yellow and sticky substance of the egg.

What does this "gag" mean? Nothing and everything. It is designed to provoke both discomfort and laughter. It is extraordinary, but it is not extraordinary in the way surrealists use the extraordinary—as a matter of principle. Like the fall of the bicycle in *I Confess,* it expresses the idea of the inimicalness, of the fundamental resistance, of things. And Hitchcock, as his talent matures, will go on multiplying these observations. Through them, he shows us that he is one of the greatest inventors the screen has ever known, an inventor not so much of "gags" as of forms. By this is to be understood cinematic forms which not only refer to geometry but to that part of mathematical science called "rational dynamics." These schemas are motor-schemas endowed with a dual spatial and temporal quality. To describe them by abstracting one from the other would be to falsify them.

The second embellishment, the cross-cutting between the fireworks and the love scene, is a true comparison. As we know, Eisenstein devoted part of his experiments and writings to the task of discovering a cinematic equivalent of the poets' metaphor. For several years now the famous theory of the "montage of attractions," long discarded, was in the process of being revivified. The planetarium sequence in *Rebel Without a Cause,* the most beautiful moments of Rossellini's *La Paura* and *Italian Journey,* show in conjunction two series of facts that have only a purely poetic relationship. We can similarly be thankful to Hitchcock for having by means of these bouquets of fire—in an accelerated montage of closer and closer shots—symbolized an amorous embrace with more lightness and humor than Eisenstein, the auteur of *The General Line,* had been able to achieve in his rustic wedding scene. Old stuff? Old enough to be able to emerge from its attic and shake off the encrusted dust of naiveté and pedanticism. It is better to rummage in the chests of yesteryear than in the trashbaskets of yesterday.

The third jewel is an ellipsis, by means of which this fireworks scene is joined to the next. The fireworks are over. We've scarcely had time to note Grace Kelly dozing on her couch and Cary Grant re-entering his room. A door opens and Grace Kelly enters Robie's room demanding that he return her mother's jewels! It is as if we were emerging from a heavy sleep, which seems to have lasted only a second. Suddenly we are aware of all the time that's gone by. The liaison is extremely simple, but somebody had to have the audacity to think of it. Hitchcock comes up with tens, hundreds, of these effects which seem so simple once they've been thought of. Caught up in the heat of the action, we don't notice the beauty of the seam that Hitchcock, when he wants to, is more skillful than anyone in rendering invisible. If the seam sometimes appears to stand out more than necessary, let's not be fooled: he is counting, as we will see in *The Man Who Knew Too Much,* on its being noticed.