

# Hitchcock's Legendary Shower Scene

By Michael Gallagher

New York (NC) — How mores do shift! There was a time when we weren't supposed to enjoy the sufferings of victims. But then along came Alfred Hitchcock, a man who could have said with Dickens' Fat Boy, "I want to make your flesh creep," and death in the shower suddenly became a spectator sport. To this day, we're put down as terribly square if we don't give vent to giggly appreciation whenever the subject comes up.

So revered in the folk memory has the "Psycho" shower scene become that one critic, calling it the "legendary shower scene," took great umbrage at its being exploited as a prelude to the just-released sequel, "Psycho II." It is a sacrilege, he implied, like unto "Rod McKuen's beginning one of his poems with the storm scene from 'King Lear.'"

Actually, though I share this critic's lack of esteem for "Psycho II," I'm somewhat grateful for its inclusion of the "legendary shower scene." Though this might sound like an unthinkable confession for a certified, practicing movie critic to be making, I had never seen it until "Psycho II" gave me the opportunity.

## MOVIES

Oh, I knew what all the fuss was about, and I had perused a frame-by-frame analysis of the scene in two or three of those awkward and banal film books. And then I had also seen Mel Brooks' painstakingly faithful parody in "High Anxiety." A showering Brooks is beaten with a rolled-up newspaper in the hand of an irascible bellhop whom he had browbeaten to go out and buy the paper.

But in the days when I had to pay my own money to see movies, I was selective. I was also never fond of Hitchcock. He impressed me as a cold trickster more concerned with startling his audience in the early days and then, as the threat of censorship grew less pressing, with shocking them than with telling a story in which character and motivation counted for anything.

So I passed up "Psycho" in 1960. But I had to pay a price, it turned out, the price of having to put up all these years with reams of adulatory copy on the most brilliant scene of the world's most brilliant director.

I had to bear, for example, with Francois Truffaut's extravagant praise of The Master. Truffaut is himself a

cold fish of a director who, to switch metaphors while keeping a relation to the same element, likes to water ski over the deep of human emotions.

Ironically enough, though "Psycho II" is filled with 80s vintage blood and gore, which is offensive enough, nothing in it is nearly as bad as the legendary shower scene. No, we don't actually see the knife going home, but what we do see throughout is a closeup of the face of the victim. We see the shock and horror register, then the pain, and then, worst of all, the realization on her face that she has been murdered and that only seconds of life remain.

Is this art? No, it's exploitation. There's no redeeming purpose to depicting such agony. The critic Stanley Kauffmann puts his finger on both the viciousness of the scene and its failure as art in "A World on Film." He compares the shower scene with the multiple rape and the murder of an innocent girl by swineherds in Ingmar Bergman's "The Virgin Spring," a film based upon the same medieval legend that inspired a poem by Gerard Manley Hopkins.

Bergman, says Kauffmann, "horrifies us at the act; Hitchcock horrifies us at himself — his cynically adroit exploitation of the act." Note that Kauffmann gives Hitchcock credit for skill, but being "cynically adroit" does not an artist make.

In "Psycho" the brutal murder does not contribute to something larger. It itself is quite the largest thing in the movie, and the reason for its cult status.

The untutored reaction to the shower scene would, I think, be: "Gee, what kind of man would show us something like this?" — exactly Kauffmann's point. But now everybody wants to be hip. So we don't see it with a fresh eye but with one glazed over by pseudo-sophistication.

And so we identify not with the victim but with the filmmaker, a famous man who is a household word, and we struggle to be as cool as he is by suppressing those healthy emotions in ourselves which, judging from his work, never seem to have reached full growth in The Master himself.

True art enlarges our vision, our capacity to feel and to understand. Pseudo art panders to us, encourages us to be less than we are and rewards us with a smug sense of superiority.



In a sequel to a classic Alfred Hitchcock horror film, Anthony Perkins again plays Norman Bates in "Psycho II." After 22 years in a psychiatric hospital, Bates is released and returns to the house and motel where violence occurred previously.

No, art doesn't come easy. But the price exacted by either to create or appreciate pseudo art is ultimately far dearer. It demands something of us.

## TELEVISION

# South Africa's Racist History Documented

By Henry Herz

New York (NC) — The recent series of terrorist bombings in South Africa mark a further escalation in the violence directed against the government's racist policy of apartheid. The growth of this violent opposition is rooted in the long history of injustice that is the subject of "Generations of Resistance," airing in Rochester at noon, Sunday, June 26, on Channel 21. The program is being sent out by PBS today.

Documenting 300 years of white repression and the refusal of blacks to accept subjugation in southern Africa, the film begins with the Dutch colonists who founded the Boer state which the British conquered at the turn of the century. Blacks were treated as ruthlessly under the Empire as before and uprisings were savagely suppressed. The picture of a rebel's severed head became a popular 1906 postcard.

In 1912 the African National Congress (ANC) was formed as the first black political party representing all South African tribes. Although the government responded to this by enacting a law making black

ownership of land illegal, the ANC continued trying to effect government reforms only through legal political means.

After supporting the war effort against Hitler, black leaders were shocked by the series of racist laws that created apartheid after victory was achieved. The ANC thereupon embarked on a course of civil rights demonstrations and non-violent acts of civil disobedience. The 1960 Sharpsville massacre of some 300 protest marchers led to the formation of an underground revolutionary group calling for open defiance and sabotage of property and government symbols.

The documentary ends with the riots of 1976 in which hundreds were killed, further embittering black militants to fight back against military force. Last month's car bombing of a military headquarters in Pretoria was the first time the ANC used indiscriminate violence resulting in the death of innocent bystanders, a change in policy that was feared by all who hoped for the end of apartheid

through moral opposition and economic sanctions.

Using photographs, movie footage and interviews with black leaders, the film was made by Peter Davis, many of whose previous South African documentaries have appeared on PBS. By concentrating on the changing attitudes of the generation before World War II, the post-war leadership and the youth of 1976 — the group most willing to escalate the violence — the film makes viewers aware of the emergence of a national black consciousness that transcends tribal differences and is united in the determination to achieve full political rights.

Although made several years ago, the film's historical background is indispensable in understanding the full implications of recent South African events. The non-violent tactics of Gandhi have proved futile against a state that has no moral scruples about using the full measure of force to repress its people. The only question is how much more blood will be shed before apartheid is finally abandoned.

## BOOKS

# Drinan: U.S. #1 Villain In World's Worst Horror

Beyond the Nuclear Freeze, by Jesuit Father Robert F. Drinan, The Seabury Press (New York, 1983). 170 pp., \$7.95.

Reviewed by James E. Milord  
NC News Service

The more books one reviews about the arms race, the more one wonders whether it can ever be made comprehensible.

Father Drinan's heroic effort sheds much light on the whys and wherefors of what lies behind the nation's largest and most powerful peoples' protest.

This is a no-nonsense job that asserts his country's role as number one villain in what he calls "history's worst horror story." As professor of arms control and disarmament at Georgetown University, this gutsy Jesuit is no amateurish peacenik, but someone who has spent 10 years as a congressman fighting for many moral causes.

He laments, Jeremiah-like, the total moral vacuum behind Washington's rejection of the Test Ban Treaty,

adopted by 20 nations, including Russia. He finds especially heinous his country's opposition to the United Nations resolution to ban all nuclear weapons, and cannot contain his disgust about America's sad claim as the number one arms supplier to the world.

In 10 years, says Father Drinan, the United States has kept millions of working "Christians" in affluence by producing \$123 billion worth of weapons, peddled abroad to 130 nations, including China which is now declared as friendly in a State Department quick-change act.

Perhaps the author's keenest contribution is his insight in perceiving the feelings of millions who finally have realized their beloved land has declared itself "a permanent adversary of any nation in the world." He agonizes with the growing army of citizens who, by their inaction for the past 38 years, now realize that their children might be

incinerated.

All the Pentagon uglies are here: Polaris, Trident II, AWACS, Sidewinders, F-15s, with all their beffudling, narcotizing lingo for Joe Average. Their presence in the American scenario seems to augur "Star Wars" fantasies, rather than wake moral response. Father Drinan is troubled about why it required the White House's utterances about "winnable" or "limited" nuclear wars to evoke the freeze.

Citing the Rev. Billy Graham's observation that if the arms race is not stopped a nuclear disaster is inevitable, we discover that Father Drinan takes sin as seriously as his brother preacher, whose recent conversion to the anti-nuclear camp has awakened his fellow evangelicals from their America-the-Beautiful slumbers, where God is on the side of the stars-and-stripes.

What apparently troubles Father Drinan the most is the response of his

Catholic community to the condemnations of nuclear weapons by Pope Pius XII and Pope John Paul II. He fails to understand Catholics' antipathy to Pope John XXIII's "Pacem In Terris," which called for a ban on all nuclear weapons. Vatican II's statements, says Father Drinan, are "narrow, legalistic and guarded."

Despite the support of the freeze by 133 Catholic bishops, the publication of the third revision of the bishops' statement on war seemed to leave the kind of troubling ambiguity that Father Drinan fears has gripped the man and woman in the pew.

Presumably, Father Drinan will be better satisfied with the pastoral letter the bishops finally adopted on an issue which he calls "the primordial moral and religious problem of the age."

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