Peeping Through the Holes

Peeping Through the Holes: Twenty-First Century Essays on *Psycho*

Edited by

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and Julio A. Olivares Merino

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PREFACE

Emotions are like children at school on a Friday afternoon: you can hardly control them. Behind this book there is some lack of self control in the sense that we simply let ourselves go; yes, 'perhaps all of us go a little crazy at times'.

Back in December 2010, time was running out for us to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960), one of the first I-wished-I-had-not-watched-it movies for both of us when we were kids. Needless to say that many more came after. And so, we quickly arranged a one day seminar for students at the University of Jaén which was held on December 10. It was not a big event, but it gathered a reasonable number of students and lecturers in the audience. The participants, whose contributions are included in this volume, did not want to miss the chance to discuss Norman Bates, Hitchcock, Robert Bloch and Ed Gein; the anniversary was a good excuse. Unexpectedly, Sigmund Freud turned up, and he brought Oedipus Rex by the hand. Shakespeare was the last one to join, but unfortunately he did not reveal whether he had come from Oxford or, rather, from Stratford-upon-Avon.

Psycho was approached from different perspectives, and, obviously, many of the conclusions reached in our *Psycho-Seminar*—and now published in this book—were not new. However, a quick review of the literature on this topic reveals that it belongs massively to the field of film studies and *Hitchcockiana*—and we do not mean the different types of plants bearing the name of botanist Albert Spear Hitchcock (1865-1935). In all these works, Bloch is an unwelcome guest, only invited to join the party because the British film director made explicit his debt to the Chicago writer: "*Psycho*," Hitchcock said, "all came from Robert Bloch's book." In this sense, the reader will soon notice that most of the essays included here are about the movie, but not all. *Psycho*, the 1959 novel, also has a place in the present work, both in itself and in relation to the movie it inspired. Furthermore, there is also another written text that is taken into consideration: Joseph Stefano's script for the film, which was not by any means a simple transition between a reader-oriented work and another made for theatre-goers.

Consequently, the position adopted here is one in which *Psycho* is not viewed solely or exclusively as a movie, a short novel or a screenplay. Rather, it is a split entity in which, as in the case of Norman Bates, three

layers merge to make up an 'unholy trinity', as Bloch defined his character's fractured personality. Each of these discourses establishes a complex set of relationships among themselves and other similar works. Needless to say, it is not possible to cover the entire range of this web as it has no boundaries and it is in a state of permanent change. In this sense the reference to the twenty-first century in the title of this monograph, as pretentious as it may sound, is but an attempt to mark some limits in our approach, a kind of *début de siècle* perspective.

Aware of the innovations and controversy brought about by the film, our academic itinerary will start with a necessary contextualization of *Psycho*'s times in terms of propaganda and censorship, focusing on the strategies employed by Hitch to overcome the limitations imposed by the vigilant moral codes and preserve the film's perverse potential. In "Hitchcock and the Hollywood Production Code: Censorship and Critical Acceptance in the 1960s," Dr. Garrido Hornos 'reads' the film's visual and thematic orchestration under the light of the Motion Picture Production Code of 1960, which clearly set the restrictions that every film discourse of the age was obliged to respect. Most filmmakers and producers adhered to the censorship limitations, but Alfred Hitchcock was a nonconformist and rebellious professional: his adaptation of Robert Bloch's novel was in itself an attack on the system which precisely accentuated the banned visual and textual effects: blood, early annihilation of the main protagonist and, overall, incestuous Freudian echoes. Garrido's analysis considers the tools the director used to 'distract' the Code's attention, detailing the difficulties found during the process of approval of scripts for their performance and subsequent filming. In this and many other aspects, Hitchcock was, undoubtedly, ahead of his time. So as to illustrate the aforementioned idea, this approach focuses on the use of the black and white in the opening scene—when color had been considered the norm for twenty years and a logical step forward in cinema techniques—; the showing of Janet Leigh's half-naked body after her furtive sexual encounter also in the prologue; or the explicit shot of a lavatory bowl in the shower sequence.

Expanding on the film's foundations, unleashing key facts to its textuality of madness and, as a consequence, diving into the movie's mental landscapes, the second essay allows us to enter Norman's fissured architecture of reality. Dr. Mesa Villar regards Hitchcock's *Psycho* as a purposefully anti-cathartic experience that seeks to evoke the fluctuating instability of personal identity while also illustrating the fragility of the bonds between individuals, society and the whole legal/moral apparatus that provides existence with an impression of security, meaningfulness and

inter-connectedness. Taking as a reference the diagnostic criteria of the American Psychiatric Association, this chapter presents a comparative study between the characters of Marion Crane and Norman Bates, paying much attention to their specific processes of transgression and self-reconstruction in the film. The corresponding analysis reveals startling similarities, of course to different degrees but within the same categories, as regards their protective manoeuvres, identity transformation routines and guilt management processes among other factors. Both characters rebel against an impending sense of nothingness. However, while Marion abandons her undertaking and so is about to come to terms with society—an attempt suddenly thwarted by the shower scene—Norman delivers himself to the destruction of others and even of himself. Ironically enough, such a nullifying process finally confirms his victory above every other character in the film and, most importantly, above the audience, as the closing scene more than aptly demonstrates.

In "Robert Bloch through the Looking Glass: *Psycho*, Doubles and Narrative Technique," Dr. Nieto García addresses a series of narrative techniques that Robert Bloch uses in his novel. Three main interrelated aspects are dealt with: the frequency of use of the mirror as an image in the novel, and what this use may imply; the constant game of doubles in *Psycho*, leaving aside the obvious case of the protagonist himself; and thirdly, an issue that seems to complete the previous treatment and that somehow reflects how we view reality on a mirror: how we can read *Psycho* from end to beginning, by analyzing the clues offered by Bloch along the novel for his readers to interpret it as a whole.

With Dr. Eugenio M. Olivares Merino's two-part paper, Bloch's novel comes again to the foreground. In the first one, the author focuses on the relevance of psychoanalysis in the United States during the first half of the twentieth century: Freud's views exercised a strong appeal both in scientific circles and in the popular culture. The purpose of the author is to show that, as an avid reader of books on psychology, Bloch came across two psychoanalysts who used Shakespeare's *Hamlet* to illustrate some mental pathologies loosely associated with the so-called Oedipus Conflict. In this, they were following the track of Freud, whose early reference to the Prince of Denmark in his *Die Traumdeutung* (1900) set the foundations for psychoanalytic literary criticism, and for an approach to *Hamlet* which would exercise an overwhelming influence on twentieth century critical responses to this tragedy. This is followed by chapter five where Dr. E. Olivares Merino sets to the task of presenting Bloch as a reader of Shakespeare. The paper concludes with a challenging statement: an Oedipal Hamlet might have been a point of reference for the author of

Psycho in the shaping of Norman Bates and his excessive attachment to Mother.

Back to the screen, our next installment grants a way into *Psycho*'s visual and narratological style, illustrating the film as a perfect mimesis of the main concepts at work in its plot. Dr. Julio Ángel Olivares Merino proves the movie stands as a perfect formal refraction and embodiment of madness and other signifieds concerned with the conscious distortion and deprivation of a solid framing of facts or actants. Existentialism and a proclivity to spy on and annihilate what bears a material form or physicality, that which emerges as hope and means to last, definitely beats on screen. Considering the primal significance of the act of seeing and the textual predominance of the eye in the film, through his most personal theory on Hitchcock's 'blinking method', Dr. Julio A. Olivares explores *Psycho*'s mischievous and perverse narrative mechanism, paying special attention to point of view, proactive editing—mostly in terms of veiling and unveiling procedures—and the figurative reverberations of content and form. The aim is to present the movie as a process or assembly of splitting shots or sequences abounding in aggression and cutting—nuclear dynamics in the discourse—, as well as the emphasis on evanescence, a stage of being which heads for the ultimate death or fade into black.

Finally, Dr. Rodríguez Martín's "*Psycho* (1960) Revisited: Intertextuality and Refraction" focuses on the film, analysing it through the prisms of intertextuality and refraction, as used respectively in adaptation studies and studies of contemporary fiction. From this perspective, *Psycho* can first be viewed as an adaptation or example of intertextual dialogism, that is, a text which engages in dialogue with previous texts, not only Bloch's novel but also other movies by the famous director and recurring motifs in his filmography. *Psycho* has become an intertext which influences many posterior texts. Although the analysis of intertextual relationships will provide us with a better understanding of the discourse of *Psycho*, this study is further enriched by making reference to the concept of refraction to show how later texts refract a particular light or perspective of the previous one, affecting our perception of Hitchcock's movie when it is revisited.

Our readers will notice that this work is published long after its purported date of release. We will not make explicit the reasons behind this delay for, as the Latin saying states, *excusatio non petita, accusatio manifesta*. Besides, it seems we are not the only ones to have lingered in our celebration of the anniversary, as much as it seems that 2012 and 2013 will be two years looking back on Hitch. By the time the present work is published, *The Girl*, a TV movie directed by Julian Jarrold, will have

questioned some commonplace assumptions about the English director, after intruding on our home screen with a peculiar approach to his art. The work narrates Hitchcock's obsessive relationship with Tippi Hedren, during the making of *The Birds* (1963) and *Marnie* (1964). The premier of Sacha Gervasi's *Hitchcock* is planned for the end of 2012, and it has already created much expectation. Sir Anthony Hopkins stars in the film, playing the role of the British director. Based on the book *Alfred Hitchcock and the Making of Psycho* (1990), by Stephen Rebello, this movie plans to show the complex filming of the masterpiece. From the beginning, *Psycho* was marred with financial problems, not to mention Hitch's efforts to dodge Hollywood censorship. But the movie also deals with the director's relationship with his wife, Alma Reville (played by Dame Helen Mirren). The cast features Scarlett Johansson (Janeth Leigh), Jessica Biel (Vera Miles), and James D'Arcy (Anthony Perkins), among others.

But Hollywood agenda for 2013 seems to include two more Hitchcockian events. *Dreamworks* and *Working Title* are preparing a new version of *Rebecca*, which has been launched—rather than as a remake of the classic 1940 film—as a kind of reinterpretation of Daphne Du Maurier's 1938 novel. Writer Steven Knight is the author of the script. A similar true-to-the-book approach seems to be behind *Paramount Pictures* new version of *Suspicion*, whose screenplay has been written by Veena Sud based on Anthony Berkeley's (as Francis Iles) 1932 novel *Before the Fact*, which also inspired Hitchcock's 1941 *Suspicion*.

A last minute addition to this list is *Bates Motel*, a television series to premier on March 18 (*A&E*), directed and produced by Tucker Gates.

Now the curtains (either on the stage or in the bathroom) are about to open and a most peculiar house—with its silhouette and endorsement of doom—is awaiting up on the hill. No cameras or pencils are allowed; you are invited to a ritual that only your eyes will view and your imagination will embody. Leave all hope behind and enter at your own risk. The Bates' terrifying rollercoaster welcomes you. Nothing is over here… not at least until it overcomes you.

—Eugenio M. Olivares Merino and Julio A. Olivares Merino

CHAPTER ONE

HITCHCOCK AND THE HOLLYWOOD PRODUCTION CODE: CENSORSHIP AND CRITICAL ACCEPTANCE IN THE 1960S

MARÍA DEL CARMEN GARRIDO HORNOS

> *La censure quelle qu'elle soit me paraît une monstruosité, une chose pire que l'homicide; l'attentat contre la pensée est un crime de lèse-âme.* (Gustave Flaubert, *Correspondance.* A Louise Colet, 1852)

Preamble

In the introduction to an interesting and quite pedagogical guide about the film *Psycho*, by Alfred Hitchcock, the British film critic and historian Derek Malcolm writes:

> Many filmmakers would say that there's no such thing as a movie capable of shaking the world. But some will attempt to make them. Those who succeed are rare, and the strange thing is that even the lucky ones don't appear to know they are doing it at the time. In fact, it sometimes takes years to realise what really is a great film or what may have looked wonderful at the time but was just a momentary flourish. [...] *Psycho* was a distinct change of pace by Hitchcock [...] [which] did shake the world, [*sic*] with its black sense of humour and its textbook example of how to manipulate an audience into fear and loathing. (Malcolm, 1995: 3)

Many other scholars and connoisseurs of the British filmmaker have described his innovative and iconoclastic *modus operandi* in the same way

for decades. *Psycho*, Hitchcock's first "movie capable of shaking the world," the "first real instance of 'pure film' in American commercial cinema"—as Vincent Canby (quoted in Monaco, 2001: 189) commented twenty years after its release—opened the door to a new filmmaking aesthetic which mirrored the socio-political milieu of the age. In his fifth decade behind the camera, Hitch premiered a motion picture which has come to represent a defining moment in the history of the horror genre, a movie which pioneered the natural treatment of controversial subject matters as sex or violence in the United States. His skilful manipulation of both the audience and the censors in the austere post-war age signalled a turning point in the North-American conception of morality in cinema and television.

With its incitement to corruption, incest, clandestine sexual encounters, nudity, bloodshed—not to mention unprecedented uncanonical narrative disruptions such as the sudden and early killing of the protagonist—, *Psycho* enraged those responsible for censoring 'inappropriate' content. The murder scene in the shower—an "extreme violation of audience expectations" (Allen, 2007: 51), a "direct violation of 'correct' scenario development" (Sterrit, 2002: 103)—expressly devastated Hollywood's classical precepts, which had not only never witnessed such a display of insolent graphism, but also believed firmly in the pre-eminence of the orthodox diegesis.

Hitchcock's new production now embodied a manifest abandonment of the formerly governing 'Cinema of Sentiment' that had symbolised classic Hollywood in pursuit of one prime purpose: sensation. Employing the visual medium of the motion picture to obtain an immediate effect upon the viewer—which could not successfully be attained by any other medium (Canby quoted in Monaco, 2001: 189)—, the Hitchcockian 'Cinema of Sensation', a perilous "new perception of film [...] rooted in the visceral manner in which the viewer was drawn into and held by a movie" (Monaco, 2001: 189), violated the restrictions of censorship, but satisfied the visual appetite of the audience, and quenched its voyeuristic demands. And, censors aside, that was what motivated Hitchcock: the animal instinct, the corporeal attraction, the pleasure gained while 'peeping through a hole'. Littau elucidates about this perception when writing about the actual purpose of gazing at a thrilling scene, be it real or fictitious:

> Whether the crowd gathers at the crash site or gathers for a crash film in the cinema, it is their readiness to be thrilled which has brought them together. Thus, whether the crash film has quickened the audience heartbeat through kinaesthetic motion [...] or confused their retinas through

> the collision of images in montage sequences [...] or conversely, has commented on spectatorial sensation [...], we find, to a greater of lesser extent, instances of physical pleasure in looking. (Quoted in Elliot, 2010: 29)

Like Littau, Hitchcock believed that his new thriller should accentuate the innate and visceral side of human nature with its overwhelming expressivity, seeking, at the same time, a duality of contradictory emotions: pain and pleasure, or horror and excitement. With this double articulation, the spectator would be unconsciously and 'perversely' lured and manipulated through a strong sensation of vulnerability and loss of control.

Unfortunately for Hitch, the *Motion Picture Production Code*—still prevailing thirty years after it was first set out—was not willing to ignore his 'improprieties' in exchange for an awesome product which, undoubtedly, would put the methodological effectiveness and integrity of the system to the test. In spite of his yearning for rebellion, Hitchcock would have to soften his excessively realistic depiction of brutality and insolent sexual magnetism if he wanted to release his *Psycho.*

This chapter will offer an insight into the socio-historical factors which led to the establishment of the *Motion Picture Production Code* in the year 1930, its evolution during the following decades and the aftermath that its implementation had on Hitchcock's most intense, blood-curdling and eerie film. The most risqué points in *Psycho* will be examined along with the brilliant procedures through which Alfred Hitchcock outmanoeuvred the 1960s censors. Conscious of *Psycho*'s lascivious initial rendezvous, Freudian innuendos and coercive instances, the director cleverly negotiated his dispute with the Code—"designed by rearguard Victorians for the 'family audience'" (Durgnat, 2002: 32)—: the opening scene, the flushing toilet and the shower sequence could be mitigated as long as censorship boards accepted others of his sharp-minded suggestions, an astute pre-conceived ruse which would secure the release of the magnificent result that, as described by Youri Deschamps, opened the door to a new generation of filmmakers and a distinctive directorial style:

> Plus que tout autre film du maître, *Psycho* fait aujourd'hui figure d'indépassable, de modèle qui a ouvert la voie à une longue série de films mettant en scène la figure du psycho-killer. Une ouvre programme, une base qui servira de donnée de base à toute une génération de cinéastes, un film matriciel, le parangon du thriller horrifique moderne. (2000: 92)

The Motion Picture Production Code and the *Catholic Legion of Decency:* Origins and Historical Transcendence

The 1960s witnessed important sociological shifts which, unavoidably, had direct repercussions upon the content included in new films and TV productions. The last years of the previous decade had already seen audiences afflicted by the influence of television, particularly in families, who regarded the new 'box' as a low-priced substitute for their former cinema-going habit. Moreover, TV presented few problems as far as the portrayal of sexual taboos or moral matters were concerned, since censorship executed a powerful control over them.

The transitional stage of the film industry embraced, however, a very different ground-breaking perspective, and feature filmmaking in Hollywood did tackle motifs and topics directly related to the new America. The inauguration of the 'Cinema of Sensation' with Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* coincided with youth rebellion: socio-cultural phenomena such as the 'hippie' movement, the liberation of repressed mentalities with the approval of the sale of the birth control pill and the insurrection of certain minority racial groups preceded new artistic tendencies. In addition, when in November of the same year Kennedy arrived at the presidency with his promise to "get the country moving again" and his vision of a "New Frontier" after the apathetic last years of the Eisenhower age (quoted in Quart and Auster, 2002: 68), special attention was beginning to be paid to visually graphic movies with a special appeal to the senses which, influenced by foreign productions that gave focus to conflictive themes in a much more sophisticated and mature way, became increasingly overt in their representation of adult subjects, eroticism and violence.[1]

[1] Certain popular foreign films—which, indifferent to censorship, were successfully distributed and screened in American cinemas and theatres—clearly influenced the modernization of the *Hollywood Production Code* with their mature approach to adult matters. Among this imported seal-free material, Monaco (2001: 58) mentions inspiring French, British and Italian works such as *The Lovers* (1958, by Louis Malle), *Roman at the Top* (1959, Jack Clayton), *Hiroshima, Mon Amour* (1959, Alain Resnais), *À bout de souffle* (*Breathless*, 1959, by Jean-Luc Godard), *L'Avventura* (1960, Michelangelo Antonioni) and *La Dolce Vita* (1960, by Federico Fellini), which were "sexually daring compared to contemporary Hollywood releases," and which overcame any censorship restriction due to their special treatment of sex, "always considered more mature, complex and sophisticated than anything permitted by the Hollywood code" (Monaco, 2001: 58). Precisely because most of the films referred to had been denied the 'Seal of

But in spite of the powerful influence of certain European directors such as Alain Resnais, Jean-Luc Godard or Federico Fellini and their *avant-garde* aesthetics, the American motion picture industry was still at the mercy of the *Production Code*, a complete well-defined set of guidelines which governed the release of the films produced in the United States from the year 1930.

The origin of this association dates back to the beginning of the twentieth century, when, due to the curiosity aroused by the new and economical form of entertainment, many individuals became brave producers of film discourses which included extravagant and provocative situations. No moral code or ethical control governed the new motion pictures, until in 1930, Father Daniel Lord S.J.—a Catholic Priest convinced of the corrupting content of some films—wrote a code which banned any exaltation of violent domination—white slavery, torture, abuse, etc.—or sexual exposure—nudity, adultery, prostitution and other erotic suggestions—. He argued that movies should be devoted to foster marriage, religious practices and fairness of government, instead of negatively influencing the audience's primary instincts:

> [M]ovies cut across all social, economic, political, and educational boundaries, attracting millions of people to its theatres every week. In order to protect the masses from the evil influence of the movies, they had to be censored. (Quoted in Black, 1994: 1)

Father Lord's reflection upon the lack of order and decency which had characterised films until his code led to a legal governing body which prevailed in the country for more than sixty years. Interestingly enough, almost a decade prior to his writing, a group of producers and distributors who had been attempting to evade early censor boards had already formed *Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America, Inc.*, naming Will Harrison Hays—Presbyterian Chairman of the Republican Party—as President. Hays agreed with Fr. Lord's ideals and conceptions, and adopted his code so that any script considered for a potential motion picture in the United States should comply with the restrictions outlined in it.

Only four years after Father Lord's contribution, the Catholic Church struggled for a stronger consolidation of the Code, alleging that its premises did not entirely account for their religious precepts. For that purpose they launched a *Legion of Decency* campaign which aspired to

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Approval' in the States, American audiences anxiously anticipated their screening and made of them box-offices successes, discovering in them the liberty that their films were deprived of by the Code.

gain a more in-depth revision of sexual and political matters in prospective film releases. Hays accepted the plea and created a new censorship office, the *Production Code Administration*, which would concede its 'Seal of Approval' only to those motion pictures which, on the basis of their adherence to the Code's guidelines, could be screened in theatres. If a movie was denied the seal for being considered immoral according to the Code's standards, it harboured few possibilities of being premiered. To assess the process cleanly, at least two members of the Code boards used to read the scripts; they normally agreed about whether specific sequences or lines of dialogue might constitute problems and, as a consequence, would have to be removed. After a short scope of time—commonly just a few days—[2] they supplied film producers and studio liaisons with a thoroughly detailed feedback about their acceptable and unacceptable contents.

In 1945, Eric Johnston took charge of Hays' institution, changing its name to *Motion Picture Association of America, Inc.*, and twenty-one years later, in 1966, Johnston's *Hollywood Production Code* was abandoned in favour of the subsequent and current rating system. Nowadays, scholars and experts on film censorship still regard the Code as "a key ingredient in understanding how films were made during the studio era" and as "an integral part of the studio production system" (Black, 1994: 5), which helps us better appreciate the constraints imposed upon Hitchcock's *Psycho*. It is hardly surprising that the filmmaker inevitably had to convince the censors of the suitability of his new and controversial film, for, as David Thomson points out, "[m]ost films of the 50s [were] secret ads for the American way of life [...] [whereas] *Psycho* is a warning about its lies and limits" (2009: 24), a realistic depiction of a superficial society which camouflages human vulnerabilities and corruption behind the appearance of normalcy and automatism.

The film suffered the scrutiny of diverse censor procedures and vetting boards, which, moreover, highlighted its troublesome link to the so-called 'auteur theory', particularly in relation to the brutality expressed in the famous shower scene:

[2] This pre-production scrutiny and considerably fast response on the part of the *Production Code Administration* evinces its intention not to delay film projects, but as Van Schmus stated, "to cure the problems before [directors and producers] g[ot] into the ghastly expense of dealing with a finished picture" (quoted in Prince, 2003: 40). The Code tended to facilitate the natural development of the shooting and release by negotiating with directors and producers even before they started filming instead of condemning elements at the time of the final screening.

> [S]creen violence in classical Hollywood makes ever more salient the longstanding objection to, and problem with, the auteur theory. Adjudicating violence entailed that films would have numerous authors rather than just a single author. As a site of adjudication and negotiation in classical Hollywood, screen violence is antithetical to orthodox auteurist notions of directorial control and creative expression. In this regard, the violence in *Psycho*, as we now have the film, is rather different in this crucial scene than it was in the picture as Hitchcock made it. (Prince, 2003: 44)

With this impressive authenticism, Hitchcock's murder sequences—"the last expression of the darkest desire that had occupied [the director's] imagination for decades" (Modleski, 2011: 174)—were not the only concerns which worried Geoffrey Shurlock's board; the screenplay was full of inappropriate Freudian undertones, erotic allusions, necrophilic inferences and many other violations of the Code, which, under no circumstances, could endow the film with its seal.

Hitchcock's Offence: *Psycho*'s Censorship and Audiences

As early as twenty-four years before the making of *Psycho*, Alfred Hitchcock reflected on the audience's necessity to tremble and marvel during their screening experience:

> Why do we go to the pictures? To see life reflected on the screen, certainly—but what kind of life?
> Obviously, the kind we don't experience ourselves—or the same life but with a difference; and the difference consists of emotional disturbances which, for convenience, we call "thrills".
> Our nature is such that we must have these "shake-ups", or we grow sluggish and jellified; but, on the other hand, our civilization has so screened and sheltered us that it isn't practicable to experience sufficient thrills at firsthand. (Quoted in Gottlieb, 2000: 109)

Already devoted to appealing the censorship, the filmmaker highlighted the 'shelters' enforced by that set of guidelines which denatured his own impressions on reality; for him, censorship meant overprotection and enclosure, but his earlier works had already been subjected to the limitation of the Code—by then somewhat softened, but still setting the

standard for any prospective project in the 1960s—and these experiences had taught him how to deal with its impositions.[3]

On the morning of the 19 April 1959, Hitchcock read a review in the *New York Times* by the American editor and writer Anthony Parker White; in his column, 'Boucher'—White's pseudonym—discussed Robert Bloch's new novel, headlining its author as "chillingly effective" and the work as "icily terrifying" (quoted in Rebello, 1990: 35). Enthralled by the commenter's lines, Hitchcock purchased a copy of the novel and, impressed by the sudden demise of its heroine, decided to undertake its adaptation to the big screen. He summoned his team to his own house for the preparation of 'his' *Psycho* on the 3 June 1960, and presented his new project both to *Paramount* and the members of his crew as a simple terror story which would keep the spectator fixated on the screen owing to its naive style and twist ending.

Much to his disappointment, and even though some of Robert Bloch's writings had already been adapted for television, the novella was initially rejected, being considered too macabre and bloody according to censorship standards. The impossibility of approval of certain reprehensible scenes was declared without hesitation; the brutality of the crimes depicted and the morbid characterisation of its protagonist, Norman Bates, would prevent the sale of the product to any cinema studio, reluctant to blatantly infringe Hays Code.

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[3] Twenty years before *Psycho* was aired, Alfred Hitchcock had already faced his incompatibilities with the censorship. Joan Fontaine saw how her roles in *Rebecca* (1940) and *Suspicion* (1941) were adjusted to the audience's tastes, tempering some of her and Laurence Olivier's lines in the dialogue. His second American film, *Foreign Correspondent* (1940) avoided allusions to Germany which, for obvious political reasons, might have been considered offensive during the years of the Second World War. *Notorious* (1946) was likewise conflictive in its depiction of Nazism and certain scholars even maintain that the Code required the plot to clearly specify that the atomic bomb was an invention of the Germans, and not of the Americans (Chaparro, 2005: 73-74). Together with political aspects, eroticism was also softened in Hitchcock's *Notorious*; during the long kissing scene in which Cary Grant and Ingrid Bergman never have dinner, the chicken seems to be a substitute for a potential sexual encounter and, in fact, in compliance with the *Production Code*, it becomes the main topic of the conversation between Devlin and Alicia to evade erotic commentaries. After all, Hitchcock was convinced that food replaces sex quite frequently (Chaparro, 2005: 73). Finally, *Rear Window* (1954) and *North by Northwest* (1959) suffered the censors' restrictions in their screenplays for suggestive situations, sensual remarks or sexy portrayals of their protagonists.

For its part, *Paramount* even endeavoured to dissuade the director by alleging that no studio was available for the shooting, but Hitchcock, confident in overcoming all the obstacles posed by the company, declared that he would finance the project himself through *Shamley Productions*—his own television company—and claimed that this film would not need an exorbitant budget; much the opposite, it would balance out the substantial expenditures of his previous releases. Hilton A. Green, assistant director of the film, stated Hitchcock's intention of employing his television staff to gain time and to reduce costs:

> *North by Northwest* having been a rather expensive film for its day, he wanted to prove a quality movie without spending a lot of money to do it. So he thought of his television crew because we were accustomed to shorter schedules. (Quoted in Rebello, 1990: 55)

Paramount eventually consented to the project, especially when they heard that the director's new motion picture would be entirely prepared and filmed by his TV cinematographer, John L. Russell—member of his *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*, who was specialised in black and white. The studio heads sighed with relief since, apart from being a money-saving technique, a black-and-white film would shock cinemagoers—already used to colour—and, above all, it would divert the censors from the horror of the murder scenes.[4] Hitchcock would submit an accelerated but excellent and conscientiously presented work which could perfectly stand alongside his best former productions; as G. D. Phillips lucidly argued: "Given the economy—in every sense of the word—with which *Psycho*

[4] Hitchcock's common sense advised caution in the selection of the photographic code; aware of the consequences which the challenging murder scene in the shower might have, he opted for black-and-white photography which could avoid excessive reprimands, as the bloody depiction of violent shots in colour would have provoked disapproval on the part of the Code, already irritated by the explicitness of the sequence. As the director himself commented in posterior interviews: "in color, the blood flowing down the bathtub drain would have been *repulsive*" (quoted in McGilligan, 2003: 579). Thanks to black-and-white, Hitchcock dispelled the chromatic brutality of the shots and focused on the continuous light and shadow game throughout the whole film. The use of black and white allowed the team to use chocolate syrup, since its density and the chromatic effect of it mixed with the bath water provided an effect very similar to human blood.

was made, the finished film has a stark simplicity that brings the best of his telefilms very much to mind" (quoted in Castro de Paz, 2000: 159).[5]

The writing of the script—commissioned initially to James P. Cavanagh and finally undertaken by Joseph Stefano for manifest textual disagreements between the director and the former—lasted for three months. Three months in which Stefano—"a thirty-eight-year-old former lyricist-composer [...] [e]xuberantly cocky, volatile and streetwise, [...] who had only owned a television for two years [and] had harbored no writing aspirations outside of music" (Rebello, 1990: 37)—was undergoing psychoanalysis, which definitely influenced the Freudian echoes in his final product. Peter Conrad writes about this undeniable influence, considering how Norman's complex dramatized the Oedipal travails of Stefano himself; the screenwriter even admitted to Hitchcock that, as Norman, he could have killed his own mother:

> I was capable of it at one time. For some reason, I didn't. So for me, it was a deep psychological drama, kind of tragedy. […] There are things a boy child cannot beat—a mother who is sexual, who flirts with him, but then puts up a stop sign. I imagined that this is what happened to Norman too, when he was growing up. (Quoted in Conrad, 2000: 311)

For obvious reasons, Stefano felt extremely captivated by Robert Bloch's unambiguous allusions to the incestuous relationship between Norman and his mother. Even though Mrs. Bates was but a mere *acousmêtre*—a character featuring in a film with a voice, but nobody (Chion quoted in Sterrit, 2002: 318)—, *Psycho*'s hints of necrophilia and, above all, its Oedipal plot transcendence, reverberated in the censors' ears from early on.

As expected, on the 24 November, Hitchcock received an official communication from the *Paramount Pictures Corporation*, a detailed report signed by Luigi Luraschi, executive and head of censorship with direct connections to Hays Office. In it, Luraschi itemised the controversial points that the company had found in its reading of the screenplay and categorically demanded the elimination of certain lines of

[5] Castro de Paz (1997: 11) analyses the naturalness and simplicity of a project which ended up becoming a hit: "[L]a hiperdeterminada forma Hitchcockiana podría ajustarse a los limitados medios de la temprana televisión americana gracias a la constante búsqueda de esa calidad de la imperfección que lo había llevado a la producción de un artificio formal basado no en una excelsa fotografía ni en complejos trucos o efectos especiales, sino en el económico ensamblaje de las condiciones técnicas disponibles, controlables artesanalmente en cada pequeña particularidad y de un modo muy preciso […]."

dialogue to avoid reprimands from local censure and the *National Legion of Decency* of the Roman Catholic Church:

> Your script of the 18th has been submitted to the Production Code who, having read it, wishes to report that while the basic story is acceptable under the provisions of the Production Code, the present version however contains one element which would be unacceptable, and which would make it impossible to issue a Certificate on a finished film based on this script. They refer to what they call "the very pointed description of an incestuous relationship between Norman and his mother." [...] I might add parenthetically that if the picture were to contain this kind of a flavour we would be in serious trouble with the Legion of Decency and also with the various censor boards throughout the international field. (Quoted in Bouzereau, 2010: 73)

Both Stefano and Hitchcock had assumed such a reaction since they initiated their adaptation; they worked hard during their daily morning meetings, viewing clips of certain films which had influenced them—like *Les Diaboliques* (*The Devils*, 1955, by Henri-Georges Clouzot), which the director himself cited as inspiring—or some parts of Hitch's own motion pictures. Robert Bloch's material definitely lacked the grandeur of Pierre Boileau and Thomas Narcejac's novel *Celle qui n'était plus* (*She Who Was No More*, 1952) or the splendor of Hitchcock's previous stories, particularly those from the 40s and 50s. Bloch's fiction was indeed plain, but its Freudian background and its unpredictability would amaze the spectator much more than any of his earlier pictures.

Stefano was, therefore, loyal to Bloch's core text except for the suggestions proposed by Hitchcock, who, as McGilligan notes (2003: 580), always encouraged scriptwriters to be courageous when composing; censors should not inhibit their creativity, he would deal with their objections personally once the writing was concluded:

> Hitchcock always knew how to play safe when in doubt without compromising his vision. He was shrewd enough and lucky-enough to escape opprobrium for his controlled provocations. Yet provocations they were. [...] [He was] determined to test the edges of Hollywood censorship while challenging [his] audience, but always doing so through well-constructed, emotionally absorbing films. (Orr, 2009: 53)

Encouraged by Hitchcock's intrepid and defiant spirit, Stefano did not disguise any information about the dubious maternal-filial connection which Bloch had openly shown in his novella and he emphasised "how seductive she was with [Norman] and how he had a right to be her only

lover..." (quoted in Rebello, 1990: 88). Already in his first draft, Stefano's Mrs. Bates referred to Norman "ever the sweetheart" and became excited about "the fantasy of making love," but his final script was not less daring and included other direct references: "a son is a poor substitute for a lover"—Norman says to Marion during the parlour scene with the stuffed birds—and the psychiatrist underlines that Mrs. Bates and her son's relationship is "more than two adolescent lovers" (Rebello, 1990: 77).[6]

This concealed but alarming sexuality between mother and son—an erotic overtone never visualized graphically in the film—found its unequivocal counterpart in Stefano's first sequence. The opening scene, with Marion and Sam after their sexual encounter, was the clever idea of Hitchcock and an astute ruse to divert censorship from other polemical components. After all, if censors were engaged in the open-mouthed kissing and embracing of the first minutes, the shower scene would seem less incensing than it actually was.

Newspapers and magazines at the time of the premiere had already announced that the motion picture would be more explicit in its portrayal of sexuality and, as Kapsis puts it, "the great sexual frankness of *Psycho* was [...] [already] evident in ads and posters for the film which featured Janet Leigh in brassiere and half-slip and John Gavin stripped to the waist" (1992: 58). His audience, effectively, had to be prepared for the share of sensuality they were about to receive, and these irreverent advertisements would contribute to his veiled suggestion. For the first time, Hitchcock conceived a film primarily addressed to a young spectator who, seduced by the promotional image of a semi-nude girl, would satisfy his instinct by buying a ticket. As Hitchcock commented to Sheila Graham, a Hollywood gossip columnist:

> You can't put scenes on the screen today where lovers just peek at each other—young people would laugh. [...] Our big problem today [...] is trying to make the censors understand that the young people are much more sophisticated than they used to be. (Quoted in Kapsis, 1992: 58)

[6] Joseph Stefano admitted to Philip J. Skerry that all the scenes in *Psycho IV*—the only sequel to the original film which was written by him—"were in [his] mind when [he] wrote *Psycho*: the mother teasing him on the bed and then getting furious at him because he gets an erection" (quoted in Smith, 2009: 64-65). Actually, even though no explicit or real sexual encounters occur during the film, *Psycho IV* seems to evince the Oedipus motif with which Stefano had cautiously peppered his *Psycho* thirty years before, when the Code closed the door to any disguised confusion of roles. In a succession of flashbacks, the TV film makes use of a young lascivious and erotic Mother Bates who equally incites and reproaches Norman for his attraction towards her.

The film's publicity was a sensual wink that invited the potential spectator to view Marion and Sam's intimacy. Jean Douchet—critic of the age who, used to liberal French cinema, wanted even more from this sequence—claimed that Janet Leigh should have appeared without her bra to satisfy the masculine audience in the same way that John Gavin's naked torso was a delicacy for feminine spectators:

> [L]a caméra pénètre d'une façon indiscrète dans une chambre aux stores baissés, en plein après-midi. Et dans cette chambre, un couple, sur un lit, s'embrassant, s'étreignant, manifestant une grande attirance charnelle. Dès lors il [le spectateur] se sent frustré. Il voudrait "en voir plus". Si encore le torse de John Gavin peut satisfaire à la rigueur la moitié d'une salle, le fait que Janet Leigh ne soit point nue est mal supporté par l'autre. Ce désir éveillé doit trouver logiquement sa conclusion à la fin de la course de Janet. Elle sera nue, totalement, en s'offrant totalement. [*sic*] L'acte sexuel qui s'accomplira sur elle sera, lui aussi, extrême. (Douchet, 1960: 10)

Douchet's desires aside, Hitchcock was conscious that an overload in the sexual accentuation of the sequence would have implied, for sure, a disruption in the logical and equable presentation of the events and an unfavourable judgement on the part of the critics of the time, but, equally for the director, a mere classical kissing scene would not have realistically illustrated the *pathos* of the situation (Truffaut, 2003: 255). Although he was aware of the implicit eroticism of the sequence—which would have been automatically condemned by the *Production Code*—, Hitchcock's assertiveness was not unfounded; his affable relation with Geoffrey Shurlock and Frank Freeman—president of the *Motion Picture Association of America*, which, in turn, regulated the *Production Code*—would foster some indulgence by the censors, since

> [Hitchcock] knew enough to flatter the censor and to let him feel that they were men of the world, who understood dirty jokes, say, in a way that helped excuse them. It was calculated, and Shurlock was at liberty to see how he was being used. (Thomson, 2009: 65)

Shurlock was cordial and quite ahead of his time—even considered a helping hand in liberalising the Code—yet fully conscious of the opposition to giving the green light to *Psycho*, a film which meant "a revolt against the fascism of the studio heads and the Hollywood Production Code" (Mordden quoted in Monaco, 2001: 2). To obtain his approval, Hitchcock would have to provide narratological arguments to justify voyeuristic scenes like the erotic opening of the film or the—according to the Code—'too long Peeping Tom' shot with Norman

visually 'devouring' Marion through the hole (Prince, 2003: 42-43). And he had them. The exhibition of certain lascivious content would absorb the spectator's attention, increasing, in turn, the confusion provoked by the shower scene. The plot perfectly excused sexual intercourse in the preliminary sequence, which, after all, was not visually depicted—following Coursodon, we even experience a "visual frustration," arriving at the scene 'too late' to witness the sexual act (1984: 29)—but which, nonetheless, marked significant progress in the Hollywood of the sixties and in its prospective audience without directly defying or breaching the Code.

Hitchcock turned a deaf ear to recommendations and, once the casting for his Norman had been closed with the selection of Anthony Perkins,[7] he rebelliously chose his enticing main actress, a decision which radically contravened Robert Bloch's original and discreet conception. In the novel, the victim in the shower is a dark-haired young woman, but Hitchcock's intention was to contract an attractive blonde girl to petrify the audience later with her impromptu demise. Thirty-two-year-old Janet Leigh—already married to Tony Curtis and mother of two girls—was mentioned by Hitchcock during his first meeting with Stefano. She did not possess the aggressive beauty of certain *prima donnas* such as Marilyn Monroe or Ava Gardner, nor the exquisiteness of his former muse, Grace Kelly, but—after some costume epics and mediocre comedies—she had played an expressive and sexy role in Orson Welles' *Touch of Evil* (1958), and Hitch trusted in his rarely mistaken instinct, sure of what would be an excellent complicity between them.

In October, Hitchcock sent Leigh a copy of Robert Bloch's novel, informing her of the changes carried out to her character and narrative rhythm. For the filmmaker's version, Crane's character would have a much more accentuated diegetic weight and, for the sake of audience identification, her scenes would be multiplied. He told her that *Psycho* was a cake and that he had a portion for her:

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[7] Charles Winecoff, Anthony Perkins' biographer, states that "[Perkins'] performance […] was not acting: that was Tony" (2006: 179), for the actor himself shared much of Norman Bates' personality. Like his character's, Perkins' father—the actor Osgood Perkins—had died when Anthony was just five years old and, like Norman, he was brought up by his mother, a "manipulative" and "dominant" woman (Winecoff, 2006: 29) towards whom he felt an agonizing tie. Apart from openly recognizing his homosexuality, Perkins admitted this abnormal relationship in an interview, and honestly added that he had felt a concomitant "Oedipal" jealousy toward his father (Winecoff, 2006: 19).

> Here's your piece of the pie. What you bring to Mary other than what I want is fine. You can do almost anything with Mary and I won't interfere, so long as it's within my concept. […] I will only interfere if you don't come up to where I need you or go too far. (Quoted in Rebello, 1990: 61, 62)

And, stressing this idea, he added: "I will only direct you if A, you attempt to take more than your share of the pie, or B, if you don't take enough or C, if you are having trouble in motivating the necessary time motion" (quoted in McGilligan, 2003: 587).

Janet accepted knowing full well that Stefano's script was tremendously provocative and without imagining that her less than twenty-seven-day contribution to *Psycho* would become the work of any actress' lifetime; her paralyzing death in the movie mythicised her and turned her into a living legend. Only a few years before her real death in 2004, she still remembered melancholically how people continued telling her that, in one way or another, they were sure that Marion would reappear in the film, despite being dead (Bouzereau, 2010: 87).

Her scenes meant a challenge for the costume team, who travelled to Phoenix to observe women of the age and social class of Marion Crane. As usual, Hitchcock also took part in the task: he searched the city for a girl like his protagonist, went to her home and browsed through her wardrobe and drawers, photographing any item he considered inspiring and classical. Once the information had been gathered, Janet's clothes were purchased in *JAX*, a Beverly Hills boutique with woollen items which could suit the absorption of the spotlights on the set. Rita Riggs and Helen Colvig, costume designers of the film, paid scrupulous attention also, and above all, to Janet's underwear, more problematic in terms of censorship. The inceptive idea of a matching bra and knickers was soon refused by Hitchcock, since, for him, Marion's underwear should be a distinctive sign for any feminine spectator: "We want that underwear to be identifiable to many women all over the country" (quoted in Rebello, 1990: 72). Finally, Hitchcock decided not to show the lower item and opted for a white matching set for the opening scene—the good girl tormented by the circumstances—and a black one for the bad girl, the thief, the fugitive.

Leigh was not surprised about her boss' meticulousness; as well as his notorious tendency towards pre-planning, scheduling and storyboarding, Hitchcock had told the actress about his strategy to manipulate censorship by presenting things in such a bizarre way that he could negotiate any sensitive part of the film. He had deliberately included plenty of objectionable shots in the script, completely aware that they would be

reprehensible—even unacceptable—, but expecting that, for each one rejected, he would have a broader opportunity to debate the ones with which he had been concerned from the very beginning. That was the way in which he convinced the Code of the imperative necessity to include a half-naked Marion in the voyeuristic opening scene, stating that it was essential to demonstrate the furtive and useless nature of her relationship with Sam, which ends up as being theft.

Equally defensible would be the shot of a flushing toilet—never exhibited in the American cinema and iconoclastic image of the film—;[8] Hitchcock invited Shurlock's board to regard it as another vital narrative element, even though its disruptive and eccentric presentation was inconceivably realistic in the light of 60s censorship. Moreover, and plainly,

> Hitch could surmise that the average American flushed a toilet half a dozen times a day without having conniption fits. It wasn't as if anyone in the film used the bathroom as plumbing intended (and that taboo had hardly yet been broken fifty years later). (Thomson, 2009: 66)

Leaving aside its more than obvious usefulness—and in spite of Hitchcock's theory that the toilet shot would stand as a prelude for the forthcoming outright horror, the shower scene—the irreverent quality of the lavatory in the film was naturally criticised by those who found in its portrayal an assault on intimacy, intrinsic in American values:

> *Psycho* [...] is the lower-bodily-stratum film par excellence of Hitchcock's career, and hence his most extravagant act of carnivalization via the subversion of Hollywood norms in particular and American-bourgeois norms in general. [...] Its inclusion of a full-screen close up of a toilet, an everyday object that had hitherto been rigorously excluded for mainstream

[8] Curiously enough, the use of the toilet was not new to Hitchcock. As a matter of fact, the director found a source of enjoyment in locking people in lavatories and toilets, endowing them with certain prominence as a hiding place in more than fifteen films, as an enclosure and penance site in others or even as a threshold of lovemaking. *Number Seventeen* makes use of the toilet cistern as safekeeping for the necklace studded and precious stones; *The Lady Vanishes* employs the lavatory of the roomette to hide Dame May Whitty. *Mr. and Mrs. Smith* shows it as a meeting point for a whole family. *Secret Agent*, *Lifeboat* and *Shadow of a Doubt* repeatedly include its euphemistic initials B. M., and films like *Vertigo*, *North by Northwest*, *Marnie*, *Torn Curtain* or *Topaz* utilise it both as a waiting area for sexual encounters and as a place where spies discover secrets. *Psycho* and *The Trouble with Harry* exemplify its use as an improvised coffin.

> American movies, is an over example of this carnivalization. (Sterrit, 2002: 100, 103)

Sociological questions aside, Hitchcock had already filmed sequences depicting bathrooms as places of danger, menace and revelation, and *Psycho*'s would be one. He adduced the toilet's worth as a plot link; firstly, Lila's discovery of a bit of paper in the bowl would prove that Marion had been in the hotel and, secondly, with its first straightforward image—Marion throwing the pieces of paper—, the spectator would naturalise the following seconds, decodifying and identifying the sounds related to the flushing of the toilet and the running water in the shower and feeling invited to it. As expected, the censors soon showed their disapproval, although they did not concur as to whether it was violence or nudity which they disliked most.

The slow-motion filming of the shower murder was programmed for the week of 17 to 23 December and lasted seven long days during which Janet Leigh—covering her body with a mesh especially designed to hide her most private parts—stood half-nude on the set for hours. For those particular shots in which her chest had to be shot, Hitchcock had hired Maril Renfro, a professional stripper and model to act as a body-double. No sexual nudity would be evident, but the audience's illusion of glimpsing it would still be there:

> In describing what is now regarded as a classic sequence, Hitchcock emphasized that the challenge of shooting it was to suggest rather than to show nudity so as to placate the censors, "[t]he Scene occupies only forty-five seconds in the film, but it took me seven days to shoot it so as to avoid censorship and yet create the illusion of nudity." (Kapsis, 1992: 59)

Saul Bass' innovative storyboards covered a total of seventy-eight camera angles, so that Leigh's nudity was dissected and not directly focussed as a precautionary measure to the Code. The actress herself commented on Hitchcock's common sense when arranging the shooting of the sequence:

> Of course, Mr. Hitchcock never asked me to do the scene in the nude because showing nudity on the screen was simply out of question. Doing [it] would have negated how clever and subtle he was at *suggesting* things. (Quoted in Rebello, 1990: 103)[9]

[9] Makeup supervisor Jack Barron contravened this idea when he remembered that Hitchcock commented him his attempt to convince Leigh to shoot the scene naked,

The Eisenstein-like montage of the sequence confused the five members of Shurlock's board who descended on the screening room to "[protect] the morals and sensitivities of a nation" (Drucker, 2010). They were not able to decide if the images showed offending nudity in the scene or not, and forced Hitchcock to censor the sequence by sending him a report which clearly obliged him to eliminate the nudity (Leff, 1999: 108). The director made his plea adducing that the scene was vital as such, that no physical nakedness was explicitly shown and that no blade pierced Marion's flesh. As a reply, the Code's functionaries agreed to attend a second screening of the film, after which three members who had highlighted the nudity during the previous viewing did not do so now, and a further two changed their minds. Additionally, shrewd Hitchcock had prepared a possible trade-off, foreseeing potential hurdles in his second opportunity; he would hack the terrifying shot of Marion lying over the edge of the bath with her buttocks visible if the censors respected the rest of the scene. Joseph Stefano was furious when he heard that the most awesome shot of his screenplay had been removed.

A revision of the post-coital opening was also proposed in exchange for preserving most of the content of the murder scene. Hitchcock suggested a second filming of the initial lunchtime affair shots and asked the censors to be present on the set during the performance of the new extract, since he still harboured some doubts about how to overcome their objections. Marshal Schlon, script supervisor, stated that censors were never present on set and, as a consequence, they did not eventually condemn either the introductory minutes of kissing or the nude flashes of the on-screen killing. Presumably, as David Thomson writes, with Hitchcock they learnt what people 'wanted' to see and this favoured their leniency:

> They [the Code functionaries] were being lectured about "reaction" by one of the greatest films and audience experts ever. [...] They caved in. Like most figures in their position, they felt a mounting gap between what was allowed in cinema and what audiences found acceptable. They passed the film, and the Catholic League of Decency slid away from a crisis with a "B"—"morally objectionable in part for all." (Leff, 1999: 67)

Once the *Hollywood Production Code* had granted approval, the *National Legion of Decency* felt almost obliged to concede its B, but it clearly set forth its provisos not to provide the picture with a C

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at least for the European version of the film. Obviously, she refused the suggestion and, embarrassed, ignored it (Spoto, 2008: 279).