

Chapter Eight

SHADOWS AND DOUBTS:  
Hitchcock, Genre and Villainy



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Made over the summer of 1942 and released during 1943, Alfred Hitchcock's *Shadow of a Doubt* pre-dates the high point of the crime thriller on the American screen, but is nonetheless often characterised as the director's most important contribution to *film noir*. The story of the disruption of an idyllic small town by a debauched serial killer, *Shadow of a Doubt* anticipates many of the concerns of *film noir*, whilst remaining somewhat aloof from the genre as a whole—a position indicative of Hitchcock's own ambivalent place in the canon of crime fiction and cinema. His films persistently deal with themes of murder, treason and kidnap; and yet they have never comfortably fitted into any particular school of crime narrative.

James Naremore argues that Hitchcock's personality was too well-known, and his films too distinctly marked by his own idiosyncrasies as an auteur, to exist within the confines of genre (266). This is not to say that Hitchcock does not borrow the recognisable features of particular genres—indeed, his sensitivity to popular culture is a key factor in his film-making. As Jane Tompkins argues, “a novel's [or a film's] impact on the culture at large depends not on its escape from the formulaic and derivative, but on its tapping into a storehouse of commonly held assumptions, reproducing what is already there in a typical and familiar form” (xvi). Hitchcock throws his net wide, absorbing images, patterns and symbols from a variety of sources; but the resultant synthesis, filtered through the director's unique imagination, defies easy classification as anything other than “Hitchcockian.” His films manage to be simultaneously within genre and without. Robin Wood points out that *Shadow of a Doubt* uses overlapping genre patterns to make an ideological point, in common with other films of the period, such as Frank Capra's *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946). “[T]he central tension in both films can be described in terms of genre: the disturbing influx of film noir into the world of small-town domestic comedy” (Wood 293). To the small-town comedy and *film noir*, one could add the western, the horror film, the family

melodrama, the romance, even the Hitchcockian man-on-the-run thriller, to the list of familiar genres with trace elements embedded in *Shadow of a Doubt*.

The film's villain, Charles Oakley (Joseph Cotten), stands at a transitional point in cinema history, between the visionary but doomed gangsters of the 1930s (Edward G. Robinson in *Little Caesar* [LeRoy 1930], James Cagney in *The Public Enemy* [Wellman 1931], or Paul Muni in *Scarface* [Hawks 1932]) and the flawed, fatalistic anti-heroes of 1940s *film noir* (Fred MacMurray in *Double Indemnity* [Wilder 1944], Burt Lancaster in *The Killers* [Siodmak 1946], or John Garfield in *The Postman Always Rings Twice* [Garnett 1946]), trying to escape from a tawdry, unsatisfactory life by any means possible, and in doing so condemning themselves. He is the common denominator between the competing narrative forms, and the vehicle through which Hitchcock introduces and controls the various generic patterns. As Wood suggests, the ideological conflicts of *Shadow of a Doubt*, created by the juxtaposition of these apparently incompatible narrative patterns, mimic the tensions of 1940s America. The aim of this chapter is to demonstrate the centrality of Uncle Charlie in creating and sustaining this fine balance, allowing Hitchcock economically to reveal the fault lines beneath a society that he could still regard with the critical gaze of an outsider.

#### SHADOW OF A DOUBT, FILM NOIR AND CRIME FICTION

In the wake of the Second World War, the films that would later be grouped together by critics as *films noir*<sup>1</sup> gained a commercial popularity and critical prestige unheard of before the war. These films drew on a variety of sources, owing their distinctive underworld setting to the pulp fiction writers of the 1920s and 1930s, while their visual style drew on techniques learned from German expressionism. "They tend to be associated with angular photography, subjective modes of narration, and an approximately Freudian or deterministic view of character" (Naremore 265). Hitchcock had come to America from Europe, and had long been incorporating expressionist methods in his own work, having learned them in Berlin during the 1920s. His earlier British films and his American work of the 1940s share with *noir*, as Naremore puts it, "some degree of scepticism toward established institutions," and "involve subjective narration, psychologically 'deep' views of character and an eroticised treatment of violence" (265).

*Film noir* acknowledged that the domestic ideology that had long been the staple fare of Hollywood movies, and had become even more entrenched by the propaganda of the war years, was no longer socially relevant. Vivian Sobchack accounts for the popularity of this type of film in this period arguing that "[w]hether considered a genre or a style, the films circumscribed as noir are seen as playing out negative dramas of post-war masculine trauma and gender anxiety brought on by wartime destabilisation of the culture's domestic economy and a consequent 'deregulation' of the institutionalised and patriarchally informed relationship between men and women" (130). Such a definition certainly embraces *Shadow of a Doubt*. Elsie Michie notes that the film contains several examples of women breaking "patriarchally informed" gender stereotypes—in par-

ticular the ability of Charlie (Teresa Wright) to drive (39). Neither her father nor her mother can drive, and this skill makes Charlie an example of the social reordering to which *film noir* was a response. Uncle Charlie's desire to reassert a patriarchal order in the family generates his misogyny—"Women are fools!" as he says to his sister. His gifts to the family demonstrate how clearly he divides them along gender lines: for Joe (Henry Travers) and Roger, a watch and a gun; for Emma (Patricia Collinge), Charlie and Ann, a fur, a ring and a stuffed toy. Both younger females are unimpressed with their presents, signalling their resistance to Uncle Charlie's social pigeon-holing. His gradual recognition that Charlie cannot be made to fit into his limited world-view refigures her in his imagination into a threat. Elsie Michie perceptively notes that his second attack on Charlie takes place in the garage, as he tries to suffocate her with exhaust fumes—attempting to kill her with the very symbol of her new-found social power.

*Shadow of a Doubt* clearly emerges from the same set of social conditions as other *noir* thrillers, but in other ways the relationship of Hitchcock to *film noir* is a problematic one. The first shot of the film quickly thrusts us into the territory of *noir*, the camera panning over a scene of urban decay, surprising after the elegant waltzers of the credit sequence. An enormous iron bridge, a monument of progress and design, dominates a cityscape of crumbling buildings and burnt-out cars.<sup>2</sup> From here, Hitchcock's lens guides us from the general to the specific, to a dilapidated street where children are playing baseball; to the door of a boarding house on a row of run-down houses; then within, to the shaded interior of a room belonging to Charles Oakley, who lies, smoking a cigar, on the bed.<sup>3</sup> Crucially, however, although this early sequence has some of the trappings of *noir*—the run-down buildings, the detectives, the city streets—Uncle Charlie never seems to belong in this environment. His appearance is smart, even dapper; the bank notes casually strewn across his room tell us he is a wealthy man (although he cares little for that wealth) and need not live in such dilapidated surroundings. As the film progresses, it becomes increasingly clear that the modern, urban environment in which we first encounter him is the very thing Uncle Charlie despises and tries to dissociate himself from—by the way he dresses, by his flight westward, by his nostalgic emphasis on family—but which he cannot escape. The city casts a shadow over the rest of the film, and at crucial moments, the representative settings of *film noir* obtrude themselves threateningly into the narrative—such as Charlie's dizzying, expressionistically filmed run to the library for the revelatory newspaper cutting; or the confrontation between the two Charlies in the 'Til Two Bar.

Charles Oakley is an atypical *noir* protagonist, "on some level a rebel against modernity—a Luciferian aesthete or dandy who is keenly aware that his sister has moved down in the world by marrying a bank clerk" (Naremore 274). Such snobbish characters do occasionally feature in *film noir*—the acerbic socialite columnist Waldo Lydecker (Clifton Webb) in Preminger's *Laura* (1944), for instance—and their refinement often functions as a thin veil for homosexuality, or some other socially unacceptable perversion—in this case, Uncle Charlie's psychopathy.<sup>4</sup> But Uncle Charlie's suave sophistication also distances the film from

the *noir* model. Unlike, say, Hammett, Chandler<sup>5</sup> or their many imitators and adaptors, Hitchcock is not interested in presenting believable crimes committed by realistic villains. "In Chandleresque classics such as *The Big Sleep* (1946) or *Murder, My Sweet* (1944), we always sense a fascination with 'the dark side of town.' The world in these films is *manifestly* corrupt. . . . In Hitchcock, by contrast, the world is often calm and well-lit, and when we glimpse the gutter it has terror but no romantic fascination" (Naremore 267). Uncle Charlie incarnates this typically Hitchcockian vision of the world. In his overall aesthetic approach to villainy, Hitchcock, in many ways, has less in common with the hard-boiled proponents of straightforward, explicit violence than with Golden Age practitioners of the detective novel, such as Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers. He shares their (very English) fascination with the notion of evil lurking in the most unlikely places, and Santa Rosa shares many traits with the small villages so beloved of English crime fiction. Hitchcock seems playfully to refer to the two "schools" of detective fiction in *Shadow of a Doubt*. Joe Newton and Herb Hawkins (Hume Cronyn), both avid readers of mystery stories, constantly discuss ways of committing murder; Joe advocates the straightforward methods of hard-boiled fiction, whereas Herb prefers the more English refinement of poison. Their debate brings home to the audience that the film they are watching is a hybrid of the two.<sup>6</sup>

#### VICTORIAN GOTHIC AND THE HORROR FILM

Hitchcock's English background also manifests itself in the symbolism that envelops Uncle Charlie from the start of the film. The opening credits of the film appear over a sequence of couples dancing to Franz Lehár's *Merry Widow Waltz*. With each recurrence in the film, this musical motif takes on increasingly sinister overtones. It represents Uncle Charlie's twisted nostalgia, his yearning for a nineteenth-century world of refinement and order, and it also becomes the visual shorthand by which Hitchcock reminds us of the nature of his crimes. David Sterritt describes it as "a classic (and very *noirlike*) example of the return of repressed material, erupting from an obscure but threatening past into a troubled and tormented present" (52). But Uncle Charlie's repressed material is not an underlying guilt for his crimes, or regret over an event in his past, as is most common for the protagonists of *noir*. "Charlie Oakley may resemble these characters in his quasi-Freudian compulsion to repeat the past, but his specific nostalgia has historical dimensions, pointing to a nineteenth-century, hierarchical society. Hence the thematic structure of *Shadow of a Doubt* is somewhat less like a typical *film noir* than like Welles' *Magnificent Ambersons*" (274). Donald Spoto has also noted the particularly Victorian quality to Uncle Charlie's character. Spoto suggests that the film's insistent pattern of doubling, famously remarked upon by Rohmer and Chabrol, reveals a specific literary ancestry; he sees precursors for *Shadow of a Doubt's* fascination with "the dark underside of human nature" (264) in Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886) and Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891). The 1940s witnessed a spate of films celebrating this *fin-de-siècle* decadence and gothic Victoriana—Stevenson's clas-

sic had received its third Hollywood adaptation in 1941, and the 1939 British psychological melodrama *Gaslight* was remade in 1944, both starring one of Hitchcock's favourite actresses, Ingrid Bergman, and the latter, significantly, also featuring Joseph Cotten. *Dorian Gray* was also successfully adapted in 1945.

In *Shadow of a Doubt*, Uncle Charlie's character evinces a similarly nostalgic fixation on the late nineteenth century. The most significant gift he brings for the family is a framed photograph of his parents, dated 1888. He has invested this picture with all his notions of what is good in the world. As the years have passed, he has been able to convince himself that it is the world that is degenerating, not him, so long as he has this picture as proof of an earlier golden age—a kind of *Dorian Gray* in reverse. When Charlie comments that her grandmother was pretty, her uncle's reply is indicative of this self-delusion: "Everybody was sweet and pretty then, Charlie, the whole world; a wonderful world. Not like the world today; not like the world now."

Most of the Hollywood movies that recreate this late Victorian era belong to a specific genre—the horror movie. Although the very American settings of *Shadow of a Doubt* are, superficially, far from this, Hitchcock nevertheless draws on the horror film in his depiction of his villain. When we first see Uncle Charlie in his hotel room, his hands are folded across his chest, as he stares at the ceiling. His position, as Sterritt comments, is loaded with vampiric associations, and the phallic cigar lends him an air of sexual predatoriness before he has even moved or spoken. When the landlady draws the blinds, the darkness seems to animate him—another vampiric moment. He moves to the window and looks down, the first of three such moments in the film, to see the two police detectives waiting on the corner of the street; as he does so, the cross-beam of the window projects a dark cross of shadow across his face, a further subtle indicator of his demonic qualities. As Uncle Charlie is pursued by the two detectives outside the boarding-house, the camera pulls back, and we look down at a deserted plot of land. Uncle Charlie walks through it, then off camera. The detectives, follow, pause uncertainly, split up. We see them go round in a circle and reunite, but they have lost their man—and the camera slowly, disconcertingly pans sideways, to reveal him high up in a building, looking down, still smoking his cigar. No explanation is provided for this miraculous escape, imparting to him a further aura of the supernatural. The smoke of the cigar becomes another motif throughout the film, evoked by the thick black smoke that pours from the train bringing Uncle Charlie into Santa Rosa and by the exhaust fumes with which he attempts to murder his niece. Symbolically, Uncle Charlie seems to breathe fire, like a malignant demon. Charlie ironically declares that her Uncle Charlie is, "Just the right person to save us!" As she is about to wire her message, she discovers that Uncle Charlie has sent one of his own. For Charlie, this is evidence of her preternatural bond with her uncle ("He heard me, he heard me!"), but this scene of summoning has Faustian overtones to place alongside the vampiric ones. By the conventions of the horror movie that the film obliquely observes, because Charlie invites a demon into her home, only she can exorcise it.

Uncle Charlie's journey east reinforces his alignment with demonic forces. In the train, he remains in his compartment, like a vampire in his coffin. He is,

in a sense, invisible, and his identity, too, is mutable—here, he is “Mr Otis,” where before he had been “Mr Spencer,” and will soon become Charles Oakley, inhabiting different personalities as he moves from place to place, each a different incarnation. He is described as a “very sick man.” Though he is physically well, his sickness is psychological; and, of course, in the horror genre to which Hitchcock alludes, vampirism is a long established metaphor for sexually transmitted disease. Before he even sets foot in Santa Rosa, Uncle Charlie has acquired an aura of sexual menace; again, like a vampire, he poses an insidious threat to the health of the community in which he is seeking to ensconce himself.<sup>7</sup>

Later in the film, the two attempts on Charlie's life both draw upon this signifying system. The first, in which Uncle Charlie sabotages a staircase so that Charlie will fall, seems such an ineffective and imprecise means of killing someone that its true relevance almost certainly lies elsewhere. Given the pervasive demonic imagery in the film, Charlie's physical fall hints at her potential moral one; the rudimentary trap set by her uncle embodies the spiritual snares that he has laid for her. The second, more serious attempt to kill her can be given a similar symbolic interpretation. Uncle Charlie fills the garage with fumes from the car, and traps Charlie within, choking her to death. Just as with his escape from his pursuers at the beginning of the film, his supernatural powers are suggested by the obscurity of the means by which his plan is effected—without ever leaving the house, he manages to jam a stick underneath the garage door to prevent Charlie escaping. The association of smoke with Uncle Charlie springs forcibly to mind when watching this scene, to the extent that Charlie seems symbolically to be choking on her uncle's poisonous breath.

#### ROMANCE

Another generic role occupied by Uncle Charlie is that of the romantic lover. He holds this position in relation to both Charlie, who clearly idolises him, and Emma, who projects onto him all her own girlhood aspirations, which have been smothered over the years by her marriage to the reliable but ineffectual Joe. These dually incestuous possibilities are developed throughout the film. Uncle Charlie, for all his references to his age, seems far closer to his niece's generation than his sister's. After he gives her the ring, they retreat to the kitchen, where they play out a scene like two lovers. He slips the ring onto her hand, not knowing that it constitutes evidence of his crimes. The ring ties him to her, like an engagement ring, giving her an element of control over him.<sup>8</sup> Charlie reaffirms the connection between them, insisting that she can find out anything about him—“We're not just an uncle and a niece. It's more than that. . . . We're sort of like twins, don't you see?” The dialogue and the body language of the scenes between uncle and niece throughout the film are indeed suggestive of more than that—there is an undoubted sexual tension between them. That he is considered to be eligible in a sexual sense is brought home by the frankly admiring stares with which Charlie and her uncle are received by her friends when out walking together. Charlie says to her uncle: “Did you see the way they looked at

you? I bet they wonder who you are. . . . I love to walk with you! I want everyone to see you!”

The extent to which Uncle Charlie figures his niece's darkest desires and fears becomes clear in the *Til Two Bar*. At first, he tries a thinly veiled sexual proposal—“You're the head of your family, Charlie, anyone can see that. I'm not so old,” suggesting that Charlie is old beyond her years, while he retains his youthfulness, making them compatible. He offers her a twisted vision of a new family unit, in which they will replace her parents as joint heads. Disappointed with her obvious revulsion, he tries a different approach: “How do you know what the world is like? Do you know the world is a foul sty? Do you know if you ripped the fronts off houses you'd find swine? The world's a hell, what does it matter what happens in it? Wake up Charlie.” The scene plays partly like a demented seduction, and partly like a temptation—he is inviting her to join him in his world, to partake of his knowledge, to open her eyes. For a brief moment he is darkly transfigured, like Satan tempting Eve, or a vampire his victim, belittling and flattering her at the same time. Hitchcock seems to be spelling out to us that knowledge of other people is a dangerous, unpleasant business, precluding innocence, perhaps even happiness. The perverted logic of his rhetoric must hold a certain appeal for Charlie, offering as it does a simplified view of the world, in which the consequences of one's actions are irrelevant.

The strength of the bond between uncle and niece is clear even as she threatens him: “I don't want you here, Uncle Charlie. I don't want you to touch my mother. So go away, I'm warning you, go away or I'll kill you myself. You see, that's the way I feel about you.” As she speaks, “the camera moves in to frame their silhouettes—for all the world like lovers' silhouettes on the window shade—in medium shot” (Rothman 227). Her threat also signals her partial surrender to the impulses aroused in her by her uncle, and the words “I don't want you to touch my mother” suggest both fear and jealousy. The entry into the narrative of the young police detective Jack Graham (MacDonald Carey) produces a rival for Charlie's affections, but he lacks the charisma of her uncle. This is brought home by a scene in which Charlie and Jack bump into her friends whilst walking through town—their response lacks the naked jealousy of their earlier meeting with Uncle Charlie. When she mentions to Graham that she doesn't like the idea of being average (her sense of boredom was, after all, the reason for her summoning Uncle Charlie in the first place), he replies that “Average families are the best.” The opposition between Uncle Charlie and Graham corresponds with Charlie's internal struggle—between her desire to break free from her mundane life, and her unconscious satisfaction with it; between her need for new experiences and her love for the people around her. The film's climactic sequence brings this tension dramatically to a head. She finds herself trapped on a train taking her away from her family and the life she has known, exactly as she had wished at the start of the film. She tries to get off and is prevented, and then the struggle is inverted and becomes an effort to stay on the accelerating train. This final confrontation is a struggle with herself, distilling all the conflicting impulses which have possessed Charlie throughout the film.

The future mapped out for Charlie, with Graham as a possible husband, seems far from satisfactory. As in earlier works such as *Blackmail* and *Sabotage*, the "victory" of the heroine and her policeman lover/accomplice is tarnished by the necessity of suppressing the truth, trapping them in a perpetual state of guilty collusion. She waits with Graham outside the church where the funeral of her uncle is taking place, but they stand apart—no physical intimacy, no final clinch, no restorative embrace—their only bond being their knowledge of her dead uncle's crimes. Charlie is faced with the irony that the abandonment of her dreams, of which the "wonderful" Uncle Charlie had been a projection. While it has preserved her family and community, it has also distanced her from them.

#### THE WESTERN, NOSTALGIA AND DOMESTICITY

*Shadow of a Doubt* is a film in which good and evil operate within a closely circumscribed domestic sphere—villainy is shown to function within, even to emerge from, surroundings that are normally safe and unthreatening. When the scene changes to Santa Rosa from Philadelphia, the contrast in tone is marked. A rapid montage sequence maps out the differences between this location and the one we have just left: all is bright, clean and new; the streets are lined with lush trees and prosperous looking buildings, compared with the crumbling brick terraces of the east. A chubby, smiling policeman directs traffic, an emblem of reassuring social order to eclipse the chaotic game of baseball on the street in front of Uncle Charlie's lodgings. Here, we have a shining image of the new America transposed over a tarnished image of the old. The move westward in the action is significant. Uncle Charlie, like a modern day pioneer, hopes to find a new start, a chance to leave behind the sordid associations of the east. The west connotes wealth, prosperity and opportunity, the familiar ideology of American expansion and progress. As Wood puts it in his comparison of the film to *It's a Wonderful Life*, "Bedford Falls and Santa Rosa can be seen as the frontier town seventy or so years on; they embody the development of the civilisation whose establishment was celebrated around the same time by Ford in *My Darling Clementine*."<sup>9</sup>

On arriving at the family home, his sister Emma comes out to meet him. He stops her on the path, which is bathed in dappled sunlight streaming through the trees, and says, "Standing there you don't look like Emma Newton. You look like Emma Spencer Oakley of 46 Burnham Street, St Paul, Minnesota—the prettiest girl on the block!"<sup>10</sup> This is the first indication that for Uncle Charlie, his journey west is also a journey into the past, an attempt to rediscover an innocence he associates with the lost, golden age of his youth. By reassigning his sister's name, he attempts to remove all trace of her marriage and the intervening years, to reappropriate her and displace Joe. Having no family of his own—"We're all the family he has," as Charlie says early on in the film—Uncle Charlie tries, like a cuckoo, to enter and take control of his sister's. The sense of family and community in Santa Rosa is crucial to his aims—he is not just fleeing the police, he is trying to find the idyllic family environment he recalls from his youth. On being shown to his room (Charlie's room) he instinctively looks out of the window, but

where the detectives had been standing in the east, two women stand gossiping. Later in the film, when the investigation is closed and Uncle Charlie would be secure if it weren't for his niece, he looks out of his window again. Now, where the gossiping women had been, he sees Charlie—just as the representatives of enclosing authority were replaced by emblems of community, so Charlie takes their place, becoming the overriding concern in her uncle's mind.

When Emma tells Charlie the story of how Uncle Charlie was nearly killed by a street car when he was a child, she produces a photograph taken on the morning of the accident—much to the surprise of her brother who believes that he has never been photographed in his life. The picture represents a defining moment in his life, the precise point to which he is trying to return. He is frozen at that moment in time, emotionally and psychologically, just as the photograph freezes his physical image.<sup>11</sup> The function of a camera is to capture the image of a particular moment; hence subsequent photographs emphasise change, by offering a new incarnation of selfhood for comparison. Uncle Charlie's fear of being photographed is, on one level, an attempt to avoid acknowledging change, and, on another, to remain the boy in his only picture.

Towards the end of the movie, when Uncle Charlie is compelled to leave Santa Rosa, Hitchcock, with deep irony, places him in a welcoming group representing all the values that he opposes—a banker, a priest and a wealthy widow. He changes his toast, which was to have been a victorious confirmation of his place in the community, into a farewell. His words make clear of what he feels he is being deprived: "I'll always think of this little town, as a place of hospitality and kindness, and homes . . . homes." But, of course, he has demonstrated his contempt for the community—by mocking the bank, slighting the church, and murdering widows—at the same time as attempting to win—or buy—their approval. Uncle Charlie's vision of community is an artificial construct, at odds with his own inner self. Charlie must drive him out of her family and community before he remakes them in his own image.<sup>12</sup>

Wood notes the implicit link made in the film between the family and the broader social structures that are celebrated by the introductory montage:

What is in jeopardy is above all the family—but, given the family's central ideological significance, once that is in jeopardy, everything is. The small town (still rooted in the agrarian dream, in ideals of the virgin land as a garden of innocence) and the united happy family are regarded as the real sound heart of American civilization; the ideological project is to acknowledge the existence of sickness and evil but preserve the family from their contamination. (297)

However, this reading of the film seems to neglect the fact that Charlie begins by explicitly denouncing her parents' practical, homely attitude towards their life. Her dissatisfaction is not produced by her uncle—it is already in place. Her first conversation with her father counterbalances the images of prosperity with which we have just been presented—she is disenchanted with the world, bored by her life and exasperated by her father's resignation. She says to her father, "Have you ever stopped to think that a family should be the most wonderful thing in the world, and this family has just gone to pieces?" The ideological proj-

ect of the film, then, is not so much to “preserve the family from contamination” by “sickness and evil” as to warn against and exorcise the traces of evil already present in society, and recuperate these intrinsic domestic values. It does so, I would argue, at the expense of Charlie’s dreams of breaking free from the domestic life mapped out for her.

*Shadow of a Doubt* was made during World War II, when the domestic values the film sketches out were being put under severe strain, and when Americans felt a genuine threat to their national security.<sup>13</sup> In *Shadow of a Doubt*, the Newton family is characterised as quintessentially American—the detectives posing as journalists claim they have been selected as an average American family. On one level, this normality is clearly a façade—the family has been singled out for the abnormality of one of its members. As Freedman and Millington argue, Hitchcock is also making a veiled observation about how this idealised image of American family life is in fact a media projection, commenting particularly on the scene in which Emma bakes a cake for the “journalists”: “Her very normativeness is being demonstrated to be wholly simulacral, both a pose for and the creation of the media who ostensibly record it—and, it hardly needs to be added, a pose for and creation of Hitchcock’s self-conscious, self-mocking camera as well” (3). However, this mockery is affectionate, since her obtuseness derives from a laudable pride in her home and family. As Michie notes, Emma’s domesticity also gives her a certain power, within a closely circumscribed sphere, illustrated by her disregard for Uncle Charlie’s demand not to let the “journalists” into the household. “She’s really a wonderful woman,” Charlie remarks at the beginning of the film, a comment that resonates throughout, as Uncle Charlie begins to pose a threat to the family nucleus.

The film can be read as an exhortation to turn one’s attention inwards, to protect the family, previously taken for granted. In a time of great external threat, Hitchcock places his villain in a small town milieu to create an allegory of invasion and disruption. Emma may aspire to an image of domesticity created by the media, but the film also seems to suggest that there is a need to preserve such ideals in the face of more insidious reinterpretations of American society, such as Uncle Charlie’s. Charlie’s growth from a girl to a woman in the course of the film entails an acceptance of her familial responsibilities, a recognition of her parents’ real worth and the relinquishing of her personal ambitions for the greater good of the community. The uneasiness of the film’s ending, often described as downbeat, derives in part from the discrepancy between this socially conservative stance and the pattern of romantic comedy.

Uncle Charlie, ultimately, is a villain because he has no sense of social responsibility: “The whole world’s a joke to me!” His freedom from restraint is initially appealing, but gradually Hitchcock reveals the isolation that accompanies his bleak disregard for other people: “The world’s a hell, what does it matter what happens in it?” But the film also makes clear that social and familial responsibility has a price, a price which Joe and Emma have already paid, and to which Charlie must reconcile herself. Although it may question the ideological placement of the family at the fulcrum of American life, *Shadow of a Doubt* also suggests its centrality to a sense of Americanness, and the importance of this

strong sense of national identity for its contemporary viewers. Participation in the social contract is shown to be necessary for happiness, although dependence on other people will always be fraught with uncertainty. In articulating this dual warning and reassurance, and making clear that the most potent threat to individual, familial or national security comes from within, *Shadow of a Doubt* is clearly striking a powerful chord for its wartime audience, with its subtle exhortation for vigilance. But it also reveals, on a smaller scale, the flexible notion of morality which often distinguishes Hitchcock’s work—the belief that we all have the capacity for evil, and must guard against it; and that the difference between a hero and a villain is often a matter of perception.

#### NOTES

1. The term *film noir* was probably first coined by Raymond Borde and Etienne Chaumeton in *Panorama du Film Noir Américain, 1941–1953*.

2. This is presumably Philadelphia. Early on in the film, Charlie quotes his address as “Philadelphia,” although he is described by Joe Newton as “a New York man.”

3. This technique is also used to great effect in the opening sequence of *Psycho* (1960), in which Hitchcock gives the impression of performing this transition from distance to intimacy in one continuous shot, entering a hotel room window to reveal Janet Leigh in bra and slip, and John Gavin naked to the waist.

4. Bruno (Robert Walker) in *Strangers on a Train* (1951) or Shaw and Philip (John Dall and Farley Granger) in *Rope* are further examples of this in Hitchcock’s own films.

5. Hitchcock collaborated with Chandler on *Strangers on a Train*, for which Chandler wrote the first draft of the screenplay. Hitchcock found the temperamental writer difficult to work with, and was so disappointed with the result that he had the film almost entirely rewritten.

6. A third thriller genre is also alluded to. The off-screen pursuit of a second suspect in the east embeds within the primary narrative a typically Hitchcockian story of mistaken identity, false accusation and pursuit. Poking fun at himself, Hitchcock gives Joe the line, “I never cared much for that case.”

7. Uncle Charlie’s dislike for being photographed can also be read on this level: his absence from film connects with his “invisibility,” the mutability of his persona and the connotations of vampirism.

8. Hitchcock uses a similar conceit in his silent movie *The Ring* (1927), in which the title also puns on the boxing ring.

9. Just after Uncle Charlie hears that the investigation has been closed, he runs up the stairs, before turning to see Charlie framed in the doorway, lit from behind. The composition of the shot, her shadow crossing the threshold but her body remaining outside, is extremely similar to the famous shot of Ethan Edwards (John Wayne) departing at the end of Ford’s *The Searchers* (1956).

10. Both Michie and Rothman hear this as “Vernon Street,” the latter arguing that this has further significance as an example of Hitchcock’s symbolic reference to the colour green. After repeatedly listening to this section of dialogue, I have to conclude that this is just a fanciful mistake.

11. As Donald Spoto tells us, Emma’s speech, “one of the few ever actually written by Hitchcock, was drawn directly from his own life experience” (Spoto 261), illustrating

the bond between director and villain in the movie. William Rothman notes that Uncle Charlie is the only character whose movements can "control the camera," such as when he throws his hat onto the bed and the camera pans left suddenly.

12. He has already deposited \$40,000 in the bank, funded a children's hospital, and charmed the eligible widow. He has also had an impact on the domestic routine—as Herb comments, "You folks are getting pretty stylish. Having dinner later every evening."

13. Hitchcock engaged more explicitly with these issues in the two works that precede *Shadow of a Doubt*, *Foreign Correspondent* (1940) and *Saboteur* (1942), and in *Lifeboat* (1944), in which Hitchcock tried to provide a microcosmic cross-section of American society and demonstrate the need to work together to repel the Nazi threat.

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