

# ***Marnie*, the Phantom, and the Dead Mother**

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*"What haunts are not the dead, but the gaps left within us by the secrets of others."*

Nicolas Abraham, "Notes on the Phantom" (Abraham, 1987: 287)

After Raymond Bellour (Bellour, 1977: 69-91), there has emerged a consensus that the figure of Marnie is constructed by a relay of looks of the male gaze. The consequence of this view, despite its demonstrable correctness, has been an insistence that, as Rob Lapsley and Michael Westlake sum it up, Marnie is "a signifier without a referent... whose only link with reality is fantasy" (Easthope, 1993: 188). My intention in this essay is to show that despite the representation of Marnie via the male gaze (and there are episodes in which this is problematic, as in her first visit home) we do see enough of Marnie to be able to analyse the "lack" or absence that she presents, and thereby to move the discussion of the film beyond its present pause at the site of mystification. So "absent" is Marnie, in fact, that regrettably she hardly appears in Tania Modleski's study *The Women Who Knew Too Much: Hitchcock and Feminist Theory* (Modleski, 1988). It is as though nothing can be said about her, as though she is "nothing". There is, of course, a difficult question to answer: to what extent is it possible to infer deep structures from the film text? Hitchcock would have known nothing of the theories I propose to draw upon, Abraham and Torok's "Phantom", or Green's "The Dead Mother", any more than he could have been cognisant of Lacan's or Kristeva's work. But in this discussion it will prove necessary in some respects to follow D.H. Lawrence's advice to trust the tale rather than its teller or, as Tania Modleski puts it in talking of feminist perspectives on Hitchcock, "critics must refuse to bow down before the camera's 'terrifying power' and instead, affirm the theatrical, 'treacherous' aspects of these 'seductive' texts those parts which 'know' more than their author. . ." (1989: 119). In interpretation, the critic is not limited to provable biographical evidence but must work with the text itself, which may indeed "know" more than its author, as is the case with Hitchcock's illuminating interrogations of the "woman" within an undoubtedly misogynistic context or frame. So, Lucretia Knapp's account of possible lesbian readings of *Marnie* has a validity outside the notion of masterly directorial intent, and the idea of auteurist mastery itself may be called into question, as it has been by Donald Grieg and Mary Ann Doane. Grieg accepts Mary Ann Doane's argument that the "play of possession and repossession of Marnie marks a hesitancy of the patriarchal hand, a resistance to such analytic closure centred on the figure of the woman", producing "an ironic distance from the male obsession that the text seemed to display. The bounded film is unsettled, the male bonding questioned and the grain of the text revealed" (Doane, unpublished PhD thesis, quoted by Grieg, 1987: 32). Relatedly, our unwillingness to see Marnie as a figure in any possible respect *in excess* of her production out of a series of carefully contrived signifiers may need to be confronted. It is a New Critical truism that we can say no more than the text explicitly provides for: a proper admonition to interpretive excess of the kind that directed Ernest Jones' famous psychoanalytical interpretation of *Hamlet*, or Marie Bonaparte's investigation of the Oedipal precept in Edgar Allan Poe. How many children had Lady Macbeth, indeed? And yet, in some respects, that may be a very fair question. Fictional characters do have a hinterland, a "back story" that enables their audience to generate an ongoing understanding of how this or that character

may have come to be who she is, or to act in such a way. Hamlet must be supposed to have a youth before the time of the play, Lady Macbeth a family situation more or less relevant to that play's action, which we may infer for ourselves, without, of course, being able to assert that such inferences are "true". The issue of "truth" has also bedevilled the application of analytical theory to the arts: where Freud used literature and other artworks to illustrate and sometimes develop his ideas, his followers attempted the application of his principles as truths superior to the effectively secondary art object. We need, arguably at least, an equivalence between the two realms in which the interpretive possibilities can be explored without either an assumption of exegetical privilege or alternatively a hierarchy in which restrictive textualism forecloses imaginative response.

Abraham and Torok, whose work will be discussed at more length later in this piece, assert that characters in literary texts "may be construed as cryptic poetic entities whose words and actions can be heard to tell the secret history generating their existence" (Rashkin, 1988: 50). The implications of this for literary study of the uncanny are of course considerable. Esther Rashkin argues that:

...this means that the linguistic elements of the text are considered to be incomplete and need to be joined with their missing complements, whose traces are hidden in the text. The reading of these traces and the union of missing complements enables the interpreter to perceive or conjecture a drama or dramas concealed within a character's history '....' This does not mean that a character's past is conceived to be real, or that it is afforded a status different from the character's "present." (Rashkin, 1988: 50)

There are two major strands of psychoanalytical implication in *Marnie*. One is the question of the origin of her compulsive stealing, which is explained to be a consequence of her being or at least feeling unloved as a child: as Mark says at the end, "When a child...can't get love, it takes what it *can* get, any way it can get it." This strand emerges in her jealousy of Jessie, a little girl her mother has virtually adopted, and in her mother's evident coldness or indifference to Marnie herself. When she hugs her mother she is shrugged off with "Marnie, mind ma leg". The other strand is her refusal of men, and her abhorrence of sexuality, which is ultimately explained by exposition of a terrifying primal scene, in which Marnie reverts to her five year old child persona, speaking in a little girl's voice, while the camera shows the audience what "really" happened: that one of her mother's sailor clients seemed to become too familiar with the little girl and was killed by the child with a poker blow to his head during the ensuing fight between her mother and the sailor, in which the mother's leg was crippled. Marnie does not remember this, but is subject to extreme symptoms during thunderstorms; disturbed dreams of a knocking at the window and being removed from her bed; and a phobia about the colour red, presumably due to the blood spilled in the killing. Her mother has never told her the secret, but when it is finally out, she is able to admit that she always did love Marnie: "You were the only thing in this world I ever did love". So the film, and its psychoanalytical narrative, reaches closure, with Marnie now (perhaps) enabled to feel sexually for her new husband Mark ("I don't want to go to jail. I want to stay with you!"), and presumably cured of her kleptomania. The pattern of explanation seems clear enough in popular Freudian terms: Marnie's revulsion from sex and men is due to the traumatic scene that she repressed as an infant and her mother's subsequent hysterical insistence that a decent woman need have nothing to do with men; it is finally relieved by a reenactment and "working through" of the moment of horror. But *aporia* remains: neither the mother's coldness, nor Marnie's obsessive stealing, are explained by this scene (although valiant

efforts in this direction have been made: John Fletcher, for example, considers the money "as phallic signifier" and claims that her thefts are "the other side of her sexual rejection of men", a "replaying of the murder of the sailor." (Fletcher, 1988: 60-61). Her mother's eventual avowal of profound love for her child has been powerfully contradicted in the early part of the film, when Marnie is quite clearly rejected on her visit, and Jessie is definitely preferred, justifying Marnie's apparently childlike jealousy of her child rival. As E. Ann Kaplan notes of Mrs. Edgar, "'the film' leaves us confused as to how we are to position her it means that the question about the mother is never satisfactorily resolved, never quite closed" (Kaplan, 1990: 137).

The mother has protected her child by not ever telling her the terrible truth (she took Marnie's loss of memory to be "a sign of God's forgiveness"), even when "they" threatened to take the child out of her care. Nor is there any suggestion that she blames Marnie for her action, which the filmic realisation in flashback shows was entirely justified. So why is Marnie rejected, and why does that rejection have such a profound effect on her? E. Ann Kaplan shows how neither Freudian nor Lacanian psychoanalysis (nor, I think, her own preferred explication through Kristeva's and Irigaray's idea of the "abject maternal") properly account for the mother-daughter relationship played out in *Marnie*:

In *Marnie*, the real horror displaced into the thriller genre is produced by Kristeva's 'phobic object' which in turn... involves early pulsations in the mother-child relationship 'Kaplan has earlier glossed Kristeva's argument: 'The mother, then, becomes a sort of phobic object: A form of the abject, the phobic object has to do with uncertainty over boundaries... and with the tenuousness of the symbolic' (Kaplan, 1990: 133).

One could see the film as constructed precisely as an attempt to articulate and then control the terror of the mother via a clever narrative structure. That is, the actual experience of terror/love in relation to the mother (that duality whereby the child at once desires the mother *and* fears being swamped by the dual relationship which risks, in Kristeva's words, 'the loss not of a part 'castration' but of the totality of his living being') is (as in *Now Voyager*) located in the figure of the heroine, not the hero. Here however, the film dwells far longer on the daughter's hysterical, panic reaction to her mother. Whereas the institution of psychoanalysis quickly 'saves' the daughter from the mother in *Now Voyager*, in *Marnie* this 'saving' constitutes the film's *aporia*, its climax and resolution (Kaplan, 1990: 135).

Kaplan continues, "Mrs. Edgar resists *total* control - something excess remains, and it is the threat of that excess that brings Mark to drag Marnie away brusquely...the device brings Marnie under his control, and ensures Marnie's separation from her mother; but the mother as noted is not entirely defeated" (1990: 135). Like most commentators and no doubt most viewers of the film Kaplan is mystified by the figure of Mrs. Edgar. On the one hand she is presented as "an unattractive, awesome, and negative presence from the start the deliberate antithesis, it would seem, to any dominant ideal-mother code" (1990: 136). Nevertheless, Kaplan sees that she does not fall into the mythic opposite figure of the evil or possessive mother (Mrs. Vale) or the surrogate mother-figure (Mrs. Danvers in *Rebecca*): "Rather, she occupies some other terrain more mysterious, more ambiguous and contradictory. The spectator is torn between hatred for her, for her rejection of Marnie, who adores her, and pity for her: this pity emerges once we understand her tragic life, her taking upon herself the

murder Marnie accidentally committed as a child, and on some level her love for Marnie." This is why the question of the mother is "never satisfactorily resolved, never quite closed" (1990: 136). Kaplan sees that the "simplistic and reductive Freudian scheme of revelation of the 'trauma' followed by instant catharsis and 'cure'....simplifies and refuses any understanding of the mother-daughter relationship in all its pathos and difficulty for the mother as well as the child." But her account of the gap between "lived mothering" and the Symbolic order does not clear the problem up: she simply moves on from Marnie towards the "postmodern moment". (Kaplan, 1990: 138) The problem remains: Mrs. Edgar "loves her child but cannot express it, for reasons that remain unclear" (Kaplan, 1990: 137). In order to develop this problem productively some different explanatory system seems required.

In her analysis of "Mothering, Feminism and Representation: The Maternal in Melodrama and the Woman's Film 1910-40", Kaplan finds that most of the "maternal melodramas" feature a mother-son relationship, whereas most of the maternal "women's films" stress a mother-daughter relationship, which she sees as subversive of patriarchal culture, a subversiveness that makes them "powerful experiences for women, and possibly disturbing to male spectators" (Kaplan, 1987: 126). In the 1930s, Kaplan notes that although psychoanalytic discourse had yet to enter film fully, "filmic narratives already show increased attention to the Mother's *responsibility* for the child's *psychic*, as against *social*, health" (Kaplan, 1987: 130). Instead, then, of being "the agent for shaping the public, external figure (the man/citizen), the Mother is now to shape the internal, psychic self. By the 40s, aberrations in the grown-up child are her fault" (Kaplan, 1987: 130). This very interesting shift in emphasis explains some of the interactions in *Stella Dallas* (1937), or Stahl's *Imitation of Life* (1934), and leads on to further development, the postwar women's picture becoming increasingly:

focused on the Mother's inadequacies, especially her inability to foster psychic health. *Mildred Pierce* and *Now Voyager* may be seen as setting the pattern for 50s and later films in their portrayals of the alternately masochistic and sadistic Mother. Close Mother-daughter bonding is now seen not as merely 'unhealthy', but as leading either to evil, or to neurosis.... Late 40s and 50s films (especially those by Fritz Lang and Alfred Hitchcock) now use neo-Freudian theory to expose the Mother's responsibility for the psychopathic protagonists that interests them. The Mothers in these films are blatantly monstrous, deliberately victimising their children for sadistic and narcissistic ends, and thereby producing criminals. Often the process of these films involves a kind of psychoanalysis of the sick protagonist (viz. Lang's *Secret Beyond the Door*, or Hitchcock's *Marnie*) in the course of which the protagonist is freed of the evil doings of the Mother (Kaplan, 1987: 134).

Even feminist critics, it would seem, see the Mother as threatening. But when considering the representation of Marnie's relationship with her mother a less dismissive interpretation than simply putting "the blame on Mame" and her sadistic and narcissistic motives is in order, since *Marnie* exceeds such formulation. The mothers and mother figures that lurk -- the word seems the most appropriate -- in the background of Hitchcock's films do in some respects appear narcissistic and sadistic; in other ways, however, they are more complex, and more deserving of sympathy. Mitch's mother in *The Birds* is overly attached to her son, which is perhaps in part the imbalance behind the distortion of "Nature" that the flocking predators imply, but her loneliness and need is handled sympathetically. The cruel mother in *Notorious* is murderous, but shown as acting desperately to protect her son rather than cold-bloodedly in

support of their group's fascist ideology. Mrs Danvers in *Rebecca* is a worshipper of her lost mistress. It is possible that the patriarchal, anti-maternal orientation of Freudian thought, combining with a growing appreciation of the role of the mother in socialising the child, led in the 1940s and 1950s to a potential demonising of the "bad" mother and a fear of intense mother-daughter relationships as productive of psychopathology. A certain *agnosis* of the Freudian understanding, especially in its popularised versions, seems to have encouraged the mystification of this relationship as disruptive and uncanny. It may be also that the representation of the exclusive mother-daughter bond tended to draw upon folk tradition: if for example we consider the use of Marnie's mother's shadow on the stairs, in this respect it suggests an echo of witchcraft. Mother and daughter together create a lethal coven, as does Mildred Pierce with her daughter Veda.

When considering the representation of Marnie's relationship with her mother, a relatively new analytical problematic may be useful: Andre Green's concept of "the dead mother". This is the title of a paper Green wrote in 1983, in which he developed "a paradigm of the child's response to a traumatic disruption of maternal relatedness in infancy and early childhood" and its "subsequent pathology" (Modell: 1999, 77). The mother in question is emotionally dead rather than actually dead; the concept refers rather to:

an *imago* which has been constituted in the child's mind, following maternal depression, brutally transforming a living object, which was a source of vitality for the child, into a distant figure, toneless, practically inanimate, deeply impregnating the cathexis of certain patients...and weighing on the destiny of their object libidinal and narcissistic future... 'The ' dead mother ... is a mother who remains alive but who is, so to speak, psychically dead in the eyes of the young child in her care (Green, "The dead mother", quoted in Kohon, 1999: 2, and see Appendix).

Gregorio Kohon describes the notion of "blank anxiety", one of a series of concepts described by Green as: "negative hallucination, blank psychosis, blank mourning, all of which are connected to the problem of emptiness, or of the negative..." For him, Kohon explains, "'blankness' is 'the result of one of the components of primary repression: massive decathexis of the maternal primary object, which leaves traces in the unconscious in the form of 'psychic holes'". The sudden loss of love causes a psychical catastrophe and "is followed by loss of meaning; for the child, nothing makes sense any more." (Kohon, 1999: 3) One consequence may be an incapacity for love:

The subject's trajectory evokes a hunt in quest of an introjectable object, without the possibility of renouncing it or losing it, and indeed, the possibility of accepting its introjection into the ego, which is cathected by the dead mother. In all, the subject's objects remain constantly at the limit of the ego, not wholly within, and not quite without. And with good reason, for the place is occupied, in its centre, by the dead mother (Green, quoted in Kohon 1999: 4).

There is no room for anyone else. The relevance of this analytic scheme to Marnie is, I hope, self-evident, particularly in the light of this comment: "behind the dead mother complex, behind the blank mourning for the mother, one catches a glimpse of the mad passion of which she is, and remains, the object, that renders mourning for her an impossible experience" (Green, in Kohon, 1999: 4). The inability of the mother to recognise the child's inner life can

be devastating, as if the mother failed to recognise his or her humanity, in effect as if the mother wishes the child did not exist, wishes her dead: "Believing that the mother withholds permission to exist may result in the conviction that all desires are forbidden, for if one does not have a right to exist, one has no right to have desires, to want anything for oneself" (Modell, 1999: 78). The mother's unresponsive, expressionless face, without animation, produces an echo in the child: "the flight of animation, a deflation of posture, a fall in positive affect and facial expressivity, a decrease in activation, etc. In sum the experience is descriptively one of a 'micro-depression'" (Green, quoted in Modell, 1999: 78). And further, "The daughter... models herself on what she perceives as her mother's unconscious attitudes. This total identification with a dead mother who is incapable of loving, contributes to a corresponding incapacity to love others and to love oneself" (Modell, 1999: 79). Such sufferers from the dead mother syndrome may find an inability to experience pleasure (not a masochistic compulsion to seek pain, pleasure is simply missing or felt to be forbidden), and find great difficulty in "being with the other". "They maintain a corpse-like posture, do not move on the couch 'in analysis', and speak in a dead-seeming voice drained of all affective valencies" (Modell, 1999: 80). But of course there may be different outcomes, some more relevant to *Marnie*. Although "a total identification with the mother's affective deadness is the most pathological and malignant", the child may try to compensate for the fear of inner deadness "through a hypersexuality or an addiction to thrills or induced crises" (Modell, 1999: 84-85).

Such descriptions of the dead mother syndrome (or complex, in its less extreme form) do seem to bring the mysterious, uncanny nature of Marnie into better focus. Her compensatory stealing, her use of stolen money or of her horse Forio as "transitional objects"; even her frigidity, can be assigned to her experience of the affectless "dead" mother, as much or even more than to her dynamically repressed and unavailable memory of primal trauma. Mark, not because of his male sexuality but because of his ability to resist being drawn into Marnie's dead world -- unlike certain unfortunate analysts who find themselves infected by the "contagious" deadness and "also speaking in a dull, lifeless monotone" (Modell, 1999: 80) -- may provide Marnie's best chance of escaping the traumatising relation with the mother.

Post-Freudian analysts Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok's theory of the "Phantom" may also throw an intriguing light on the psychodynamics involved in the relationship between Marnie and her mother. But as their theory of the unconscious effects of family secrets and "cryptonymy" is less widely known than Freud's or Lacan's work it will require some preliminary summary and explanation.

Abraham and Torok argue that it is not axiomatic that childhood development proceeds in predetermined ways, nor that any particular event is traumatic for all individuals, in contrast to the familiar oedipal or castration theorising of maturation. Instead they stress that the process of individuation is "potentially nonlinear, and that in certain cases it is constituted by specific influences outside the individual's immediate or lived experience" (Rashkin, 1988: 32. 'I have found Esther Rashkin's account a valuably clear guide to the sometimes obscurely phrased arguments of Abraham and Torok, and therefore will quote from her extensively here'). The process begins with the child's differentiation from the mother, within which the infant, "with no conscious or unconscious of its own other than the mother's... perceives the mother's words, gestures, and physical attributes without distinguishing between the mother's conscious or unconscious intent or charge." The maternal unconscious, communicated without having been spoken, "resides as a silent presence within the newly formed unconscious of the child. As the child matures, it will add its own repressions -- produced by

its own lived experiences -- to this central core" (Rashkin, 1988: 34). There is no preprogrammed sequence of drives and repressions as in Freud's formulation of developmental stages, nor any single and privileged drive and repression, such as is represented by the phallus in Lacan's formulation. But, since every mother is herself the child of another mother there is a genealogical inheritance of the unconscious. Thus, "We are all the products of our infinitely regressive family histories" (Rashkin, 1988: 35).

The "Phantom" is Abraham and Torok's designation of the unknowing awareness of another's secret which "introduces, via the concept of 'transgenerational haunting', a novel perspective on the potential configurations of psychic history and on their role in pathogenic processes and symptom formation" (Rashkin, 1988: 37). According to Abraham,

The phantom is a formation of the unconscious that has never been conscious for good reason. It passes -- in a way yet to be determined -- from the parent's unconscious into the child's. Clearly, the phantom has a function different from dynamic repression. The phantom's periodic and compulsive return lies beyond the scope of symptom-formation in the sense of a return of the repressed; it works like a ventriloquist, like a stranger within the subject's own mental topography. (Abraham, 1987: 287-292)

Abraham argues in "Notes on the Phantom: a Complement to Freud's Metapsychology", that "what haunts are not the dead, but the gaps left within us by the secrets of others," and that, "what comes back to haunt 'us' are the tombs of others" (Abraham, 1987: 287-288). This concept of the phantom enables Abraham and Torok to postulate how influences outside an individual's consciously lived experience can determine psychic development by linking certain states of mental disarray to the concealment of a secret rather than to that individual's unconscious understood as a repository of repressed wishes. "Should a child have parents 'with secrets,'... the child will receive from them a gap in the unconscious, an unknown, unrecognised knowledge, a *nescience*.... The buried speech of the parents will be (a) dead (gap) without a burial place in the child. This unknown phantom returns from the unconscious to haunt its host and may lead to phobias, madness, and obsessions." (Rashkin 1992: 27 'Rashkin is here quoting from Abraham and Torok's "A Poetics of Psychoanalysis: 'The Lost Object -- Me,'" *Substance* no 43 (1984) 17, n.1'). The phantom is outside developmental views of human behaviour.

It holds the individual within a group dynamic constituted by a specific familial (and sometimes extrafamilial) topology that prevents the individual from living life as her or his own. ... it occurs when the child's normal processes of individuation or separation from the parent are hindered by the presence of a gap or lacuna within the parent's speech. The unspeakable secret suspended within the adult is transmitted silently to the child in 'undigested' form and lodges within his or her mental topography as an unmarked tomb of inaccessible knowledge. Its presence there holds the child (later the adult) in a pathogenic dual union with the parent, in a silent partnership dedicated to preserving the secret intact. The child's unwitting involvement in this mute pact interferes with the psychic processes leading to successful introjection and inhibits its emergence as an autonomous subject. (Rashkin, 1992: 27)

The difference between this and more familiar views is that "for Freud psychopathology occurs when sexually oriented drives and fantasies are blocked or when a trauma (in the form

of an actual seduction or molestation) intrudes upon the normal course of infantile development; for Lacan, illness is explained in terms of a failure to assimilate lack as the core of subjectivity" (Rashkin, 1992: 22). Marnie's childhood trauma and consequent frigidity of course fit with both those perspectives. But Abraham and Torok propose, more aptly in terms of her kleptomania, that "symptoms can occur when a shameful and therefore unspeakable experience must be barred from consciousness or simply 'kept secret'" (Rashkin, 1992: 22). In Abraham and Torok's theory, the originator of the traumatic secret will be a "member of a particular family whose secret, and whose reason for keeping a secret, are determined by a specific psychic constellation. By the same token, the effect on those to whom s/he transmits the secret as well as their identity (whether child, grandchild, nephew, niece, or non-relative) cannot be predetermined or predicted" (Rashkin, 1988: 41).

In his article on the Phantom, Abraham discusses the "special difficulty" in analysis of such cases (well borne out in *Marnie*), due to:

the patient's horror at violating a parent's or a family's guarded secrets, even though the secret's text and content are inscribed in the unconscious. The horror of transgressing, in the strict sense of the term, is compounded by the risk of undermining the fictitious yet necessary integrity of the parental figure in question (Abraham, 1987: 290).

In relation to Marnie, who immediately associates the word "death" with "me" in the word association episode with Mark, and is driven by a compulsion towards repetition in her thefts, one further comment of Abraham's seems particularly apposite:

A surprising fact gradually emerges: the work of the phantom coincides in every respect with Freud's description of the death instinct. First of all, it has no energy of its own; it cannot be 'abreacted', merely designated. Second, it pursues in silence its work of disarray. Let us add that the phantom is sustained by secreted words, invisible gnomes whose aim is to wreak havoc, from within the unconscious, in the coherence of logical progression. Finally, it gives rise to endless repetition and, more often than not, eludes rationalisation (Abraham, 1987: 291).

The mother's own unconscious then, including in this case her knowledge of the trauma, is handed onto the child without words, becoming encrypted in the child's unconscious as an inaccessible knowledge, thereby giving rise to the damaging "phantom".

It follows from this argument that it is not so much Marnie's own dynamically repressed knowledge of her action as a child that damaged her and makes her a thief; it is rather her mother's imposition of the "secret" that has stood between them all these years. The unknown secret creates an empty space, which is recurrently present to Marnie and to the audience of the film as a "nothing" to be filled (Marnie's reply, for example, to the question "what do you believe in?" is "Nothing"). Marnie is repeatedly associated with containers of secrets, from handbags and suitcases to drawers and safes, as well as postal and luggage deposit boxes. She is also associated -- understandably in plot terms -- with doors, locks and keys. The opening sequence strongly suggests the "secret" of female sexuality: Marnie's yellow handbag, seen from behind as she walks along the station platform, is suggestively sexual in its contours (which is reinforced by the camera's view of her rear, of course); we also perhaps can see sexual repression implied by a glimpse of the shining steel of the clasp in the centre of the



"vaginal" opening presented by her bag. But in some respects this may be another of Hitchcock's red herrings. The view of the purse is the camera's not Marnie's own, it imposes - or at least this particular understanding of it imposes -- a sexually charged point of view on Marnie as object. The compulsion to theft signified in this and the other "containers" sequences is not sexual in origin but (as Mark ultimately recognises if only in part) is generated by the mother-daughter interaction, that is, by the "secret" held back yet imparted by the mother, not-known and yet known by the daughter. It is not the sexual *content* of the secret but the *presence* of the secret itself which prevents the bonding that Marnie so ardently desires. The closer she comes to her mother, the more her mother pushes her away; she cannot allow her to come close because the secret must be maintained. And doubtless the child (and the adult) Marnie reciprocally behaves in response to her phantom in relating to her mother, constantly trying to be too close. Kaplan says: "Marnie's terror has to do with fear of losing her mother -- either through sex with a man, through being hurt by a man, or through not being loveable herself. her terror is linked to desperate need of the mother on a primal level that precedes the entry into language" (Kaplan, 1990: 137) But there is I think no evidence of Marnie's terror of her mother; she is afraid of her dream, not Mrs. Edgar. The camera, of course, behaves at the other extreme, presenting Mrs. Edgar as a frightening figure when she stands in the doorway at night, and, with an ominous shadow as she descends the staircase, a Mrs. Bates apparition. But as with the purse in the opening sequence, this is not Marnie's point of view.

That this tension is the root of the coldness Marnie experiences from her mother explains the discrepancy between the love her mother claims at the end of the film and the rejection we have seen so powerfully represented at the beginning: only when the "secret" has been disinterred can the mother express her deeper feelings for her child. Even then, of course, a shadow remains: "Marnie, you're achin' ma leg."

The "falling shoe" episode when Marnie steals from the Rutlands safe is suggestive in these mother-daughter terms too: Marnie finds that the cleaning woman (a mother figure again), who might have caught her, cannot actually hear the dropped shoe: she is deaf to Marnie's secret, her encrypted burden in Abraham's theory, here represented by the stolen money, and signalled by the symptomatic fall of the shoe. The sequence perhaps echoes or recapitulates how the obsessive concern of Marnie's mother to keep the truth concealed has made her "deaf" to the damaging consequences of this in her child.

The impression Marnie herself makes on the "outside" world is also consistent with this explanatory structure; she carries with her a tangible penumbra of secrecy. She is perceived as a woman with something to hide both by Mark, and by Lil, his sister-in-law and rival to Marnie for his affections. Lil believes that Marnie has a secret -- and the narrative shows that she is right but this is a secret she has generated for herself, one that she can understand and control, to stand in place of the deeper secret that she carries within herself but cannot know. The pattern is echoed on the surface level by Marnie's choice of almost-but-not-quite-right pseudonyms for her name Margaret: Mary, and Marion. 'Marnie', her 'real' name, is itself a further and intimate example of a covering approximation or screen.

In the final episode of attempted theft, Marnie cannot bring herself to steal the money from the safe. Mark seems to assume that this is because now that she is his wife the money is now also hers; it would therefore not be theft ("It's yours, you're not stealing. Take it!"). Robin Wood argues that the episode shows how her cure, or transference, is already proceeding, due to Mark's love (Wood, 1989: 181). But my interpretation would hold rather that she cannot

steal the money because the "secret" of herself as a thief -- the conscious secret which helped her to deal with the phantom occasioned by her encrypted unconscious secret -- is now known by others, which means that it cannot any longer effectively perform as a simulacrum or cover story for herself, to mask the pain and confusion produced by the silent presence of the unrecoverable secret handed over to her through her mother's behaviour.

The drive for explanation vexes the film and its viewers: we find ourselves in Marnie's position in some respects, aware that there is a buried secret but unable to access it, puzzling over the symptoms it generates. The psychoanalytical strands are interwoven, and the narrative of the film suggests that once we have discovered the *content* of Marnie's secret we have reached the deepest truth, the origin of her sexual frigidity, the answer to both Mark's and the film's hermeneutic drive. But Abraham and Torok's theory encourages a reversal of this perceptual field, such that her *surface* symptom, the kleptomania, representing the effect of maintaining the secret within the mother-daughter relationship, is at least equally at issue in the deep psychodrama.

In what ways, it becomes inevitable to ask, is the "secret" known to Mrs. Edgar? In Abraham and Torok's thinking, part of the process of phantom formation may be the creation of a "crypt" or "false unconsciousness" within the Ego, "in which the parent buries alive a secret so shameful that it must be concealed from the parent's own awareness" (Rashkin, 1992: 29). Rashkin quotes from Maria Torok's addendum to 'Notes from the Seminar on the Dual Unity': The child's reality then "will have one single peculiarity: it will function in relation to a vital intersubjective drama located 'elsewhere,' in a 'beyond the self,' in the crypt of the 'parent', and it will provoke, as a result, the playing out of a repetitive and lethal scene in the 'child' who suffers the effects of haunting" (Rashkin, 1992: 29). Mrs. Edgar's obsessive, even hysterical, hatred of men and insistence on "decency", and her inability to express to Marnie the love that she claims she has always felt suggests that she has indeed encrypted her knowledge of the fateful night (and that the pain from her leg which curiously seems not to trouble her when Jessie takes Marnie's place on her knee -- is a symptom of her *preservative*, rather than *dynamic* as in the Freudian model, repression). In this light it becomes possible also to address the uncanny effect of the film: the sense of the strange within the familiar that Freud characterised as productive of uncanny feelings lingers after the apparent "laying bare" of the cause of Marnie's neurosis, precisely because all has *not* been brought to light: the double secret of Marnie and her mother has been exposed in terms of its content, but not in the history of its inhibited transmission and the damaging consequences of that.

But at the end of the film, the revisionary process has certainly not been fully achieved, and although Mark may be confident as he drives away with his bride, he will no doubt be well advised to keep his promise: "Mrs. Edgar, I'll bring Marnie back."

## Appendix

Green uses the term *imago* to refer to the patient's internal representation of the mother, which may be different from the memory of the actual mother (Modell, 1999: 77). It is possible to argue that it is this "imago" that the camera represents in the low angled, silhouetted and shadowed shots of Mrs. Edgar.

Robin Wood says "the obsessive compulsive behaviour is breaking down, because the tensions that necessitated it are disintegrating" (Wood, 1989: 181). I do not agree, since Marnie is at this moment desperately attempting to flee him. The main narrative describes the

need for Marnie to free herself from the domination of the mother and submit to the father-husband patriarchy of Rutland/s. Would it be reasonable to suggest that the patriarchal impulse is exacerbated into near hysteria by Marnie's indifference and refusal of it? Rutland wishes to "mark" her: he blackmails Marnie into marriage, defends her against the threatening male, Strut(t), and even it seems rapes her on the honeymoon, thus causing her attempted suicide in the ship's swimming pool. Yet Marnie is still seen as the problem. As Pam Cook notes in *The Cinema Book* (Cook, 1985: 129), Mark Rutland's own compulsions are not explored by the film. Hitchcock spoke of Rutland's unexplored fetishism. In a later note on his early reading of *Marnie*, Robin Wood admits that his treatment of Rutland was too unambiguously positive, and says that he would "now want to discuss 'the film' more in terms of inner tension, contradiction, and ambivalence than in terms of an achieved coherence" (Wood, 1989: 236).

A further note on the uncanny: the notion of return here fits with the significance of repetition and automatic action that Freud identified in the uncanny. Similarly the child/doll within Marnie as she re-experiences and works through the trauma is doubtless another factor in its production, as Freud's analysis of Hoffman's "The Sandman" illustrates. The name of the horse that Marnie wishes to back but cannot because of the jockey's red patterned shirt (and which is the occasion of Mark's ability to find her after her disappearance) is "Telepathy"; a nice figure for the uncanny destructive symbiosis between mother and daughter. Mrs. Edgar's names, Edgar, and Bernice, together with the Baltimore location suggest a Poesque undertone. Edgar Poe died in Baltimore, and one of his most chilling tales of the unconscious simultaneously both knowing and not-knowing is "Berenice". That some games are going on in the area of naming is supported, as I have already implied, by the choice of Mark (for one who wishes to impose his mark); Rutland, for the arena of patriarchal attitudes; Strut-t, for the threatening alien male, and possible even Lil (ith), the woman who is properly accommodated in that world. Marnie could be seen as meaning ill-born or damaged (mar-nee).

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