## THE FUGITIVE [1993]

by

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*The Fugitive* (1993). Directed by Andrew Davis. Story by David Twohy. Screenplay by Jeb Stuart and David Twohy. Production designed by Dennis Washington.

The story of a fugitive from justice is a very primal one. Most real criminals attempt to flee, but we rarely find this involving. Fictional criminal, however, are another (filmic) story – *Bonnie and Clyde* [1967], for example.

We become emotionally transfixed, however, if the criminal is wrongly accused. What was once a very primal story of simple survival is now layered with moral outrage – and, of course, identification. While few of us see ourselves as criminals, we can easily fantasize being wrongly accused of a crime (Hitchcock depended on this trope for most of his career.). Few of us lack childhood memories of having been unjustly accused by parents or teachers of having done something that, no matter what the evidence and past track record, for once we actually did *not* do. Now in *The Fugitive*, these memories come back to haunt us.

We can trace this primal survival/moral outrage story of *The Fugitive* through three historical phases and watch its evolution. First, of course, is the most famous novelization of the man unjustly accused and relentlessly hunted by an unfeeling father figure – Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*. While there is much more to Hugo's 1862 classic than this, it is the spiritual grandfather of our current filmic incarnation: Jean Valjean's offense was petty – stealing a loaf of bread – yet his subsequent punishment and persecution commanding. And, as in *The Fugitive*, he stops along his interminable flight to perform acts of moral goodness. Politically, this story can be summed up as follows: The police are insensitive and there is no possibility of doing anything corrective, all one can do is run. We can do nothing when faced with what Hugo calls "the black vein of destiny."

The next incarnation of the "running man" motif appeared on September 17, 1963, on television. *The Fugitive* became a very popular TV series that ran successfully for four seasons. It's dependence on *Les Misérables* can be seen in the name of the policeman pursuing the innocent Richard Kimble: Lieutenant Gerard (Gerard being first cousin in name to Javere, the doggedly persistent policeman of *Les Misérables*). But the

TV version added something. First, the crime was escalated from stealing a loaf of bread to being unjustly accused of murdering one's wife. Kimble is innocent from the onset. The second addition was the introduction of the actual criminal, the "one-armed man." Thus, Dr. Kimble was being pursued by the police while he himself pursued the real killer.

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most	TV sl	hows,	it actua	ally res	olved the 1	nystery	in th	ie last t	wo episo	des. While	Kimble
and	the	one-a	armed	man	struggle	atop	a	water	tower,	(Spoiler	Alert!)
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The 1993 movie version of the story adds still further changes. In addition to the insensitivity of the legal system, personified by Gerard the marshal (Tommy Lee Jones), we have added an organizational villain – the medical profession and drug companies. Is this film saying that today we trust doctors less than the police? Maybe. At least the police's minds can be changed, but drug company's millions will stop at nothing.

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getting thrust out of narrochange. But it is not to be.	w spaces,	etc. All these birt	h images ir	nply an imp	ending

At the beginning of the film, he knows he's innocent and *we* know he's innocent. We never doubt; he never doubts. The film simply follows him as he proves it. Kimble is active in his thinking, but passive in his actions. He learns nothing (except perhaps that it would be advisable to be more paranoid about your friends).

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hungered for more of Gerard and less of Kimble.								

Structurally, the film reverses the usual plan of an action film. It has its biggest climax at the beginning – the spectacular, astonishing bus wreck, and

Despite *The Fugitive*'s shortcomings both psychologically in terms of an unchanging, passive hero and structurally in terms of action plotting, it is still a very popular, involving, and attractive film. At the root of *The Fugitive*'s success is our identification with Dr. Kimble. I account for this in part by the simple fact that the film activates one of our primal fears, probably returning us all to helpless and frustrating childhood experiences of rage at being unjustly accused and punished for someone else's misdeeds, a feeling so strong in most of us that it instantly drowns out the film's various and rather obvious flaws.

The casting also helps. As an actor, Harrison Ford has matured to the point that his is now able to convincingly portray a contemporary incarnation of Hitchcock's everyman hero – ordinary, vulnerable, unprepared, but able to rise to any situation.

And finally, Dr. Kimble is an ordinary good man surviving in a corrupt world, a man pushed out of his job by massive corporate manipulation and he wants nothing more than to simply go back to work – much like the millions of Americans that comprise our current unemployment statistics or those millions more that fear joining them.

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