

This is the English version of the preface to the Spanish translation of my book, *Perpetual Movement: Alfred Hitchcock's Rope*, which was published originally by State University of New York Press in 2021. This preface will appear in Spanish as “Lo que obliga a volver: prefacio a la edición en español” in *Movimiento perpetuo: La Soga de Alfred Hitchcock*, translated by Antonio Lastra (UCO Press/Editorial Universidad de Córdoba, 2025).

‘Lo que obliga a volver’ Preface to the Spanish edition

I put the finishing touches to the original English edition of this book in May 2020. Those days should have been ones of joy and relief, but all I remember is wanting never again to see or write about Alfred Hitchcock’s *Rope*. This was not because I had spent years immersed in the film and was ready to move on to a new project; it was, rather, due to the fact that 2020 was a time of global pandemic and lockdown. While there were restrictions on leaving the house, while death was everywhere, I felt no desire, no compulsion, to return to Hitchcock’s tale of fatal confinement that unfolds almost entirely in a single apartment. The films to which I turned instead for comfort during this period were, I recall, ones of travel and open space: *North by Northwest*, *Lawrence of Arabia*, *Days of Heaven*, *Magnificent Obsession*, *The Wizard of Oz*, and *Paris, Texas*. It made no difference that the landscapes and voyages of those films were often troubled or troubling; what mattered was escape and, above all, escape from the constricted world of *Rope*.

Five years on, I find myself returning to the film in the context of Antonio Lastra’s wonderful translation of my book. (I am indebted forever to Antonio for proposing the project and for his meticulous work in turning my English sentences into Spanish. Thanks are also due to Sharla Clute and James Peltz at SUNY Press for taking care of the translation rights.) I wrote *Movimiento perpetuo* to address the way in which Hitchcock’s film, as I put it in the introduction, “pulls, and pulls us, in two directions at once. This way: narrative closure, knowledge, and mastery. That way: openness, unknowing, and mystery”. I concluded that what makes *Rope* so seductive, what calls viewers back – “what compels the return” [*lo que obliga a volver*], in T.J. Clark’s phrase – is precisely its shifting, undecidable status. It swings like the metronome on Phillip’s piano, this way and that, pulling us with it and refusing to let us go.

Returning to the film in the summer of 2025, I was unsure if I would feel the same. My fear was that the pandemic had strangled all pleasure out of viewing, rendered the film lifeless and ready to be hidden away in a wooden box with only my pages for cold, decaying company. I need not have worried: *Rope*, I found as I crept back into Brandon and

Phillip's apartment, is as blissfully slippery and shifting as it ever was. Its hold remains, as does its perpetual movement.

NB
Cardiff, August 2025