HITCHC

by

FRANÇOIS TRUFFAUT

With the Collaboration of HELEN G. SCOTT

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REVISED EDITION

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Alfred Hitchcock made
53 films and one daughter.

I dedicate this book
to Patricia Hitchcock O'Connell

François
Truffaut

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PREFACE TO THE REVISED EDITION

Nowadays, the work of Alfred Hitchcock is admired all over the world. Young people who are just discovering his art through the current rerelease of *Rear Window* and *Vertigo*, or through *North by Northwest*, may assume his prestige has always been recognized, but this is far from being the case.

In the fifties and sixties, Hitchcock was at the height of his creativity and popularity. He was, of course, famous due to the publicity masterminded by producer David O. Selznick during the six or seven years of their collaboration on such films as *Rebecca*, *Notorious*, *Spellbound*, and *The Paradine Case*.

His fame had spread further throughout the world via the television series *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* in the mid-fifties. But American and European critics made him pay for his commercial success by reviewing his work with condescension, and by belittling each new film.

In 1962, while in New York to present *Jules and Jim*, I noticed that every journalist asked me the same question: "Why do the critics of *Cahiers du Cinéma* take Hitchcock so seriously? He's rich and successful, but his movies have no substance." In the course of an interview during which I praised *Rear Window* to the skies, an American critic surprised me by commenting, "You love *Rear Window* because, as a stranger to New York, you know nothing about Greenwich Village." To this absurd statement, I replied, "*Rear Window* is not about Greenwich Village, it is a film about cinema, and I *do* know cinema."

Upon my return to Paris, I was still disturbed by this exchange. From my past career as a critic, in common with all of the young writers from *Cahiers du Cinéma*, I still felt the imperative need to convince. It was obvious that Hitchcock, whose genius for publicity was equalled only by that of Salvador Dali, had in the long run been victimized in American intellectual circles because of his facetious response to interviewers and his deliberate practice of deriding their questions. In examining his films, it was obvious that he had given more thought to the poten-

tial of his art than any of his colleagues. It occurred to me that if he would, for the first time, agree to respond seriously to a systematic questionnaire, the resulting document might modify the American critics' approach to Hitchcock.

That is what this book is all about. Patiently prepared with the help of Helen Scott, whose editorial experience was a decisive factor, I dare say that our book achieved this result. At the time it was published, however, a young American film professor predicted: "This book will do more harm to your reputation in America than your worst film." As it happens, Charles Thomas Samuels was mistaken. He committed suicide a year or two later, undoubtedly for other reasons. In fact, from 1968 on, American critics began to take Hitchcock's work more seriously. Today, a movie like *Psycho* is regarded as a classic, and young film buffs have adopted Hitchcock wholeheartedly, without begrudging him his success, wealth, and fame.

While we were recording these talks with Hitchcock in August 1962, the final editing of *The Birds*, his forty-eighth picture, was under way. It took us some four years to transcribe the tapes and gather the photographs. Whenever I met Hitchcock during this period, I would question him in order to update the book I called "the hitchbook." The first edition, therefore, published at the end of 1967, concludes with his fiftieth film, *Torn Curtain*. In the final part of the present edition, there is an additional chapter commenting on *Topaz*, *Frenzy* (his last relative success), *Family Plot*, and, finally, *The Short Night*, a film he was preparing and constantly revising. In truth, his whole entourage was aware that Hitchcock's health and morale had deteriorated to such a point that a fifty-fourth picture was out of the question.

In the case of a man like Hitchcock, who lived only through and for his work, to cease activity was tantamount to a death sentence. He knew it as well as everybody else, and this is why the last four years of his life were so sad.

On May 2, 1980, a few days after his death, a mass was held in a small church on Santa Monica Boulevard in Beverly Hills. One year before, a farewell to Jean Renoir had taken place in the same church. Jean Renoir's coffin had been placed in front of the altar. Family, friends, neighbors, film buffs, and people off the street attended the ceremony. For Hitchcock, it was different. There was no coffin—it had been removed to an unknown destination. The guests, who had been invited by telegram, were checked in at the door by Universal's security men. The police kept the crowds outside at bay.

It was the burial of a timid man who had become intimidating and who, for the first time, was avoiding publicity, since it wouldn't help his work—a man who, since his adolescence, had trained himself to be in control of the situation.

The man was dead, but not the film-maker. For his pictures, made with loving care, an exclusive passion, and deep emotions concealed by exceptional technical mastery, are destined to circulate throughout the world, competing with newer productions, defying the test of time, and confirming Jean Cocteau's image of Marcel Proust: "His work kept on living, like the watches on the wrists of dead soldiers."

FRANÇOIS TRUFFAUT

INTRODUCTION

It all began when we broke the ice.

That happened in the winter of 1955, when Alfred Hitchcock, having completed the location shooting of *To Catch a Thief* on the Côte d'Azur, came to the Saint-Maurice studios, in Joinville, for the post-synchronization of the picture. My friend Claude Chabrol and I decided to go there to interview him for *Cahiers du Cinéma*. Armed with a long list of intricate questions and a borrowed tape recorder, we sallied forth in high spirits.

In Joinville we were directed to a pitch-black auditorium, where a loop showing Cary Grant and Brigitte Auber in a motorboat was being run continuously on the screen. In the darkness we introduced ourselves to Hitchcock, who courteously asked us to wait for him at the studio bar, across the courtyard.

Both movie-crazy, thrilled by our brief preview of Hitchcock's latest work, we emerged into the blinding glare of daylight, literally bursting with excitement. In the heat of our discussion we failed to notice the dark-gray frozen pond in the middle of the courtyard. With a single step forward we went over the ledge, landing on a thin layer of ice, which immediately gave way. Within seconds we were immersed in a pool of freezing water and a state of shock. In a hollow voice I asked Chabrol, "What about the tape recorder?" He replied by slowly raising his left arm to hold the case in mid-air, with the water bleakly oozing out from all sides like a stream of tears.

Staggering around the sloping basin, unable to reach the edge without sliding right back to the center, we were trapped in a situation straight out of a Hitchcock movie. Eventually, with the helping hand of a charitable bystander, we managed to reach firm ground.

A wardrobe mistress who was passing by invited us to follow her to a dressing room where we might take off our clothes and dry out. When we attempted to thank her for her kindness, she said in a businesslike

way, "What a way to make a living! Are you extras for *Rififi*?" Upon learning that we were reporters, she lost all interest and told us to clear out.

A few minutes later, still soaking wet and shivering with cold, we made our way to the bar, where Hitchcock awaited us. He merely looked us over and, without a single comment on our appearance, amiably suggested another appointment for that evening at the Hotel Plaza Athénée.

A year later, upon spotting us at one of his Paris press conferences, Hitchcock finally acknowledged the incident by saying, "Gentlemen, every time I see a pair of ice cubes clicking together in a glass of whiskey, I think of you two."

We subsequently learned that he had embellished the story with a twist of his own. According to the Hitchcock version, Chabrol was dressed as a priest and I was wearing a gendarme's uniform when we turned up for the interview.

It was almost a decade after that preliminary aquatic contact that I undertook to approach Hitchcock again with a series of probing questions about his work. What prompted me to emulate Oedipus' consultation of the oracle was that my own efforts as a film-maker, in the years that followed, made me increasingly aware of the exceptional importance of Hitchcock's contribution and of its particular value to all those who work in the screen medium.

The examination of Hitchcock's directorial career, ranging as it does from his silent movies in Great Britain to his current color films in Hollywood, is a richly rewarding source of discovery. In Hitchcock's work a film-maker is bound to find the answer to many of his own problems, including the most fundamental question of all: how to express oneself by purely visual means.

I am not so much the author as the initiator, or if you prefer, the instigator, of this work on Alfred Hitchcock. The book is essentially a journalistic work, made possible when Alfred Hitchcock agreed to a fifty-hour-long interview.

In 1962 I wrote to Mr. Hitchcock, asking whether he would answer some five hundred questions dealing solely with his career, in chronological order, and suggesting that our discussion deal with the following:

(a) the circumstances attending the inception of each picture;
(b) the preparation and structure of the screenplays;
(c) specific directorial problems on each film;
(d) Hitchcock's own assessment of the commercial and artistic results in relation to his initial expectations for each picture.

Hitchcock cabled his agreement. There now remained one last hurdle, the language barrier, and I turned to my friend Helen Scott, of the French Film Office in New York. An American raised in France, her thorough command of the cinema vocabulary, her sound judgment and exceptional human qualities, made her the ideal accomplice for the project.

We arrived in Hollywood on August 13, Hitchcock's birthday. Every morning he would pick us up at the Beverly Hills Hotel to take us to his office at Univer-

sal studios. With each of us wearing a microphone, and a sound engineer in the next room recording our voices, we kept up a running conversation from nine to six every day, achieving something of a track record as we talked our way through lunches.

A witty raconteur, noted for his entertaining interviews, Hitchcock started out true to form, regaling us with a series of amusing anecdotes. It was only on the third day that he became more sober and thoughtful in spelling out the ups and downs of his career. His assessment of the achievements and the failures was genuinely self-critical, and his account of his doubts, frustrations, and hopes was completely sincere.

What emerged, as the talks progressed, was a striking contrast between Hitchcock's public image and his real self. Under the invariably self-possessed and often cynical surface is a deeply vulnerable, sensitive, and emotional man who feels with particular intensity the sensations he communicates to his audience.

The man who excels at filming fear is himself a very fearful person, and I suspect that this trait of his personality has a direct bearing on his success. Throughout his entire career he has felt the need to protect himself from the actors, producers, and technicians who, insofar as their slightest lapse or whim may jeopardize the integrity of his work, all represent as many hazards to a director. How better to defend oneself than to become the director no actor will question, to become one's own producer, and to know more about technique than the technicians?

To stay with the audience, Hitchcock set out to win it over by reawakening all the strong emotions of childhood. In his work the viewer can recapture the tensions and thrills of the games of hide-and-seek or blindman's buff and the terror of those nights when, by a trick of the imagination, a forgotten toy on the dresser gradually acquires a mysterious and threatening shape.

All of this brings us to suspense, which, even among those who acknowledge Hitchcock's mastery of it, is commonly regarded as a minor form of the spectacle, whereas actually it is *the* spectacle in itself.

Suspense is simply the dramatization of a film's narrative material, or, if you will, the most intense presentation possible of dramatic situations. Here's a case in point: A man leaves his home, hails a cab and drives to the station to catch a train. This is a normal scene in an average picture. Now, should that man happen to look at his watch just as he is getting into the cab and exclaim, "Good God, I shall never make that train!" that entire ride automatically becomes a sequence of pure suspense. Every red light, traffic signal, shift of the gears or touch on the brake, and every cop on the way to the station will intensify its emotional impact.

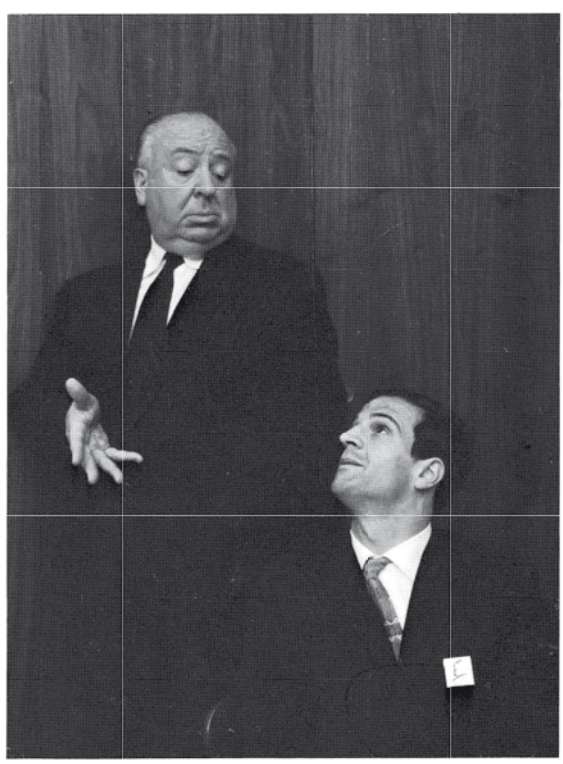
The manifest clarity and persuasive power of the image are such that it simply will not occur to the viewer to reason: "What's his hurry? Why can't he take the next train?" Thanks to the tension created by the frenzied imagery on the screen, the urgency of the action will never be questioned.

Obviously, this insistence on the dramatization cannot avoid the "arbitrary," and although Hitchcock's art is precisely the ability to impose the "arbitrary," this sometimes leads the die-hards to complain about implausibility. While Hitchcock maintains that he is not concerned with plausibility, the truth is that he is rarely implausible. What he does, in effect, is to hinge the plot around a striking coincidence, which provides him with the master situation. His treatment from then on consists in feeding a maximum of tension and plausibility into the drama, pulling the strings ever tighter as he builds up toward a paroxysm. Then he suddenly lets go, allowing the story to unwind swiftly.

In general the suspense sequences of a film are its "privileged moments," those highlights that linger on in the viewer's memory. But Hitchcock wants each and every scene to be a "privileged moment," and all of his efforts throughout his career have been directed toward achieving pictures that have no gaps or flaws.

It is this determination to compel the audience's uninterrupted attention, to create and then to keep up the emotion, to sustain the tension throughout, that makes Hitchcock's pictures so completely personal and all but inimitable. For it is not only on the crucial passages of the story that he exercises his authority; his single-mindedness of purpose is also reflected in the exposition, the transitions, and all the sequences which in most films are generally inconsequential.

Even an episode that merely serves to bridge two key sequences will never be commonplace, for Hitchcock loathes the "ordinary." For instance, a man who is in trouble with the law—but who we know is innocent—takes his case to a lawyer. This is an everyday situation. As handled by Hitchcock, the lawyer will appear to be skeptical and rather reluc-



tant to become involved. Or he may, as in *The Wrong Man*, agree to go along only after warning his prospective client that he lacks experience in this kind of legal work and may not be the right man for the case.

By introducing this disturbing note, a feeling of apprehension and anxiety has been created that invests this ordinary situation with potential drama.

Another illustration of this approach is his out-of-the-ordinary twist to the conventional scene in which a young man is introducing his girl friend to his mother. Naturally, the girl is anxious to please the older woman, who may one day become her mother-in-law. In contrast to her boy friend's relaxed manner, hers is clearly shy and flustered. With the son's introductory ritual fading into the off-screen background, the viewers will see a change come over the woman's expression as she stares at the girl, sizing her up with that purely Hitchcockian look so familiar to cinephiles. The young girl's inner turmoil is indicated by a slight movement of retreat. Here again, by means of a simple look, Hitchcock creates one of those domineering mothers he excels at portraying.

From this point on, all of the family scenes in the picture will be charged with emotion and taut with conflict, with every detail reflecting Hitchcock's determination to keep banality off the screen.

The art of creating suspense is also the art of involving the audience, so that the viewer is actually a participant in the film. In this area of the spectacle, film-making is not a dual interplay between the director and his picture, but a three-way game in which the audience, too, is required to play. In the filmic context, suspense, like Tom Thumb's white pebbles or Little Red Riding-hood's walk through the woods, is a poetic means that serves to heighten the emotions and to make the heart beat faster.

To reproach Hitchcock for specializing in suspense is to accuse him of being the least boring of film-makers; it is also tantamount to blaming a lover who instead of concentrating on his own pleasure insists on sharing it with his partner. The nature of Hitchcock's cinema is to absorb the audience so completely that the Arab viewer will forget to shell his peanuts, the Frenchman will ignore the girl in the next seat, the Italian will suspend his chain smoking, the compulsive cougher will refrain from coughing, and the Swedes will interrupt their love-making in the aisles.

Hitchcock is universally acknowledged to be the

world's foremost technician; even his detractors willingly concede him this title. Yet, isn't it obvious that the choice of a scenario, its construction, and all of its contents are intimately connected to and, in fact, dependent upon that technique? All artists are indignant—and rightly so—at the critical tendency to separate form from content. This procedure is particularly illogical when applied to Hitchcock, who, as Eric Rohmer and Claude Chabrol correctly point out in their book,* is neither a simple storyteller nor an esthete. "Hitchcock," they write, "is one of the greatest inventors of form in the history of cinema. Perhaps the only film-makers who can be compared with him in this respect are Murnau and Eisenstein . . . Here, form does not merely embellish content, but actually creates it."

The art of film-making is an especially difficult one to master, inasmuch as it calls for multiple and often contradictory talents. The reason why so many brilliant or very talented men have failed in their attempts at directing is that only a mind in which the analytic and synthetic are simultaneously at work can make its way out of the maze of snares inherent in the fragmentation of the shooting, the cutting, and the montage of a film. To a director, the greatest danger of all is that in the course of making his film he may lose control of it. Indeed, this is the most common cause of all fatalities.

Each cut of a picture, lasting from three to ten seconds, is information that is given to the viewer. This information is all too often obscure or downright incomprehensible, either because the director's intentions were vague to begin with or he lacked the competence to convey them clearly.

To those who question whether clarity is all that important, I can only say that it is *the* most important quality in the making of a film. By way of explanation, here is a typical example: "At this point, Balachov, understanding that he had been cheated by Carradine, went to see Benson, proposing that they contact Tolmachef and share the loot between them," etc., etc.

In hundreds of films this dialogue, or a variant thereof, has left you bewildered, or worse, indifferent to the proceedings on the screen. For while the authors know all about Balachov, Carradine, Benson, and Tolmachef, you, the viewer, are utterly confused by virtue of that cardinal rule of cinema: Whatever is *said* instead of being *shown* is lost upon the viewer.

Since Hitchcock chooses to express everything by purely visual means, he has no use whatever for Messrs. Balachov, Carradine, Benson, and Tolmachef.

One of the charges frequently leveled at Hitchcock is that the simplification inherent in his emphasis on clarity limits his cinematic range to almost childlike ideas. To my mind, nothing could be further from the truth; on the contrary, because of his unique ability to film the thoughts of his characters and make them perceptible without resorting to dialogue, he is, to my way of thinking, a realistic director.

Hitchcock a realist? In cinema, as on the stage, dialogue serves to express the thoughts of the characters, but we know that in real life the things people say to each other do not necessarily reflect what they actually think and feel. This is especially true of such mundane occasions as dinner and cocktail parties, or of any meeting between casual acquaintances.

If we observe any such gathering, it is clear that the words exchanged between the guests are superficial formalities and quite meaningless, whereas the essential is elsewhere; it is by studying their eyes that we can find out what is truly on their minds.

Let us assume that as an observer at a reception I am looking at Mr. Y as he tells three people all about his recent holiday in Scotland with his wife. By carefully watching his face, I notice he never takes his eyes off Mrs. X's legs. Now, I move over to Mrs. X, who is talking about her children's problems at school, but I notice that she keeps staring at Miss Z, her cold look taking in every detail of the younger woman's elegant appearance.

Obviously, the substance of that scene is not in the dialogue, which is strictly conventional, but in what these people are thinking about. Merely by watching them I have found out that Mr. Y is physically attracted to Mrs. X and that Mrs. X is jealous of Miss Z.

From Hollywood to Cinecitta no film-maker other than Hitchcock can capture the human reality of that scene as faithfully as I have described it. And yet, for the past forty years, each of his pictures features several such scenes in which the rule of counterpoint between dialogue and image achieves a dramatic effect by purely visual means. Hitchcock is almost unique in being able to film directly, that is,

* *Hitchcock*, by Eric Rohmer and Claude Chabrol. Editions Universitaires, Paris, 1957.

without resorting to explanatory dialogue, such intimate emotions as suspicion, jealousy, desire, and envy. And herein lies a paradox: the director who, through the simplicity and clarity of his work, is the most accessible to a universal audience is also the director who excels at filming the most complex and subtle relationships between human beings.

In the United States, the major developments in the art of film direction were achieved between 1908 and 1930, primarily by D. W. Griffith. Most of the masters of the silent screen who were influenced by him, among them Von Stroheim, Eisenstein, Murnau, and Lubitsch, are now dead; others, still alive, are no longer working.

Considering the fact that the Americans who entered the film medium after 1930 have barely scratched the surface of the limitless potential Griffith opened up, I believe it is not an overstatement to conclude that, with the notable exception of Orson Welles, no major visual sensibility has emerged in Hollywood since the advent of sound. If the cinema, by some twist of fate, were to be deprived overnight of the sound track and to become once again the art of silent cinematography that it was between 1895 and 1930, I truly believe most of the directors in the field would be compelled to take up some new line of work. In this sense it would seem as if the only heirs to the Griffith secrets in the Hollywood of 1966 are Howard Hawks, John Ford, and Alfred Hitchcock. One wonders, not without melancholy, whether that legacy will survive when they retire from the screen.

I know that many Americans are surprised that European cinephiles—and the French in particular—regard Alfred Hitchcock as a "film author," in the sense that the term is applied to Ingmar Bergman, Federico Fellini, Luis Bunuel, or Jean-Luc Godard.

When the Americans counter Hitchcock's name by citing others that have enjoyed prestige in Hollywood for the past twenty years, there is clearly a divergence in the viewpoints of the New York critics and their Parisian counterparts.

Among the big Hollywood names, the Oscar "collectors," there are undoubtedly many men of talent. And yet, as they switch from a Biblical opus to a psychological western, or from a war epic to a comedy of manners, how can we look upon them as anything else than simple craftsmen, carrying out instructions, dutifully falling in line with the commercial trends of the day? Why establish any distinction between these motion-picture directors and their counterparts in the theater when, year in and year out, they follow a similar pattern, going from the screen version of a William Inge play to an Irwin Shaw best seller, while working on an adaptation of the latest Tennessee Williams?
Unlike the "film author," who is motivated by the need to introduce his own ideas on life, on people, on money and love into his work, these men are mere show-business specialists, simple technicians. Are they great technicians? Their persistence in limiting themselves to an infinitesimal part of the extraordinary possibilities offered by Hollywood's studios allows for some doubt on this score as well. Of what does their work actually consist?

They set up a scene, place the actors within that setting and then proceed to film the whole of that scene, which is substantially dialogue, in six or eight different ways by varying the shooting angle, from the front, the side, a high shot, and so on. Afterward, they do it over again, this time varying the focus. The next step is to film the whole scene, first using a full shot, then a medium shot, and finally in close-up.

This is not to suggest that the Hollywood greats, as a whole, do not deserve their reputations. To give credit where it is due, most of them have a specialty, something they do exceptionally well. Some excel at getting a superior performance from their stars, while others have a flair for bringing new talent to light. Some directors are brilliant storytellers and others have a remarkable gift for improvisation. Some are excellent at battle scenes and others have a knack with the intimate comedy genre.

If Hitchcock, to my way of thinking, outranks the rest, it is because he is the most complete film-maker of all. He is not merely an expert at some specific aspect of cinema, but an all-round specialist, who excels at every image, each shot, and every scene. He masterminds the construction of the screenplay as well as the photography, the cutting, and the sound track, has creative ideas on everything and can handle anything and is even, as we already know, expert at publicity!

Because he exercises such complete control over all the elements of his films and imprints his personal concepts at each step of the way, Hitchcock has a distinctive style of his own. He is undoubtedly one of the few film-makers on the horizon today whose screen signature can be identified as soon as the picture begins.

The suspense sequences are by no means the only cues to Hitchcock's authorship. His style can be recognized in a scene involving conversation between two people, in his unique way of handling the looks they exchange, and of punctuating their dialogue with silent pauses, by the simplified gestures, and even by the dramatic quality of the frame. Just as unmistakably Hitchcockian is the art of conveying to the viewer that one of the two characters dominates, is in love with, or is jealous of, the other. It is the art of creating a specific dramatic mood without recourse to dialogue, and finally the art of leading us from one emotion to another, at the rhythm of our own sensitivity.

If I apply the term "complete" to Hitchcock's work, it is because I find in it both research and innovation, a sense of the concrete and a sense of the abstract, intense drama as well as a subtle brand of humor. His films are at once commercial and experimental, as universal as William Wyler's *Ben Hur* and as confidential as Kenneth Anger's *Fireworks*.

Psycho is a picture that rallied vast audiences throughout the world; yet, in its savagery and uninhibited license, it goes much further than those daring 16-mm. essays by youthful *avant-garde* film-makers that somehow never get past the censors. Some of the miniatures in *North by Northwest* and many of the special effects in *The Birds* have all the poetic flavor of experimental cinema that Jiri Trnka achieves with his puppets and that Norman McLaren achieves with his four-minute shorts designed directly on film.

When a director undertakes to make a western, he is not necessarily thinking of John Ford, since there are equally fine movies in the genre by Howard Hawks and Raoul Walsh. Yet, if he sets out to make a thriller or a suspense picture, you may be certain that in his heart of hearts he is hoping to live up to one of Hitchcock's masterpieces.

In recent years there have been countless imitations of *Vertigo*, *North by Northwest*, and *Psycho*; whether it is acknowledged or not, there is no doubt that Hitchcock's work has long influenced world cinema.

Overt or subconscious, bearing either on the style or the theme, mostly beneficial, occasionally ill-advised, this influence is reflected in the works of film-makers who are vastly different from each other:

Among others, there are Henri Verneuil *(Any Number Can Win)*, Alain Resnais *(Muriel, La Guerre Est Finie)*, Philippe de Broca *(That Man from Rio)*,

Orson Welles *(The Stranger)*, Vincente Minnelli *(Undercurrent)*, Henri-Georges Clouzot *(Diabolique)*, Lee Thompson *(Cape Fear)*, René Clément *(Purple Noon, The Day and the Hour)*, Mark Robson *(The Prize)*, Edward Dmytryk *(Mirage)*, Robert Wise *(House on Telegraph Hill, The Haunting)*, Ted Tetzlaff *(The Window)*, Robert Aldrich *(Baby Jane)*, Akira Kurosawa *(High and Low)*, William Wyler *(The Collector)*, Otto Preminger *(Bunny Lake Is Missing)*, Roman Polanski *(Repulsion)*, Claude Autant-Lara *(Enough Rope, Over Here)*, Ingmar Bergman *(The Virgin Spring)*, William Castle *(Homicide)*, Claude Chabrol *(The Cousins, The Third Lover, Marie-Chantal contre le Dr. Ka)*, Alain Robbe-Grillet *(L'Immortelle)*, Paul Paviot *(Portrait Robot)*, Richard Quine *(Liaisons Secretes)*, Anatole Litvak *(Five Miles to Midnight)*, Stanley Donen *(Arabesque, Charade)*, André Delvaux *(L'Homme au Crane Rasé)*, François Truffaut *(Fahrenheit 451)*, not to mention the James Bond series, which is nothing else than a rough caricature of all Hitchcock's work, and of *North by Northwest* in particular.

There is no question here of fatuous admiration, nor am I suggesting that all of Hitchcock's work is perfect and beyond reproach. But inasmuch as his achievements have, until now, been grossly underrated, I feel it is high time Hitchcock was granted the leading position he deserves. Only then can we go on to appraise his work; indeed, his own critical comments in the pages that follow set the tone for such an objective examination.

British critics, who at heart have perhaps never forgiven Hitchcock for his voluntary exile, still marvel —and rightly so—at the youthful, spirited vigor of *The Lady Vanishes*, which he made thirty years ago. But isn't it futile to look back and regret that which must necessarily yield to the passage of time? The ebullient, young Hitchcock of *The Lady Vanishes* could not possibly have captured on film James Stewart's emotions in *Vertigo*, a work of maturity and lyrical commentary on the relation between love and death.

In a critical essay published in *Film Quarterly*, Charles Higham describes Hitchcock as a "*practical joker, a cunning and sophisticated cynic.*" He refers to his "*narcissism and its concomitant coldness*" and to his "*pitiless mockery*," which "*is not a gentle mockery.*" According to Higham, Hitchcock has a "*tough contempt for the world*" and his skill "*is most strikingly displayed when he has a destructive comment to make.*"

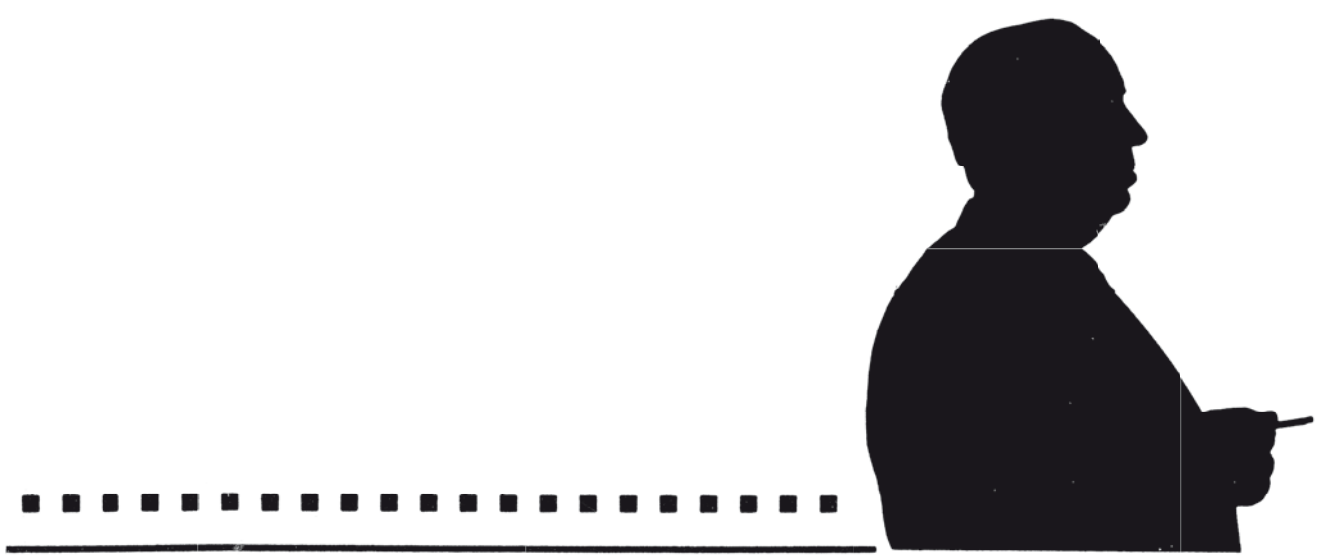
Though he raises an important point, I feel Mr. Higham is definitely mistaken in questioning Hitchcock's sincerity and his serious approach to life. A strong person may be genuinely cynical, whereas in a more sensitive nature, cynicism is merely a front. Von Stroheim used cynicism to cover up his deep sentimentality; in the case of Alfred Hitchcock it is the façade that serves to conceal his pessimism.

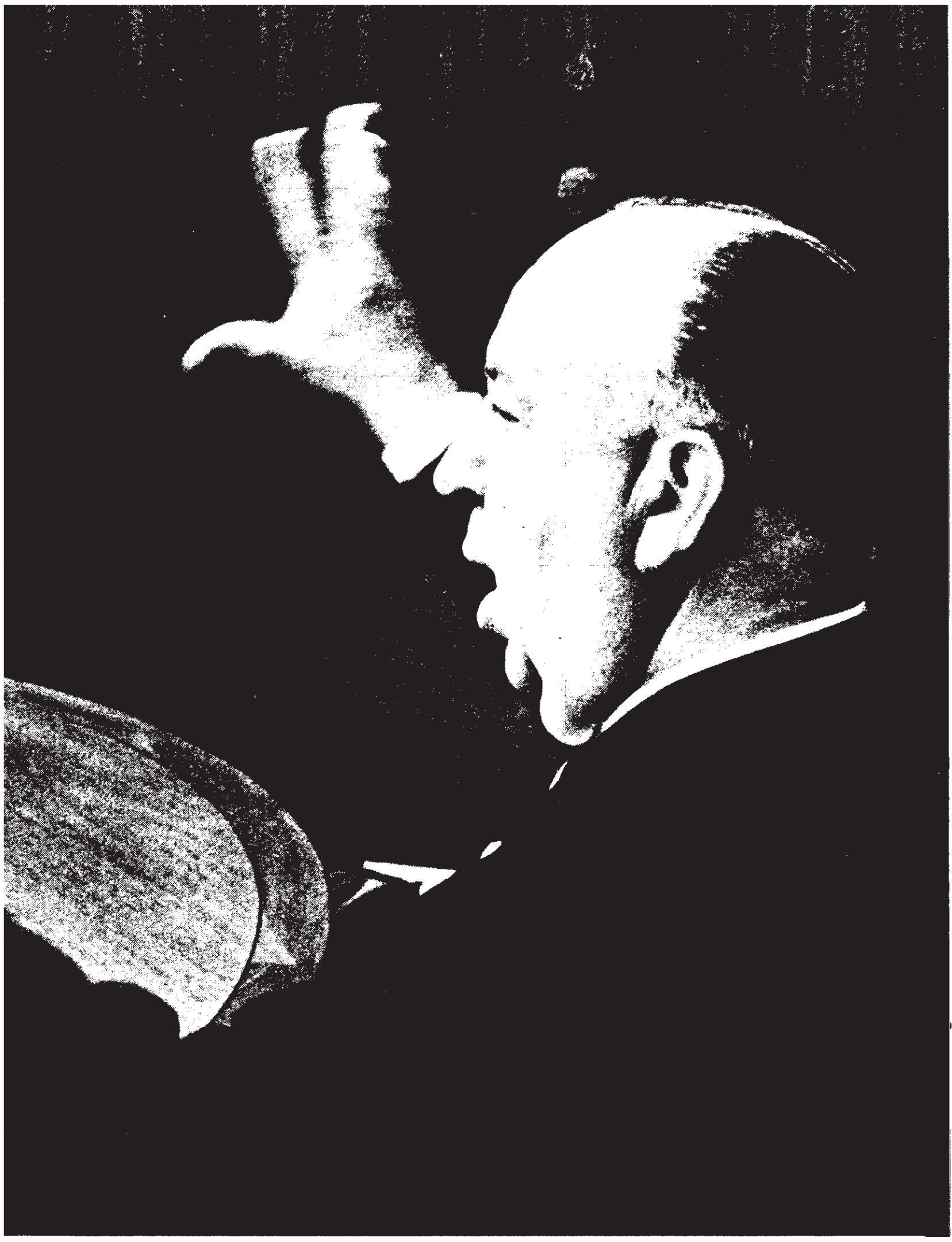
Louis-Ferdinand Céline divided people into two categories, the exhibitionists and the voyeurs; Alfred Hitchcock clearly belongs in the latter category. He is not involved in life; he merely contemplates it. In making a film like *Hatari*, Howard Hawks gratifies his dual passion for hunting and for cinema. In the life of Alfred Hitchcock there is but one passion, which was clearly expressed in his reply to a moralizing attack on *Rear Window*. "Nothing," he said, "could have prevented my making that picture, because my love for cinema is stronger than any morality."

While the cinema of Hitchcock is not necessarily exalting, it invariably enriches us, if only through the terrifying lucidity with which it denounces man's desecrations of beauty and purity.

If, in the era of Ingmar Bergman, one accepts the premise that cinema is an art form, on a par with literature, I suggest that Hitchcock belongs—and why classify him at all?—among such artists of anxiety as Kafka, Dostoyevsky, and Poe.

In the light of their own doubts these artists of anxiety can hardly be expected to show us how to live; their mission is simply to share with us the anxieties that haunt them. Consciously or not, this is their way of helping us to understand ourselves, which is, after all, a fundamental purpose of any work of art.





CHILDHOOD ■ BEHIND PRISON BARS ■ "CAME THE DAWN" ■ MICHAEL CON ■ "WOMAN TO WOMAN" ■ "NUMBER THIRTEEN" ■ INTRODUCING THE FUTURE MRS. HITCHCOCK ■ A MELODRAMATIC SHOOTING: "THE PLEASURE GARDEN" ■ "THE MOUNTAIN EAGLE" ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

1

FRANÇOIS TRUFFAUT. Mr. Hitchcock, you were born in London on August 13, 1899. The only thing I know about your childhood is the incident at the police station. Is that a true story?

ALFRED HITCHCOCK. Yes, it is. I must have been about four or five years old. My father sent me to the police station with a note. The chief of police read it and locked me in a cell for five or ten minutes, saying, "This is what we do to naughty boys."

F.T. Why were you being punished?

A.H. I haven't the faintest idea. As a matter of fact, my father used to call me his "little lamb without a spot." I truly cannot imagine what it was I did.

F.T. I've heard that your father was very strict.

A.H. Let's just say he was a rather nervous man. What else can I tell you? Well, my family loved the theater. As I think back upon it, we must have been a rather eccentric little group. At any rate, I was what is known as a well-behaved child. At family gatherings I would sit quietly in a corner, saying nothing. I looked and observed a good deal. I've always been that way and still am. I was anything but expansive. I was a loner—can't remember ever having had a playmate. I played by myself, inventing my own games.

I was put into school very young. At St. Ignatius College, a Jesuit school in London. Ours was a Catholic family and in England, you see, this in itself is an eccentricity. It was probably during

this period with the Jesuits that a strong sense of fear developed—moral fear—the fear of being involved in anything evil. I always tried to avoid it. Why? Perhaps out of physical fear. I was terrified of physical punishment. In those days they used a cane made of very hard rubber. I believe the Jesuits still use it. It wasn't done casually, you know; it was rather like the execution of a sentence. They would tell you to step in to see the father when classes were over. He would then solemnly inscribe your name in the register, together with the indication of the punishment to be inflicted, and you spent the whole day waiting for the sentence to be carried out.

F.T. I've read that you were rather average as a student and that your only strong point was geography.

A.H. I was usually among the four or five at the top of the class. Never first; second only once or twice, and generally fourth or fifth. They claimed I was rather absent-minded.

F.T. Wasn't it your ambition, at the time, to become an engineer?

A.H. Well, little boys are always asked what they want to be when they grow up, and it must be said to my credit that I never wanted to be a policeman. When I said I'd like to become an engineer, my parents took me seriously and they sent me to a specialized school, the School of Engineering and Navigation, where I studied mechanics, electricity, acoustics, and navigation.

F.T. Then you had scientific leanings?

A.H. Perhaps. I did acquire some practical knowledge of engineering, the theory of the laws of force and motion, electricity—theoretical and applied. Then I had to make a living, so I went to work with the Henley Telegraph Company. At the same time I was taking courses at the University of London, studying art.
At Henley's I specialized in electric cables. I became a technical estimator when I was about nineteen.

F.T. Were you interested in motion pictures at the time?

A.H. Yes, I had been for several years. I was very keen on pictures and the stage and very often went to first nights by myself. From the age of sixteen on I read film journals. Not fan or fun magazines, but always professional and trade papers. And since I was studying art at the University of London, Henley's transferred me to the advertising department, where I was given a chance to draw.

F.T. What kind of drawings?

A.H. Designs for advertisements of electric cables. And this work was a first step toward cinema. It helped me to get into the field.

F.T. Can you remember specifically some of the films that appealed to you at the time?

A.H. Though I went to the theater very often, I preferred the movies and was more attracted to American films than to the British. I saw the pictures of Chaplin, Griffith, all the Paramount Famous Players pictures, Buster Keaton, Douglas Fairbanks, Mary Pickford, as well as the German films of Decla-Bioscop, the company that preceded UFA. Murnau worked for them.

F.T. Can you single out a picture that made a special impression?

A.H. One of Decla-Bioscop's most famous pictures was *Der müde Tod*.

F.T. Wasn't that directed by Fritz Lang? The British title, I believe, was *Destiny*.

A.H. I guess so. The leading man, I recall, was Bernhard Goetzke.

F.T. Did you like Murnau's films?

A.H. Yes, but they came later. In '23 or '24.

F.T. What films were being shown in 1920?

A.H. Well, I remember a *Monsieur Prince*. In England it was called *Whiffles*.

F.T. You've often been quoted as having said: "Like all directors, I was influenced by Griffith."

A.H. I especially remember *Intolerance* and *The Birth of a Nation*.

F.T. How did you happen to go from Henley's to a film company?

A.H. I read in a trade paper that an American company, Paramount's Famous Players-Lasky, was opening a branch in Islington, London. They were going to build studios there, and they announced a production schedule. Among others, a picture taken from such and such a book. I don't remember the title. While still working at Henley's, I read that book through and then made several drawings that might eventually serve to illustrate the titles.

F.T. By "titles" you mean the captions that covered the dialogue in silent pictures?

A.H. That's right. At the time, those titles were illustrated. On each card you had the narrative title, the dialogue, and a small drawing. The most famous of these narrative titles was "Came the dawn." You also had "The next morning . . ." For instance, if the line read: "George was leading a very fast life by this time," I would draw a candle, with a flame at each end, just below the sentence. Very naïve.

F.T. So you took this initiative and then submitted your work to Famous Players?

A.H. Exactly. I showed them my drawings and they put me on at once. Later on I became head of the title department. I went to work for the editorial department of the studio. The head of the department had two American writers under him, and when a picture was finished, the head of the editorial department would write the titles or would rewrite those of the original script. Because in those days it was possible to completely alter the meaning of a script through the use of narrative titles and spoken titles.

F.T. How so?

A.H. Well, since the actor pretended to speak and the dialogue appeared on the screen right afterward, they could put whatever words they liked in his mouth. Many a bad picture was saved in this way. For instance, if a drama had been poorly filmed and was ridiculous, they would insert comedy titles all the way through and the picture was a great hit. Because, you see, it became a satire. One could really do anything—take the end of a picture and put it at the beginning—anything at all!

F.T. And this gave you a chance to see the inside of film-making?

A.H. Yes. At this time I met several American writers and I learned how to write scripts. And sometimes when an extra scene was needed—but not an acting scene—they would let me shoot it. However, the pictures made by Famous Players in England were unsuccessful in America. So the studio became a rental studio for British producers.

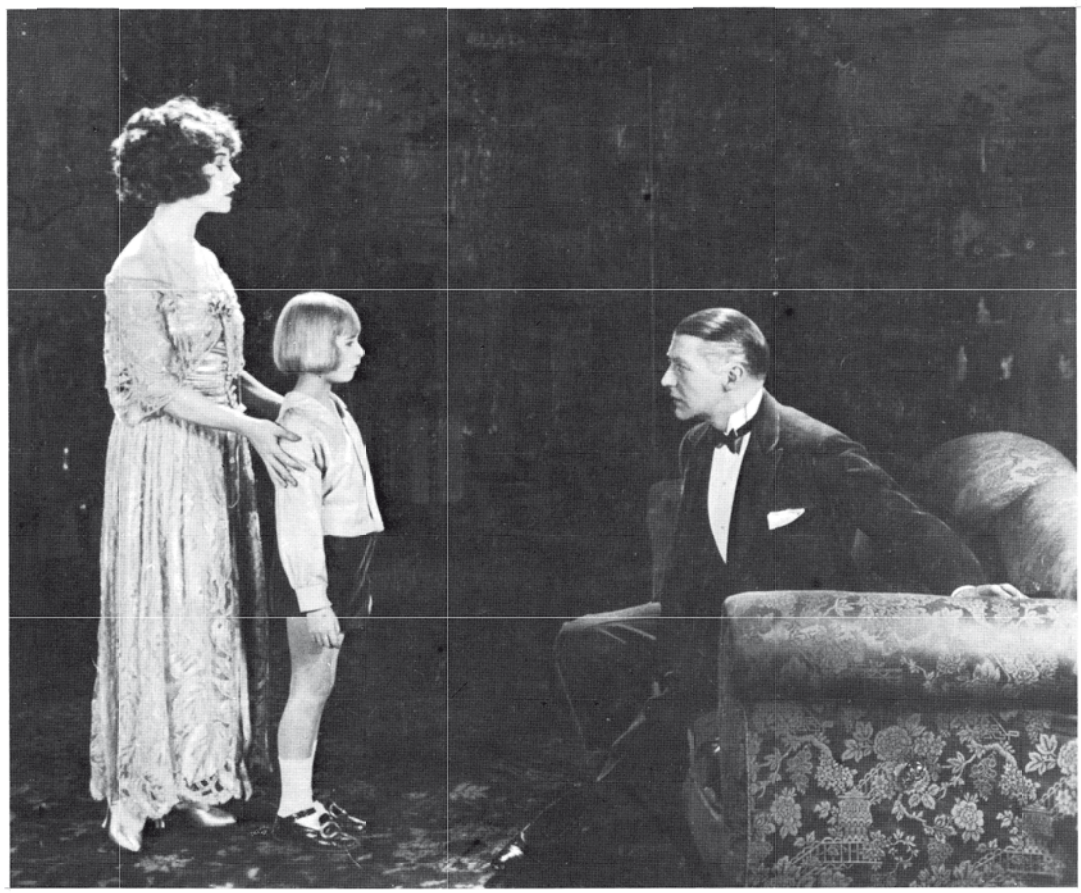
Meanwhile, I had read a novel in a magazine, and just as an exercise, I wrote a script based on this story. I knew that an American company had the exclusive world rights to the property, but I did it anyway, since it was merely for practice.

When the British companies took over the Islington studios, I approached them for work and I landed a job as an assistant director.

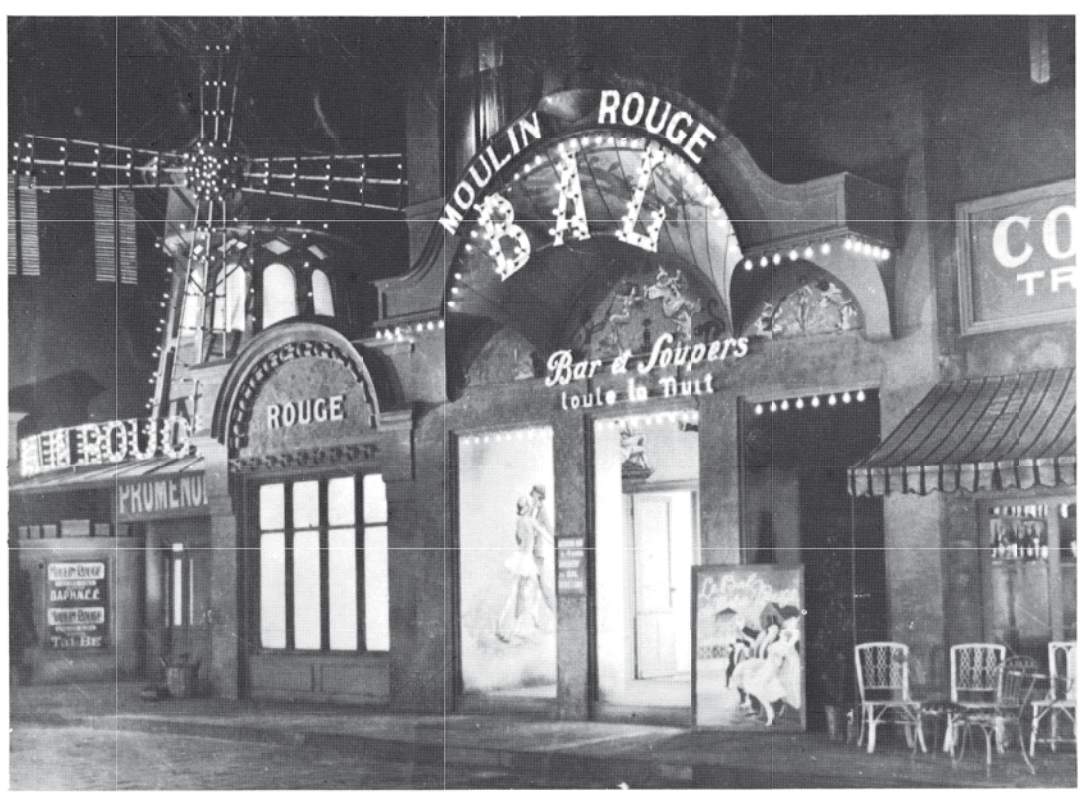
F.T. With Michael Balcon?

A.H. No, not yet. Before that I worked on a picture called *Always Tell Your Wife*, which featured Seymour Hicks, a very well-known London actor. One day he quarreled with the director and said to me, "Let's you and me finish this thing by ourselves." So I helped him and we completed the picture.

Meanwhile, the company formed by Michael Balcon became a tenant at the studios, and I became an assistant director for this new venture. It was the company that Balcon had set up



Betty Compson and Clive Brook in *Woman to Woman*.
Set created by Hitchcock for *Woman to Woman*.



Number Thirteen, 1922.

with Victor Saville and John Freedman. They bought the rights to a play. It was called *Woman to Woman*. Then they said, "Now we need a script," and I said, "I would like to write it."
"You? What have you done?"
I said, "I can show you something." And I showed them the adaptation I'd written as an exercise. They were very impressed and I got the job. That was in 1922.

F.T. I see. You were then twenty-three. But didn't you direct a little picture called *Number Thirteen* before that time?

A.H. A two-reeler. It was never completed.

F.T. Wasn't it a documentary?

A.H. No. There was a woman working at the studio who had worked with Chaplin. In those days anyone who had worked with Chaplin was top drawer: She had written a story and we found a little money. It wasn't very good, really. Aside from which, it was just at this point that the Americans closed their studio.

F.T. I've never seen *Woman to Woman*. In fact, I don't even know the story.

A.H. As you said, I was twenty-three at the time, and I'd never been out with a girl in my life. I'd never had a drink in my life. The story was taken from a play that had been a hit in London. It was about a British Army officer in World War I. On leave in Paris he has an affair with a dancer, then he goes back to the front. He is shell-shocked and loses his memory. He returns to England and marries a society woman. And then the dancer turns up with child. Conflict . . . the story ends with the dancer's death.

The White Shadow (1923).

F.T. Graham Cutts directed that picture. You did the adaptation and dialogue, and were assistant director as well?

A.H. More than that! My friend, the art director, was unable to work on the picture. I volunteered to serve as art director. So I did all of this and also helped on the production. My future wife, Alma Reville, was the editor of the picture as well as the script girl. In those days the script girl and the editor were one and the same person. Today the script girl keeps too many books, as you know. She's a real bookkeeper. It was while working on that picture that I first met my wife.

Then I performed these various functions for several other films. The second was *The White Shadow*, the third was *The Passionate Adventure*, and the fourth was *The Blackguard*. And then there was *The Prude's Fall*.

F.T. As you recall them now, would you say all of those pictures were about the same, or do you have a preference?

A.H. *Woman to Woman* was the best of the lot and the most successful. When we made *The Prude's Fall*, the last one of this series, the director took his lady friend along on location. We went to Venice. It was really quite expensive. The director's girl friend apparently didn't approve of any of the locations, so we came back to the studio without shooting a single scene. When the picture was finished, the director told the producer he didn't want me anymore. I've always suspected that someone on the unit had been "political."

F.T. How long did it take to turn out these pictures?

A.H. Each one took six weeks.

F.T. I suppose that one's talent was measured by the ability to make a picture requiring the fewest titles?

A.H. Exactly.

F.T. Still, weren't many of the scripts adapted from stage plays?

A.H. I made a silent film, *The Farmer's Wife*, a play that was all dialogue, but we tried to avoid using titles and, wherever possible, to use the pictorial expression instead. I suppose the only film made without any titles at all was *The Last Laugh*, with Emil Jannings.

F.T. A great picture, one of Murnau's best.

A.H. They were making it while I worked at UFA. In that film Murnau even tried to establish a universal language by using a kind of Esperanto. All the street signs, the posters, the shop signs, were in this synthetic language.

F.T. Well, some of the signs in Emil Jannings' house were in German, but those in the Grand Hotel were in this Esperanto. I imagine you were by then becoming increasingly interested in the technical aspect of film-making, that you were studying . . .

A.H. I was very much aware of the superiority of the photography in American movies to that of the British films. At eighteen I was studying photography, just as a hobby. I had noticed, for instance, that the Americans always tried to separate the image from the background with backlights, whereas in the British films the image melted into the background. There was no separation, no relief.

F.T. This brings us to 1925. Following the shooting of *The Prude's Fall*, the director doesn't want you to continue as his assistant. And that's when Michael Balcon suggests that you become a director.

A.H. Balcon said, "How would you like to direct a picture?" and I answered, "I've never thought about it." And in truth, I had not. I was very happy doing the scripts and the art direction; I hadn't thought of myself as a director. Anyway, Balcon told me that there was a proposal for an Anglo-German picture. Another writer was assigned to the script and I left for Munich. My wife, Alma, was to be my assistant. We weren't married yet, but we weren't living in sin either; we were still very pure.

F.T. This was *The Pleasure Garden*, from the novel by Oliver Sandys. As I remember it, there was lots of action.*

A.H. Melodramatic. But there were several interesting scenes in it. I want to tell you something about the shooting, because that was the very first picture I directed, and it was natural for me, I suppose, to have a sense of drama. So, at twenty minutes to eight on Saturday evening, I'm at the station in Munich, ready to leave for the location shooting in Italy. In the station, waiting for the train to start, I'm saying to myself, "This is your first picture." Nowadays, when I leave on location, I have to go with a crew of a hundred and forty people. But then there was only the leading man, Miles Mander; the cameraman, Baron Vintigmilia; and a young girl who was supposed to play a native woman who is drowned. There was also a newsreel cameraman, because we were going to do a ship-departure scene in Genoa. We were going to shoot the ship's departure with one camera on the shore and another on the ship's deck.

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* Patsy, a chorus girl at the Pleasure Garden Theater, gets her girl friend Jill a job in the troupe. Jill is engaged to Hugh, who is stationed in the colonies.

Patsy marries Levett, a colleague of Hugh's, and following a honeymoon at Lake Como, Levett also sails for the colonies. Jill, who is having the time of her life in London and enjoying the attentions of other men, keeps on postponing her departure for the islands, where her fiancé awaits her.

But Patsy leaves to join her husband. On her arrival, she discovers him in the arms of a native woman and totally depraved. When she announces her decision to leave him, Levett, in a panic, maneuvers the native woman into drowning, making her death appear a suicide. Then he turns against Patsy, and just as he is about to kill her, he is shot down by the local doctor. Hugh, abandoned by Jill, is drawn to Patsy, and the two embark on a new life together.

And the ship was going to stop outside the harbor to allow us to get the actors and the newsreel cameraman back to the dock to photograph the characters as they waved their farewells.

The next scene was to be shot in San Remo. This scene has the native girl wading out to sea to commit suicide, and Levett, the villain in the story, is to rush out and make sure the girl is dead, by holding her head underwater. Then he's to bring the body back to shore, saying, "I did my best to save her."

The following scenes take place at Lake Como, in the hotel of the Villa d'Este. Honeymoon, love scenes on the lake, beautiful romance, etc. My wife-to-be is there on the platform at Munich that evening and we are talking together. She's not coming with us. Her job—you know, she's only as tall as that; she was twenty-four then—was to go to Cherbourg by herself to pick up the leading lady, who was coming in from Hollywood. She was Virginia Valli, a very big star at the time, Universal's biggest—and who played Patsy. My fiancée is to pick her up from the *Aquitania* at Cherbourg, take her to Paris, buy her a wardrobe there and then meet us at the Villa d'Este. That's all.

The train is scheduled to leave at eight o'clock. It is now two minutes to eight. The actor, Miles Mander, says to me, "My God, I've left my makeup case in the taxi," and he runs off.

I shout out after him, "We'll be at the Hotel Bristol, in Genoa. Take the train tomorrow night, because we're shooting on Tuesday." I should remind you that this was on Saturday evening, and we were to arrive in Genoa on Sunday morning to get ready for the shooting.

It's now eight, but the train hasn't left. A few minutes go by. Eight-ten. The train begins to move. And suddenly there's a great row at the barrier and I see Miles Mander leaping over the gate, with three railway officials chasing him down the platform. He had found his make-up case and just manages to hop into the last car.

The first bit of film drama is over, but this is only the beginning!

The train is now on its way. We have no one to handle the accounts and I must take care of them myself. The accounting is more important than the directing. I'm terribly concerned over the money. We are in sleeping cars. As we reach the Austro-Italian border, Vintigmilia says, "Be very careful. We're not to declare the camera. Otherwise, they will charge duty on every lens."

"What do you mean?"

Carmelita Geraghty in *The Pleasure Garden*.

"The German company told us to smuggle the camera through," he tells me. When I ask him where the camera is, he tells me it's under my bunk. As you know, I've always been afraid of policemen and I begin to sweat. And now I am also informed that the ten thousand feet of unexposed stock in our baggage is not to be declared either.

The customs men come into our compartment. Big suspense for me. They don't find the camera, but they discover the film. And since we haven't declared it, they confiscate it.

So we land in Genoa the following morning with no film. And we spend the whole day trying to buy some. On Monday morning I decide to send the newsreel man to Milan to buy some raw stock from Kodak. And I'm still busy with the bookkeeping: lire to marks, marks to pounds —it's all terribly confusing. The cameraman returns at noon, bringing with him twenty pounds' worth of film. And now we are advised that the ten thousand feet of unexposed film that had been confiscated at the border has arrived and I must pay the duty. So I've wasted twenty pounds, a very large amount in our small budget! We have barely enough money left for the shooting of the location scenes.

On Tuesday the boat is scheduled to leave the dock at noon. It's the *Lloyd Prestino*, a large ship that is on its way to South America. We have to rent a tugboat to go out of the harbor. That's another ten pounds. Well, everything is finally settled. But at ten-thirty, when I take out my wallet to tip the tugboat man, I find it's empty. There isn't a sou!

Ten thousand lire gone! I run back to the hotel, look under the bed, everywhere. No sign of the money. I go to the police to report that someone must have entered my room while I was asleep. "It's a good thing I didn't wake up, or I might have been stabbed," I think. I'm very miserable, but the work must go on. And in the excitement of directing my very first scene, I forget all about the loss of the money.

But when the shooting's over, I'm very depressed again. I borrow ten pounds from the cameraman and fifteen from the actor. Since this doesn't cover our needs, I write a letter to London requesting an advance on my salary. I also compose another letter to the German company, in Munich, saying, "I may need a little more money." But I don't dare to mail this request, because they might say, "How do you know you may need more money so early?" So I only mail the letter to London.

Then we go back to the Hotel Bristol, where we're to have lunch before setting out for San Remo. After the meal, I go out in the street. And there is my cameraman, Vintigmilia, with the German girl who is to play the native who throws herself into the sea. With them is the newsreel operator, who has now completed his work and is about to return to Munich. The three of them are standing there, with their heads together, talking very solemnly. I go up to them and say, "Is anything wrong?"

"Yes," they answer. "The girl. She can't go into the water."

I ask, "What do you mean, she can't go into the water?"

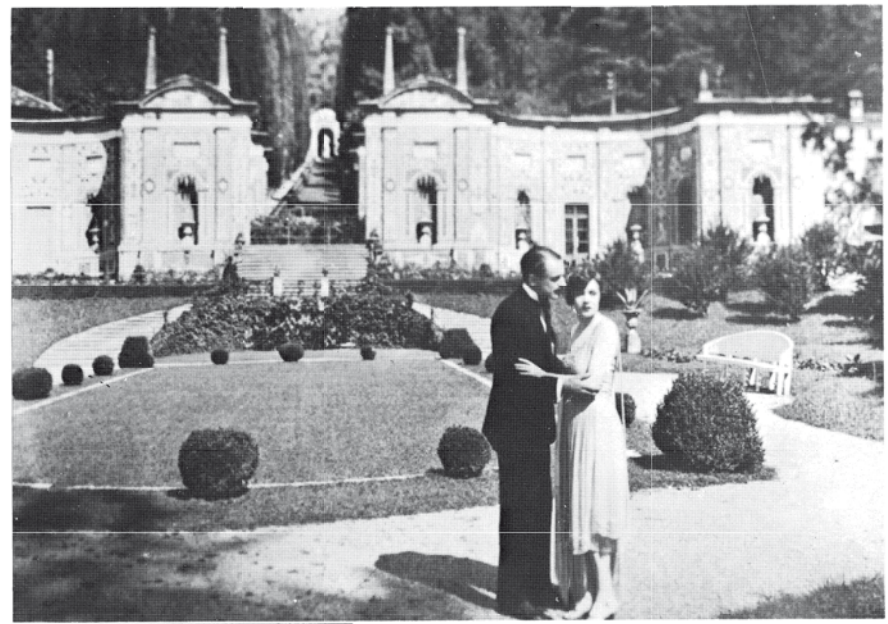
And they insist, saying, "That's right, she can't go into the water. You know . . ."

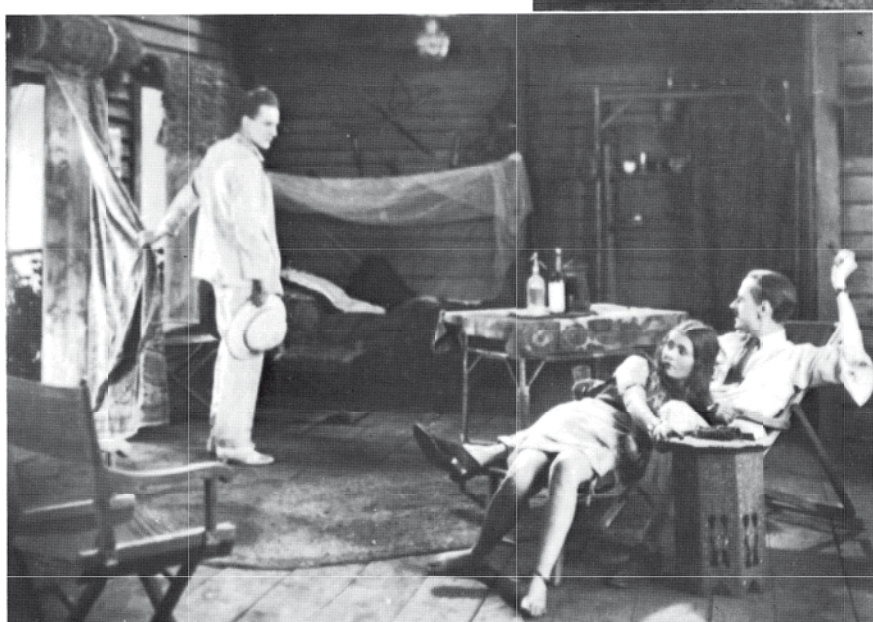
Bewildered, I reply, "No, what do you mean?"

So then and there, on the sidewalk, with people walking back and forth, the two cameramen tell me all about menstruation. I've never heard of it in my life! They go into great detail, and I listen very carefully to what they have to say. When they're through with their explanation, I'm still cross. All I can think about is the money I've wasted in bringing the girl with us, all those lire and marks. Very irritated, I mutter, "Well, why couldn't she have told us about it in Munich, three days ago?"

Anyway, we ship her back with the cameraman and we proceed to Alassio. We manage to find another girl, but this one was somewhat plumper than her ailing predecessor and my leading man was unable to lift her. At each attempt to haul her out of the water, he lets her drop, to the delight of a hundred onlookers, who are howling with laughter. And just as he finally succeeds in carrying her out, a little old lady, who had been quietly gathering sea shells nearby, saunters right across our scene, staring straight into the camera!

Next, we board the train, on our way to the Villa d'Este. And I'm very nervous because Virginia Valli, the Hollywood star, has just arrived. I can't let her know that this is my first picture.





The first thing I say to my fiancée is, "Have you any money?"
"No!"
"But you had enough," I point out.
"Yes, but she brought another actress, Carmelita Geraghty. I tried to take them to the Hotel Westminster on the Rue de la Paix, but they insisted on the Claridge."
So I tell my fiancée all about my troubles. Eventually, we start the shooting and everything works out all right. In those days, of course, we shot moonlight scenes in the sun and we tinted the film blue. After each shot I'd turn back to my fiancée, asking, "Was it all right?"
Only now do I work up the courage to send a cable to Munich saying that we need more money. Meanwhile, I have received the advance on my salary from London. The actor, being a very mean fellow, demands his money back. When I ask him why, he tells me that his tailor insists on being paid. Which wasn't true, you know!
And the suspense continues. I get some money from Munich, but am still fretting over the hotel bill, the rental of motorboats, and all sorts of incidentals. On the night before we're to leave for Munich, I'm terribly nervous. You see, not only don't I want the film star to know it's my first picture, but I don't want her to know that we're short of money either—that we're a very impoverished unit. So I do a really mean thing. I manage to twist the facts and put the whole blame on my fiancée, for bringing the extra girl. "Therefore," I say, "you've got to borrow two hundred dollars from the star."
She tells the star some story and returns with the money, enabling me to pay the hotel bill and buy tickets for our sleepers. We are to change trains at Zurich, in Switzerland, to arrive in Munich the following day. At the station they make me pay for excess baggage because the two American girls have trunks this high! By now we've almost run out of money.
I must begin my scheming again—always those damned accounts! And, as you know, I always make my fiancée do all the dirty work. I tell her to go and ask the two Americans whether they want to have dinner. And to our relief they reply that they won't eat the food on these foreign trains; they have brought sandwiches from the