HITCHCOCK Study Guide

HITCHCOCK by Helen G. Scott

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Plot Summary

"Hitchcock" by François Truffaut is a series of interviews between Truffaut and Alfred Hitchcock, which took place during a 50-hour period in the mid 1960s. The book's first printing was in 1967, almost a decade before Hitchcock stopped making films. Truffaut is a former film critic and a cinematic expert, making the author an outstanding choice to interview the Master of Suspense.

There are some basic details about Hitchcock, from his birthplace to a general outline of his education and foray into the movie business. The reader receives enough information to move forward throughout the majority of the director's career.

The entire work is transcribed from the interview conducted by Truffaut, with almost no corresponding references. The conversations between the author and subject are quite detailed without being laborious or boring. As a film critic, Truffaut understands fully the body of Hitchcock's work, almost to the level of being an expert on the films that spanned the director's career, beginning in 1927.

Hitchcock details how he became involved in working on silent films as a part of his job at the Henley Telegraph Company in London, where he had been hired to work as a specialist with electrical cables, related to his education as an engineer. The foray into directing was not planned but rather something that Hitchcock seemed to fall into on the suggestion of a director at the local studio where Hitchcock had gained employment.

Working on silent films was a joy for Hitchcock, who was assigned to create the titles relaying the actor's dialogue. Hitchcock reveals some trade secrets throughout the book, starting with the fact that the titles did not often match the actual dialogue, especially if the actual dialogue that was written for the actors was particularly bad. The director confesses that many films were made into successes by this method.

All of Hitchcock's films are discussed, starting with his first film, "Woman to Woman," which was shot in 1927 at a new studio in Islington, UK. Hitchcock reveals how he learned the skills necessary to create a dramatic and well-crafted film, with close attention being paid to the cinematic value of the work.

The director discusses working with his future wife as well as the various stars and studios. Readers may be surprised to learn that the director's work was often steered by the demands of the studio as well as the stars. In the early days of film, the studios owned the stars and were very careful of their reputations and overall image. For this reason, Hitchcock was often forced to change a screenplay or the way a film was shot so that a famous leading man would not be portrayed as a murderer or other similar circumstances.

Hitchcock has anecdotes about several of the films, both humorous and interesting.

All of Hitchcock's films are recalled, some in more detail than others. Among the director's most famous films are "Psycho," "Vertigo," North by Northwest," "The Birds," "Marnie, "Strangers on a Train," and "Dial M for Murder."

Chapters 1-3

Chapters 1-3 Summary and Analysis

"Hitchcock" by François Truffaut is a series of interviews between Truffaut and Alfred Hitchcock, which took place during a 50-hour period. Truffaut is a former film critic and a cinematic expert, making the author an outstanding choice to interview the Master of Suspense.

Alfred Hitchcock was born on August 13, 1899 in London, England. Chapter one begins with Truffaut asking Hitchcock about his childhood, a topic on which very little has been written. Hitchcock recalls an early incident when his father had taken him to a police station as a form of punishment. The police locked the small boy in a cell for five or ten minutes to make the five-year-old understand that is what happens to naughty boys. Hitchcock has no idea what he did to deserve the punishment, but the incident instilled a lifelong fear of police. Hitchcock is quick to point out that his father was a nervous man and Hitchcock had nothing bad to say about the way he was parented.

Hitchcock reveals that as a child he was a loner, one who was content with observing his surroundings. Hitchcock went to Jesuit school and very young age, at St. Ignatius College. The Hitchcock family was Catholic and, at the time, being Catholic in England was uncommon. According to Hitchcock the Jesuits had a deep sense of moral fear and would do anything to avoid evil. This also had a large impact on the child.

When asked what he would like to be as an adult, Hitchcock stated plainly that he wanted to be an engineer. Hitchcock was sent to a specialized school, the School of Engineering and Navigation, where the filmmaker studied navigation, mechanics, acoustics, and electricity. After graduation, Hitchcock went to work at the Henley Telegraph Company as a specialist with electric cables and was promoted to the position of technical estimator. Hitchcock was transferred to the advertising department, where he could spend part of his workday drawing advertisements. Hitchcock believes that this experience was his first step in to the world of film.

At the time Hitchcock was making his foray into film, American pictures were thought to be superior to those made in Britain. An avid moviegoer, Hitchcock favored Griffith, Chaplain, Buster Keaton, Douglas Fairbanks, Mary Pickford, and the Paramount Famous Players. When Hitchcock found out that the Paramount Famous Players-Lasky were planning to open a studio in Islington, London, Hitchcock read the first play they were set to perform and drew illustrations that might be used on the title cards for the film. Eventually, Hitchcock became involved with the studio and was eventually promoted to head of the title department, where caption cards were created to offset the lack of sound during the silent movie era. The job consisted of writing out the actors' dialogue and sometimes illustrating the text with various drawings. Hitchcock reveals that the titles did not always match the dialogue, particularly if the dialogue was bad. The titles could spice up a movie in many ways including adding elements of comedy.

This was the first time Hitchcock was able to see how a film was made. The filmmaker met several American writers and eventually learned to write scripts. Occasionally, when a scene needed to be shot that did not contain actors, Hitchcock would be allowed to step behind the camera. Meanwhile, Hitchcock practiced writing scripts. When the British took over the studio and Hitchcock took his first job as assistant director at the behest of Michael Balcon. The studio had purchased rights to a play, titled "Woman to Woman." Hitchcock convinced Balcon that he could write a script and the effort was impressive enough to win the job. The script turned out to be slightly more difficult than Hitchcock predicted, because the story was about a British officer who has an affair with a dancer in Paris while on leave from the military. At this time, Hitchcock was 23 years old, had never dated nor had a drink. Regardless, the movie turned out well.

In 1925 after production wrapped on "The Prude's Fall," Balcon asked Hitchcock if he would like to direct a film. Hitchcock had never considered becoming a director at that point. Hitchcock's directorial debut was on the film "The Pleasure Garden," adapted from a novel by Oliver Sandys.

Hitchcock has an amusing story about the movie and how virtually everything went wrong before the crew began its trek from Munich to Genoa where a portion of the movie would be shot. Hitchcock's assistant, Alma Reville, who would later become his wife, was expected to travel to Cherbourg to meet the movie's leading lady and accompany the star back to Munich. Meanwhile, Hitchcock and a small crew boarded the train for Genoa. Along the way Hitchcock learns that the Germans have instructed the cameraman to smuggle in the camera; otherwise, they will have to pay duty on the very expensive item. Being afraid of police, Hitchcock is terrified. The filmmaker also discovers that there are 10,000 feet of unexposed film in the baggage that has not been claimed. When customs officers search the compartment, they find the film and confiscate it. When the crew arrives in Genoa, they must buy new film. Partway through the shoot, the confiscated film is returned and Hitchcock must pay a duty on the item. Somewhere along the way, Hitchcock loses the wallet with all of the money allotted for the film, a large sum of 10,000 pounds. Hitchcock is not to be dissuaded and finds ingenious ways of getting enough money to finish the film, from borrowing from his girlfriend, the crew, and even the movie's stars.

Hitchcock discusses his first official film titled "The Lodger." The screenplay was inspired by a play titled, "Who is He?" based on a novel by Belloc Lowndes. The movie was Hitchcock's first real experience with creating suspense regarding whether or not the lead character is in fact, Jack the Ripper. However, the studios had a lot to say about the types of characters their stars would portray. For this reason, the character, played by Cary Grant, had to be found innocent. This is a common thread in the movies at this time, and oftentimes scripts had to be changed in order to placate the stars and the studios. Although this annoyed Hitchcock, he was much more interested in the actual craft of filmmaking.

The next movie to fit into the Hitchcock way of filmmaking was "The Ring." Hitchcock refers to a lot of technical innovations in the film. In fact, the elaborate montage caused the audience at the premiere to applaud, something which came as a surprise to Hitch.

Hitchcock refers to a number of techniques used to make the film that would not be used today.

Hitchcock became known for inserting gags in his movies. It did not seem to matter much to the filmmaker if anyone else got the gags; they were often inserted for Hitchcock's own pleasure. One of the most popular gags regarding Hitchcock films is that the filmmaker appears in each one. This didn't start out as a gag however. In the beginning, Hitchcock often was called upon to play the part of an extra in order to fill crowd scenes. The appearances became a sort of superstition and eventually turned into a running gag. Hitchcock had no problem appearing in the films. However, after it became well-known that viewers could expect to see him on the screen, the filmmaker insisted that his appearance be in the first five minutes of film so the audience would not be distracted from the plot.

Hitchcock discusses the use of the Shuftan Process in the making of the film "Blackmail." The process consists of angling mirrors at 45° in order to reflect a picture in front of the camera. This process was used in order to be able to film the entire interior of the British Museum. Producers were unaware of Hitchcock's experimentation and most likely would not have approved. This is just one way in which Hitchcock becomes intrinsically involved in the technical aspects of filmmaking.

Truffaut asks Hitchcock the difference between surprise and suspense. Many people assume that suspense must be related to fear in some way. Hitchcock says that the assumption is untrue and gives examples of each.

Hitchcock is not afraid to talk about things he has tried, even when the result is less than successful. One good example was the setting used in "Number Seventeen." Hitchcock had the idea to allow a hundred cats to run up and down the stairs on set. However, none of the cats would cooperate and because the set was open, the cats escaped and the crew spent the afternoon trying to find and return the felines to their owners.

Chapters 4-7

Chapters 4-7 Summary and Analysis

Hitchcock discusses "The Man Who Knew Too Much." Truffaut mentions that the movie was Hitchcock's greatest success in Britain. The movie's script had to be altered in some ways due to the plausibility of the plot and also to avoid showing the British police in possession of firearms since the Bobbies are not permitted to carry weapons. Because the military was brought in, at least some of the officers were permitted to have shotguns. The incident where the soldiers and officers surround the house of kidnappers was true in part, taking its cues from an incident where Winston Churchill went to the scene to oversee the action. The ending is also taken from a real life incident, known as the Sidney Street Siege, which took place around 1910.

Hitchcock also discusses the importance of finding the balance between being too subtle and too obvious with a movie's plot. This was particularly difficult in the silent era when all of the dialogue had to be illustrated. Hitchcock asserts that it is imperative to get the attention of the audience while not beating them over the head with the things that should be individually perceived. On the other hand, it is imperative that the audience understands the thread of the story and the props being used so that they are able to follow along. Truffaut refers to this type of filmmaking as being simplified. Hitchcock agrees and says that simplification is essential; otherwise, being too complex will not allow the audience to feel any emotion. Hitchcock relates it to a speaker who is too preoccupied with the topic and is never able to make a point.

The author and the famous director also discuss "Thirty-nine Steps" and Hitchcock's fondness for works written by John Buchan. Truffaut also points out that this is the time when Hitchcock begins to attach more significance to the scenarios rather than to the plausibility of the plot in order to evoke more emotion from the audience. The extra attention paid to the scenarios allowed Hitchcock to remove any "utilitarian" scenes and focus on those that had the most impact and value. One example of this is seen in "The Birds." In one scene an ornithologist just happens to be on the scene when a group of women begins to discuss the birds. Although some filmmakers would have seen a need to explain how the expert just happened to be there, Hitchcock sees it as superfluous. Both Truffaut and Hitchcock agree that such explanations are a waste of time.

The pair discusses the role of film critics in the cinema. Hitchcock remembers that Truffaut was a film critic when first they met. One topic discussed is how the film critic rarely has the same point of view as the filmmaker and how one cannot let it affect the work. Truffaut asks Hitchcock if he has ever considered taking a preemptive strike against the critics, to beat them to the punch. Hitchcock says it is not worth the time or effort to do so.

Hitchcock explains that not every film must have a happy ending. For example, the film "The Secret Agent" does not end happily, with the hero being killed at the end. Although

Hitchcock was not particularly fond of the film, the director stands by the fact that the ending does not make or break the movie.

Also discussed is the use of children in a suspenseful way. In "The Woman Alone," Hitchcock uses a little boy to carry a bomb that later exploded and killed the child. Hitchcock realizes that the big mistake was in having the child carry the bomb because the audience resented having anything bad happen to the boy. Truffaut agrees and says that the whole subject involving a child is "ticklish" and if not done correctly can be equated to an abuse of cinematic power.

Truffaut comments on the ineptitude of police in the films "Sabotage" and "Shadow of a Doubt." The author asks Hitchcock if the ill portrayal of police is intentional or simply related to the director's lifelong fear of those in uniform. Hitchcock does not believe that the parts are portrayed in such a manner, rather blames poor casting.

One of the most notable things about Hitchcock's films is the innovative use of camera angles. Previously, most films were shot while the camera was in a static position. Hitchcock moved the camera to shoot from various angles and distances which greatly enhanced the scenery and mood of the film. One common technique was to shoot everything from a great distance then zoom in to the closest possible point. This is especially effective in "The Girl Was Young," when the murderer in the story could only be identified by a significant eye twitch.

Hitchcock reveals an old trick used by cameramen in the days of the screen sirens. When the female star began to age, it was imperative to diminish any suggestion of age and to focus solely on the eyes and make them sparkle. To do this, the cameramen would place gauze over the camera lens to diffuse the whole scene. Holes were cut into the gauze for the eyes which forbade the star from moving her head during a close up shot. Eventually, people became wise to the technique and one of remedies was to diffuse the whole shot so it would not be noticeable when individual frames were cut in to the film.

Hitchcock's first trip to America was in 1937. The filmmaker had been contracted by David O. Selznik to film a story about the sinking of the Titanic. When Hitchcock arrived in Hollywood, Selznik had changed his mind and had acquired the rights to Rebecca, a film that would become well known, even though it lacked what would become Hitchcock's signature style.

Truffaut asks if Hitchcock was intimidated by making "Rebecca" in America. Hitchcock stated that the entire film, from concept to the actors, was British so there wasn't much difference beyond the physical location of the studio. In the end, the film was well received by both the Americans and the British. Truffaut mentions that the film won the Oscar for the Picture of the Year. Hitchcock says that he has never received an Oscar - the award for "Rebecca" went to Selznik.

The common cinematic term "MacGuffin" is explained. Originally, the concept came from Kipling's stories about soldiers who set out to steal secret documents. Eventually,

the term developed into a catchall for any sort of plot involved in uncovering a secret. The actual origin of the term is explained by Hitchcock in a short story. The MacGuffin is a trap used to catch lions in the Scottish Highlands. Of course, there are no lions in the Scottish Highlands; therefore, the MacGuffin is actually nothing at all. Hitchcock warns that paying too much attention to the MacGuffin can potentially ruin the story so it must be kept simple.

Another film discussed is "Mr. and Mrs. Smith." Hitchcock agreed to do his first American comedy as a gesture of friendship to movie star Carole Lombard. Hitchcock confesses that he could not relate to the characters and basically shot the movie as it was written.

Chapters 8-11

Chapters 8-11 Summary and Analysis

In 1944 Hitchcock returned to America to film "Spellbound." Hitchcock states that the original script wasn't tight enough and when he returned to Hollywood, it was rewritten with a tighter focus on psychoanalysis. The only downside to involving psychoanalysis is that there is less ability to fantasize and therefore a logical approach had to be used toward the main character's adventures.

Truffaut refers to "Notorious" as his favorite Hitchcock film and calls it the quintessence of Hitchcock. Ben Hecht also worked on the screenplay for "Notorious," and the writer and filmmaker spent a great deal of time on choosing a suitable MacGuffin for the story. Many different scenarios were tried and cast aside for being overly complex. The final decision for the MacGuffin was to use several samples of uranium stored in a wine bottle. When the producer questioned Hitchcock's choice of uranium, the director replied that uranium was the thing with which scientists would create the atom bomb. Because this took place in 1944, the producer was unaware that such a thing as an atom bomb even existed. Hitchcock had heard of secret experiments taking place in New Mexico and also in Norway as conducted by the Germans. The producer was unconvinced. The film was eventually made with a different studio.

Hitchcock tells of a sad incident during "Notorious." A minor member of the crew was sent to scout out a house in Beverly Hills to be used in the film. A quiet man approached Hitchcock to ask if the house was suitable. Hitchcock realized that the man was his old boss from the title department at Famous Players-Lasky back in 1920. Hitchcock did not let on that he recognized the man. Additionally, the producer suggested hiring an assistant director to help with the production schedule. Hitchcock refused because the man was a former colleague, and the filmmaker thought it was condescending to hire him as an assistant. The producer convinced Hitchcock to use the man as an assistant because he needed the money.

Truffaut brings up the film "Rope" which was filmed in 1948. Truffaut considers this movie a milestone in Hitchcock's career, since it was the first film Hitchcock produced, and it was also the director's first color film. Truffaut asks about the challenges encountered in working with Technicolor film for the first time. Hitchcock was set on reducing the color to a minimum due to his love of black-and-white film as well as the technical aspect. One particular instance in which color was a problem was at the end of the film. The sunset was much too orange for Hitchcock's taste and as a result, the last five reels had to be reshot. The use of color also brings about the potential problem of the cameraman, who may be very adept with his technical skills, having an appropriate sense of color. Additionally, it was the first of Hitchcock films that used a movable camera strapped to a dolly.

Truffaut asks if producing "Rope" was financially rewarding for Hitchcock. Hitchcock says that it was and it also received good notices. However, because there were so many technical innovations, the movie was quite expensive to produce, costing roughly $1.5 million. MGM eventually bought the rights and reissued the film.

The author refers to the 1950s film "Strangers on a Train" which proved to be a spectacular comeback film for the director following two consecutive failures. Unlike many of Hitchcock's films, "Strangers on a Train" was not an assignment; rather, the filmmaker chose the novel himself. Unfortunately, working with a mystery or suspense writer on a screenplay never works out well for Hitchcock. In this case, the writer was Raymond Chandler. Every time Hitchcock would attempt to work through the plot, the writer would ask why he was needed. Although Hitchcock had certain issues with the film it was a great success. This is also the first film mentioned which offered a part for Hitchcock's daughter Patricia.

Truffaut asks Hitchcock if there was a connection between the filmmaker's Jesuit upbringing and the use of the priest as a confessor to the murderer in "I Confess." Hitchcock says that it was a coincidence. However, there seemed to be a problem with the audience understanding the role of priest as confessor. According to Hitchcock, the priest who hears the confession of a murderer is bound to become an accessory after the fact. Additionally, the audience expects the priest to speak up, not fully understanding the role of the confessor. Many critics also questioned why a priest would risk his own life in order to protect a murderer. Truffaut asks if it was a mistake to have the priest keep the murderer's confession a secret. As a Catholic, Hitchcock asserts that a priest would never reveal what was said in a confessional. However, Protestants, agnostics and atheists would find it hard to believe that a priest would risk his own life by keeping silent.

Hitchcock reveals that there are many elaborate elements in his films that are put in for his own satisfaction that the public may never recognize or notice all of them due to the involvement with the characters and plot. The filmmaker believes that the richness of details may be the reason people feel the need to see the film several times.

The next film discussed is "Rear Window." This is the second favorite film for Truffaut. Hitchcock says that he was attracted to the film because there was a great deal of technical challenge involved in the production. Hitchcock considers the movie to evoke the "purest expression of a cinematic idea."

Truffaut addresses voyeurism in regards to James Stewart's activities of looking out his window. It is comical that the connotations in the film change depending on which subjects are being viewed. For instance, viewing a little black dog seems somewhat sweet; while watching a woman as she undresses makes Stewart look like a pervert. Hitchcock insists that all people have at least some tendency toward voyeurism.

One of Truffaut's favorite aspects of "Rear Window" is the use of close shots rather than filming the entire set from a distance. According to Truffaut, shooting a close-up of a perspiring James Stewart, his leg in a cast, a broken camera, and photographs on the

wall gives the audience a complete picture as to the identity of the principal character, what he does for a living, and how he came to have a broken leg.

The fact that the investigators in the story spend their time searching for the murder victim's head was based upon Hitchcock's belief that searching for the head is common in cases of mutilation. The director refers to two separate stories in the British press at the time, where investigators found the victim's head and were able to use the evidence to obtain a conviction.

Hitchcock talks about his preference for sophisticated blonds to be used in sexually-themed storylines. Hitchcock liked Grace Kelly because she was indirectly sexy; whereas, Marilyn Monroe and Brigitte Bardot were openly sexual. Hitchcock preferred women that appeared to be classy yet turned into whores in the bedroom. Hitchcock states that he openly prefers the paradox between the subdued, even icy, exterior and the fire within.

Hitchcock relates his distrust of the casting department regarding the choice of the actor or actress he feels is best for the part. The director uses the example of asking for an actor to play an elevator boy. The casting department will send everyone who has ever played an elevator boy. This method was a problem for Hitchcock when he had requested an actor to play an ambassador. After going through the actors sent by the casting department, all of whom had little beards, Hitchcock sent for photographs of all the actual ambassadors of the time and realized that there was no resemblance between the actors and the actual ambassadors.

Chapters 12-15

Chapters 12-15 Summary and Analysis

"The Wrong Man" was based on a true story about a musician who is wrongly accused of committing a robbery. The man goes through being arrested and sent to trial while his wife goes insane. Hitchcock regrets veering away from the courtroom scene to disclose the wife's mental problems although it was necessary to the plot. In the court room, a juror is so convinced that the man is guilty that he asks if it is really necessary to go through the process. Because of that action, which really happened, there was a mistrial. The real burglar was caught before the second trial began.

Hitchcock went to great lengths to ensure that the feelings evoked in the story rang true. This was also the case with the scenery. The film was shot at the actual sites where the crime took place and also utilized the same jail, courthouse, and insane asylum. There were many people who portrayed themselves or served as extras in the movie, including the wife's doctors.

Another aspect of the story that fits into the "you can't make this stuff up" category is how the real burglar was captured. The man attempted to rob a delicatessen. The woman behind the counter was the owner and was obviously very savvy and protective of the business. When the man aimed the gun at the woman, she took a large knife she had been using to cut meat and pressed it to the man's stomach with every intention of using it. The man panicked and began to whimper and beg to be let go because he had a wife and children.

Hitchcock does regret getting so deeply involved with the story that some of the details could have been better. The director claims that in being faithful to the veracity of the story, he sacrificed some of his usual creative license.

Truffaut is not afraid to be critical of Hitchcock, something that is rarely seen in interviews and stories about the Master of Suspense. Hitchcock often agrees with Truffaut, and the director's opinions on technical matters are very rigid. Even if a film is successful, the director has no problem discussing how things might have been done differently. This shows Hitchcock's legendary perfectionism although instead of being seen as a tyrant, the director is more likely to be self-deprecating when it comes to the less-than-successful films.

Truffaut talks about "Vertigo," one of Hitchcock's most famous films. Truffaut states that the screenplay is taken from Boileau and Narcejac's "D'Entre les Morts," a novel that was written specifically for Hitchcock. Hitchcock disagrees since the novel was out before the movie began. Truffaut reveals that the novel was written with the hopes that Hitchcock would film it. Hitchcock wonders what would have happened if he hadn't purchased the rights. Truffaut believes that it would have been purchased by some French director hoping to mirror the recent success of the suspense thriller "Diabolique."

Hitchcock outlines the story and how the screenplay had to make changes in order to work for the big screen. There are times when Truffaut refers to specific emotional or sexual aspects of the films to which Hitchcock seems indifferent; rather, there are more important things to discuss. The attitude of Hitchcock is often traditionally British - reserved and understated.

Hitchcock discusses the avoidance of politics in his films. Truffaut wonders if this is due to the potential issues that could be raised. The director simply says that people do not typically like politically-themed movies.

Truffaut refers to the director's propensity to inject absurd moments into his films, such as the crop dusting scene in "North by Northwest" where the plane flies overhead, but there are no actual crops to be dusted. Truffaut asserts that absurdity is a key element in Hitchcock's films. Hitch replies, "The fact is I practice absurdity quite religiously!" On the morning of one of the sessions with Truffaut, Hitchcock says that he has slept poorly and was most likely disturbed by all of the scenarios discussed during the interview. Hitchcock says that he does not dream often but when he does, his dreams are usually "quite reasonable." Then he details a dream that turns into a period piece and in the dream, Hitchcock realizes what is happening and acts accordingly.

The director talks about his need for things to be calm and orderly, which is strange considering the level of conflict in his films. However, Truffaut points out that Hitchcock's hidden emotions are easily transferred to film - especially fear. Truffaut pushes for more insight regarding the influence of the director's dreams on his work, but the topic does not seem to interest Hitchcock. The director confesses, in his usual proper British manner, that he does not have erotic dreams.

Although Hitchcock seems to avoid the topics of sexuality in film, Truffaut points out that his works have caused people to refer to him as the expert of physical love on screen. Hitchcock sees the romance between two people as he would any other dramatic mood and that focus is what makes the chemistry between characters work so well.

Truffaut notes that Hitchcock's films never start out as violent. A good example of a misleading opening can be seen in "Psycho" The opening of the movie shows Janet Leigh and John Gavin in a romantic scene, something that is purposely and completely misleading to the audience. Truffaut also points out that the romantic scene should have been done differently in that Gavin is bare from the waist up but Janet Leigh is wearing a bra. It would have been more effective if both had been nude. Hitchcock also discusses how the scene had to be filmed to appeal to a maturing audience. A simple kissing scene would have seemed too chaste to younger viewers who would have been more involved even at their age. There are also changes in technique that Hitchcock began using as early as "The Birds."

The novel "Psycho" was somewhat misleading regarding the fact that Norman had conversations with his mother, who did not exist but was a figment of his twisted imagination. Hitchcock says that the storyline came from a story about a man who kept

his mother's body in his home in Wisconsin. However, Hitchcock says the only thing that really intrigued him about the book was the famous shower murder scene.

"The Birds" by Daphne du Maurier was a film that Hitchcock wanted to do yet he had never given any thought to the technical aspect of handling the birds. The director admits that he would not have undertaken the film if the birds had been anything other than everyday ordinary birds, such as vultures or other birds of prey.

Although the birds were ordinary, there had been stories of them attacking people, most likely as a result of rabies. However, during the time of the shooting, Hitch met a farmer who told a story about a murder of crows dive-bombing his lambs. The story inspired the director to have one of the birds dive down to gouge out a man's eyes.

Hitchcock was notorious for memorizing entire scripts and never referring to them while shooting the film. The director was quite proud of this ability and also used it to prevent himself from improvising, an idea that may or may not work, but would surely cost the studio money. During "The Birds," however, Hitchcock broke his own rules and began to improvise, which allowed him to improve greatly on the weaker scenes.

Hitchcock refutes a story in which Peter Lorre sent him fifty canaries while he was on a ship and as revenge, the director sent Lorre a telegram every day detailing the actions of one particular bird. Hitchcock says that while the story isn't true, he is extremely fond of practical jokes.

Hitchcock discusses the fetishist angle in "Marnie" and how it was lost on the screen. There were also three projects afterward that never came to fruition; instead the director went on to film "Torn Curtain."

Truffaut discusses Hitchcock's systematic patterns and how they evolved. Although the director agrees about the evolution, he sees every film as a new one, not just another step in the process. Truffaut later addresses the fact that Hitchcock's attitude toward film is "anti-literary and purely cinematic." It is not the story or the actors that intrigue Hitchcock, it is the art of film, the technique, and the finished product.

Characters

Alfred Hitchcock

Alfred Hitchcock (1899-1980) was a British film director, producer and screenplay writer often referred to as "The Master of Suspense." The director was known for his distinct profile and habit of appearing in his own films as a bit player or extra.

Hitchcock began his career in the silent film era in Britain in 1920. The director fell into film by accident, having studied at the School of Engineering and Navigation in London, following his dream of becoming an engineer. After graduation, Hitchcock went to work at the Henley Telegraph Company as an electrical technician. The director was promoted and ended up in the advertising department which allowed him to spend part of the day drawing various items. That position led to a job in the title department, a job which entailed creating subtitles and innocuous drawings to be used in silent films. Hitchcock eventually joined a studio and worked his way up to assistant director. Michael Balcon, an important figure at the studio encouraged Hitchcock to become a director, an avenue that had never even been considered.

From that point, Hitchcock rose rather quickly in the area of film and was one of the first to venture into the new technique of filmmaking that included sound.

Hitchcock's engineering background and high level of curiosity served him well in the movie industry. Hitchcock was always looking for innovative techniques, often developing many that eventually became standard in the industry. This technical expertise was a huge factor in the director's success.

Hitchcock's love for film, married with technical expertise, allowed him to create his own genre of masterfully-produced suspense films. Among the director's best known films are "Vertigo," "Rear Window," and "Psycho."

Hitchcock's reputation often portrayed him as a perfectionist and somewhat rigid in his methods. Truffaut is able to communicate with Hitchcock as a colleague, revealing the man's deep and total commitment to the art of film and the processes by which it is accomplished. Hitchcock was not pompous; in fact, he was quite hard on himself for any missteps and was often self-deprecating. One of the little known facts about the director was that he was fond of practical jokes.

Hitchcock's career spanned seven decades. The director's last film was produced in 1976 although he went on to collaborate on a screenplay which was published posthumously.

Alfred Hitchcock was knighted by Queen Elizabeth II during the New Year's Honours in 1980. The director died four months later of renal failure.

Francois Truffaut

Francois Truffaut (1932-1984) was a director, noted film critic and author. Truffaut is credited with being the founder of the French New Wave film movement.

Truffaut was largely self-taught in the art of cinema. As a product of an unstable household, Truffaut lived with his grandmother who instilled her passion of the love of the arts, particularly music and cinema. At age fourteen, after a turbulent home life and less than stellar academic career, Truffaut quit school and decided to educate himself. Part of that education was immersion in books and film. After an poor attempt at a career in the military, Truffaut deserted.

Truffaut started his own film society and became friends with Andre Bazin, a fellow critic and founder of a rival film society. Bazin would prove to be a valuable contact throughout Truffaut's life, often helping his colleague out of a number of scrapes with the law and financial ruin. It was Bazin that landed a job for Truffaut at the publication Cahiers du cinema, where Truffaut later became editor.

Truffaut was known as a ruthless film critic, earning the title of "The Gravedigger of French Cinema." As a result of his forthright and brutal reviews, Truffaut was banned from the Cannes Film Festival in 1958. Ironically, at the same festival in 1959, Truffaut won an award for Best Foreign Film.

Truffaut had a longstanding love of American films, particularly those of John Ford and Alfred Hitchcock. Truffaut was the only person who managed to record an in-depth and lengthy interview with Hitchcock.

Truffaut died in 1984 at age 52 from a brain tumor.

Raymond Chandler

Raymond Chandler - mystery writer who collaborated with Hitchcock on "Strangers on a Train"

Michael Balcon

Michael Balcon - Director who prompted Hitchcock to become a director and offered him the opportunity to shoot his first film.

Ben Hecht

Ben Hecht - scriptwriter for "Spellbound" and "Notorious."

Alma Reville

Alma Reville - Hitchcock's script assistant who later became his wife and co-author.

Tippi Hedren

Tippi Hedren - 1960s movie icon and star of "The Birds."

James Stewart

James Stewart - Legendary actor who starred in several of Hitchcock's films, including "Rear Window."

Grace Kelly

Grace Kelly - Iconic movie star who starred with James Stewart in "Rear Window."

Janet Leigh

Janet Leigh - Actress who appeared in Hitchcock's most famous murder scene in "Psycho."

Anthony Perkins

Anthony Perkins - Actor who portrayed Norman Bates, the homicidal and delusional main character in "Psycho."

Objects/Places

London

London - The birthplace of Alfred Hitchcock. In the late Victorian era when Hitchcock was born, it was very uncommon to be Catholic, which the Hitchcocks were. In order to receive the proper education, Hitchcock was sent to one of the city's Jesuit schools where he received a solid foundation for his undergraduate work at the School of Engineering and Navigation in London, which gave him a superb start as an electrical specialist.

At the time, during the silent film era, the majority of the work was done in Hollywood. When Hitchcock learned that the Famous Paramount-Lasky Players were going to open a studio in Islington, the young film buff took great interest. London had a definite impact on the film style of the day, however, Hitchcock always preferred American films for their avoidance of the understated style of British humor as well as their refined techniques.

Hitchcock left London for Hollywood in 1944 and would return many times before relocating to California. Although Hitchcock would leave London behind, the city would always remain his birthplace for which the director would forever hold a great fondness.

London was often used as a backdrop to Hitchcock's films due to his love of the city and the overall look and feel of the scenery. Some of the films shot there were "The Man Who Knew Too Much," Frenzy," and "Foreign Correspondent."

Hollywood

Hollywood is the center of the film industry and was in its heyday when Hitchcock started his career. The black and white silent films intrigued Hitchcock and allowed the director to focus more on the cinematography than the use of Technicolor and sound, which would remain rather stilted for many years.

The early 20th century was considered to be the "Golden Age of Hollywood," when major stars such as Douglas Fairbanks, Mary Pickford, Charlie Chaplin, and Buster Keaton were highly regarded and worshipped. Hitchcock was particularly fond of these actors, as well as the groundbreaking directorial work of DW Griffith and iconic director David O. Selznik, with whom Hitchcock worked.

Hitchcock did not make his first trip to American until 1944. Hitchcock became involved with the film studios and found the facilities superior to those in Britain. Hitchcock filmed a couple movies over a period of a few years before relocating to Hollywood, much to the dismay of Michael Balcon, Hitchcock's mentor.

Although Hollywood would become the center point of Hitchcock's work for the next three decades, the director never completely abandoned London. The filmmaker was also fond of traveling to other locales, his cameras and entourage in tow.

Some of the films shot in and around Hollywood include "Foreign Correspondent" and "Psycho."

Bates Motel

Bates Motel - Home to Norman Bates and the main location used in "Psycho."

Bodega Bay, California

Bodega Bay, California - Site used for the filming of "The Birds."

Train

Train - Location used for the filming of "Strangers on a Train."

San Francisco

San Francisco - Site of the movie "Vertigo."

Greenwich Village

Greenwich Village - Location of the film "Rear Window."

Mount Rushmore

Mount Rushmore - Location in South Dakota used in the filming of "North by Northwest."

Jamaica Inn

Jamaica Inn - Location and title of the 1939 film adapted from a work by Daphne du Maurier.

Switzerland

Switzerland - location used for "The Secret Agent" and "The Trouble with Harry." Hitchcock and his wife, Alma, also spent their honeymoon in St. Moritz.

Themes

Suspense

Alfred Hitchcock was often referred to as "The Master of Suspense." Hitchcock devoted nearly his entire career in film to the genre, which is also related to mystery and thriller. Hitchcock was very devoted to creating and building suspense through the use of innovative camera work beyond all else. Hitchcock believed that the cinematic quality of a film surpassed the need for a solid script or plausibility, that the audience was willing to forgive certain things if the story and its images could carry them forward.

One popular misconception, in Hitchcock's mind, is that suspense is always related to fear or surprise. The director said that this is untrue. Suspense is the building of anxiety, particularly when the audience knows something that the characters on the screen do not. This can revolve around any type of scenario, from the famous murder scene in "Psycho" to a scene in which someone is about to receive an unexpected great reward or culmination to hard work. Surprise, on the other hand, is simple. A person is surprised at a birthday party, but there is no suspense. Surprise may be used as a shock element and can coincide with suspense but they are by no means the same thing.

One of the ways in which Hitchcock commonly built suspense was through innovative photography. Whereas many directors would show the entire scene, Hitchcock would choose to show only a portion of the scene, giving the viewer an exact feeling of the mood and scenario without going through all of the unnecessary explanation.

Technical Skill

Hitchcock was obsessed with the technical skill used in filmmaking, even as far back as 1920. The director had always been fascinated by technical things, which eventually led him to study engineering.

Hitchcock was always an observer with an analytical mind. When the filmmaker saw something being done, he was always focused on how to make it better or what adjustments could be made to make it easier for the cameraman. There were many techniques studied by Hitchcock, and he was also responsible for innovative uses of backdrops and movable cameras, something that was not common.

Hitchcock believed that to be on top of one's game, it is imperative to have technical skill above and beyond one's colleagues. There were several times when Hitchcock employed unusual techniques to realize a particular type of shot, but those techniques were often unknown to the film's producers, who would surely disapprove. However, Hitchcock was notoriously frugal with the studio's money, and his innovations often saved them money while creating a unique and masterful film.

Observation

Observation was always a strong point for Hitchcock, ever since he was a child. The director freely admits he was a loner as a small boy and cannot remember ever having playmates. Instead, the boy observed his surroundings and the people in his life. This habit became integral to Hitchcock's film work and allowed him to focus on the minute details that make a character or a scene memorable.

Fans of Hitchcock's body of work are often compelled to watch them over and over again, each time noticing something new. Hitchcock was well known for "filling the tapestry," that is, inserting people and objects into every possible frame so that there was a full image on the screen. The director admitted that many of those details were used to please him, and he asserted that a great number of the little touches would never be noticed by anyone outside the cast and crew, if they even noticed.

One thing that viewers often observe is the presence of Hitchcock in his films. As part of Hitchcock's propensity to fill the tapestry, he appeared in several of his early films as an extra. This was not to break into film, but to fill a crowd scene when enough people were not available. Eventually, the appearances became a superstition, then eventually, a running gag. However, Hitchcock was always concerned that if the viewers were concentrating on finding him in the film, that they would fail to observe more important things. As a rule, the director began to appear in the first few minutes of each film so as not to distract the audience from the plot.

Style

Perspective

The perspective of "Hitchcock" by Francois Truffaut is that of two colleagues having an in-depth but rather informal talk. The way in which the author and subject converse is especially interesting considering that Truffaut is French and did not feel his English was sufficient to conduct the 50-hour long interview with his British subject. In order to communicate properly, Truffaut found a translator who not only spoke both English and French but who could also understand the nuances of the conversation and relay them appropriately.

Francois Truffaut was a director and renowned film critic. The man had a reputation for being ruthless to the point of being brutal and his candid nature shows in the context of the book. Truffaut started out as the head of his own film society and eventually became a critic and editor of a cinematic publication before he turned to his role as a director.

Truffaut was Hitchcock's contemporary and spoke to him as such. The man had a great deal of knowledge regarding Hitchcock's body of work, save for one or two films. The result of this knowledge and that of the cinema was that the conversation between the two men was meaningful, insightful, and entertaining. Truffaut's perspective helped put to rest some of the mysteries and misconceptions about Hitchcock and also celebrated the man's long and illustrious career.

Tone

The tone used in "Hitchcock" by Francois Truffaut is one of relative objectivity. This is very difficult to achieve when discussing something as subjective as film. Truffaut definitely has his opinions, which may or may not agree with that of Hitchcock. However, the approach tends to be that of one professional speaking to another, detailing the processes of filmmaking, the techniques used, the actors and crew involved, and the state of the film industry at the time. Even though the men had differences of opinion regarding certain films, the tone always remained friendly and even tempered. It is unclear if Truffaut withheld some of his usual criticisms, but it seems that the tone of the interview was straightforward and honest.

Truffaut expresses admiration for Hitchcock's work and is obviously a fan with a deep understanding of the director's motivation and his work. Hitchcock appreciates Truffaut's forthrightness and it would seem that any other interviewer would not be able to evoke the same depth and value from the director.

In general, the tone of the work is very professional but not in such a way that it is overly technical or dry. Anyone, from a filmmaker to a person simply interested in watching movies, can find the work informative and interesting.

There are moments of levity with Hitchcock as he relays some of the more humorous incidents that took place during some of the films.

Structure

"Hitchcock" by Francois Truffaut is a non-fiction work of 256 pages divided into 15 chapters. The shortest chapter is 9 pages in length; the longest chapter is 20 pages in length. The average chapter length is 16 pages. In addition to the chapters, there are additional sections devoted to indices, as well as a section in which subject's films are listed by the release date and entail all the pertinent information about each film, such as the name of the studio, director, producer, original work from which the film was adapted, writer, cast, distributor, and information on the musical score where applicable.

The work was transcribed from 50 hours of interviews between Truffaut and Hitchcock. These took place over a series of days or weeks and were not continuous.

Each chapter is devoted to Hitchcock's career and experiences in chronological order. The chapters integrate information about the film, from small technical details to the cast as well as the events surrounding the filming of the work.

There are a lot of photographs from various movies, some stills and some progressive shots of a particular scene. Unfortunately, most of the photos are not labeled, which makes it difficult for the average reader to identify actors and actresses that may not be well known.

Quotes

"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."
Francois Truffaut on Alfred Hitchcock
Page 9

"Though I went to the theater very often, I preferred the movies and was more attracted to American films than to the British."
Page 18

"Well, the silent pictures are the purest form of cinema; the only thing they lacked was the sound of people talking and the noises."
Page 42

"To my way of thinking, mystery is seldom suspenseful. In a whodunit, for instance, there is no suspense, but a sort of intellectual puzzle."
Page 51

"In fact, at this time my reputation wasn't very good, but luckily I was unaware of this."
Page 58

"Let's be logical, if you're going to analyze everything in terms of plausibility or credibility, then no fiction script can stand up to that approach, and you wind up doing a documentary."
Page 70

"The only thing I cared about was to get into a studio to work."
Page 90

"Another funny thing is that whenever I'm working with a writer who's never been on a Hitchcock project before, he invariably becomes obsessed with the MacGuffin."
Page 99

"I felt the need to make a little contribution to the war effort, and I was both overweight and overage for military service."
Page 115

"The average cameraman is a very fine technician. He can make a woman look beautiful; he can create natural lighting that is effective without being exaggerated."
Page 132

"Whenever I collaborate with a writer who, like myself, specializes in mystery, thriller, or suspense, things don't seem to work out too well."
Page 142

"If "Psycho" had been intended as a serious picture, it would have been shown as a clinical case with no mystery or suspense."
Page 149

Topics for Discussion

How might Hitchcock's career have changed if he had remained in England?

Do you think Francois Truffaut was a good choice as interviewer? Explain.

What is your favorite Hitchcock film? Why?

Do you think Hitchcock's running gag of appearing in films is a help or a hindrance to the movies' popularity? Discuss.

Hitchcock is known for his perfectionism to the point of being an obsession. Do you think this behavior is evident throughout the conversations with Truffaut? How?

Why do you think Patricia Hitchcock never became a major movie star?

Hitchcock expressed displeasure over the outcome of several films due to poor casting. Do you think this is a legitimate excuse?

If Hitchcock were alive today, do you think he would have given in to the use of gore in his films?