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Dartmouth Film Society

THE TROUBLE WITH HARRY U. S. A. (1956)

Capt. Albert Wiles
Sam Marlowe
Jennifer Rogers
Miss Graveley
Mrs. Wiggs
Arnie Rogers
Calvin Wiggs

Edmund Gwenn
John Forsythe
Shirley MacLaine
Mildred Natwick
Mildred Dunnock
Jerry Mathers
Royal Dano

Millionaire
Tramp
Dr. Greenbow
Art Critic
Harry Warp
Chauffeur

Parker Fennely
Barry Macollum
Dwight Marfield
Leslie Wolff
Philip Truex
Ernest Curt Bach

Script by John Michael Hayes, based on the novel by Jack Trevor Story. Photographed in Technicolor and VistaVision by Robert Burks. Edited by Alma Macrorie. Sets by Hal Pereira, John Goodman, Sam Comer, and Emile Kuri. Credits by Saul Steinberg. Music by Bernard Herrmann. Produced by Paramount Pictures.

Produced and Directed by ALFRED HITCHCOCK

"I think THE TROUBLE WITH HARRY needed special handling. It wouldn't have failed commercially if the people in the distribution organization had known what to do with the picture; but it got into the assembly line and that was that. It was shot in autumn for the contrapuntal use of beauty against the sordidness and muddiness of death. HARRY is very personal to me because it involves my own sense of humor about the macabre. It has my favorite line of all the pictures I ever made: when Teddy Gwenn is pulling the body by the legs like a wheelbarrow, and the spinster comes up and says, 'What seems to be the trouble, Captain?'"

-- Alfred Hitchcock

After trying his hand at the unsuccessful TO CATCH A THIEF (1955), Hitchcock turned to comédie-noire in his next film. Shot across the river in nearby Vermont, THE TROUBLE WITH HARRY glows with the reds, browns and golds of a New England autumn. Contrasted with the glory of the Vermont woods, however, is a corpse sedately stretched out on the turf. Each of three people who come upon the corpse believes he is responsible for Harry's death: Edmund "Teddy" Gwenn thinks he accidentally shot him while hunting for rabbits. Shirley MacLaine, Harry's ex-wife, believes she is to blame; earlier that day she had smashed a milk bottle over his head. And old maid Mildred Natwick had clobbered him for trying to attack her. "Who killed Harry?" is the question in everyone's mind, but no one seems to care about Harry. Hence he is interred and exhumed three times and carted around like a sack of potatoes. Those who know of the "crime" try to conceal the body from the confused local law-enforcement officer, who conscientiously tries to perform his duty but finds his way blocked by a mass conspiracy of guilt.

In Cinema Eye, Cinema Ear John Russell Taylor writes, "The story, told with perfect directness and simplicity is totally amoral, and, though very closely based on Jack Trevor Story's novel, totally Hitchcockian in its insolent humour, its blandly persuasive assumption of the audience's complicity in something which in normal circumstances normal audiences would be likely to reject in toto. One of Hitchcock's most masterly works, it has a unity and simplicity which almost defy analysis; like THE LADY VANISHES it is just a film to be seen."

Another critic, The Times' venerable Bosley Crowther, was repelled by the film's implications. He cited with disdain such lines as Mildred Natwick's statement about her father's death, "He was caught in a threshing machine." (And this was ten years before THE LOVED ONE!) The same Miss Natwick says with unruffled politeness, "After we've dug him up, we'll go to my place and I'll make you some hot chocolate". Even after filming THE TROUBLE WITH HARRY, Hitch remarked in a Times interview, "You have to murder in good taste."

It is interesting to note here that Hitchcock's introductions to his television shows were more than a little influenced by this film. Interviewed by Peter Bogdanovitch, he commented, "When he (James Allardice) came to see me and asked what kind of introductions did I want him to write for me, I said, 'Well, I won't tell you, but I'll run a film that should give you an idea of the kind of thing I want.' So I ran THE TROUBLE WITH HARRY for him."

James A. Paris '66

Our next film presentation is the East Coast Premiere of Wojciech Has' THE SARAGOSSA MANUSCRIPT, an excellent example of the iconoclastic Polish cinema at its best. This picture, which evoked a flurry of praise at the 1965 Venice Film Festival, will be screened Wednesday, May 4, at 3 (Please Note) and 8:30 pm. This, in turn, will be followed by Hitchcock's TO CATCH A THIEF (1955) on Saturday, May 7, at 11 pm and Sunday, May 8, at 4 pm.