


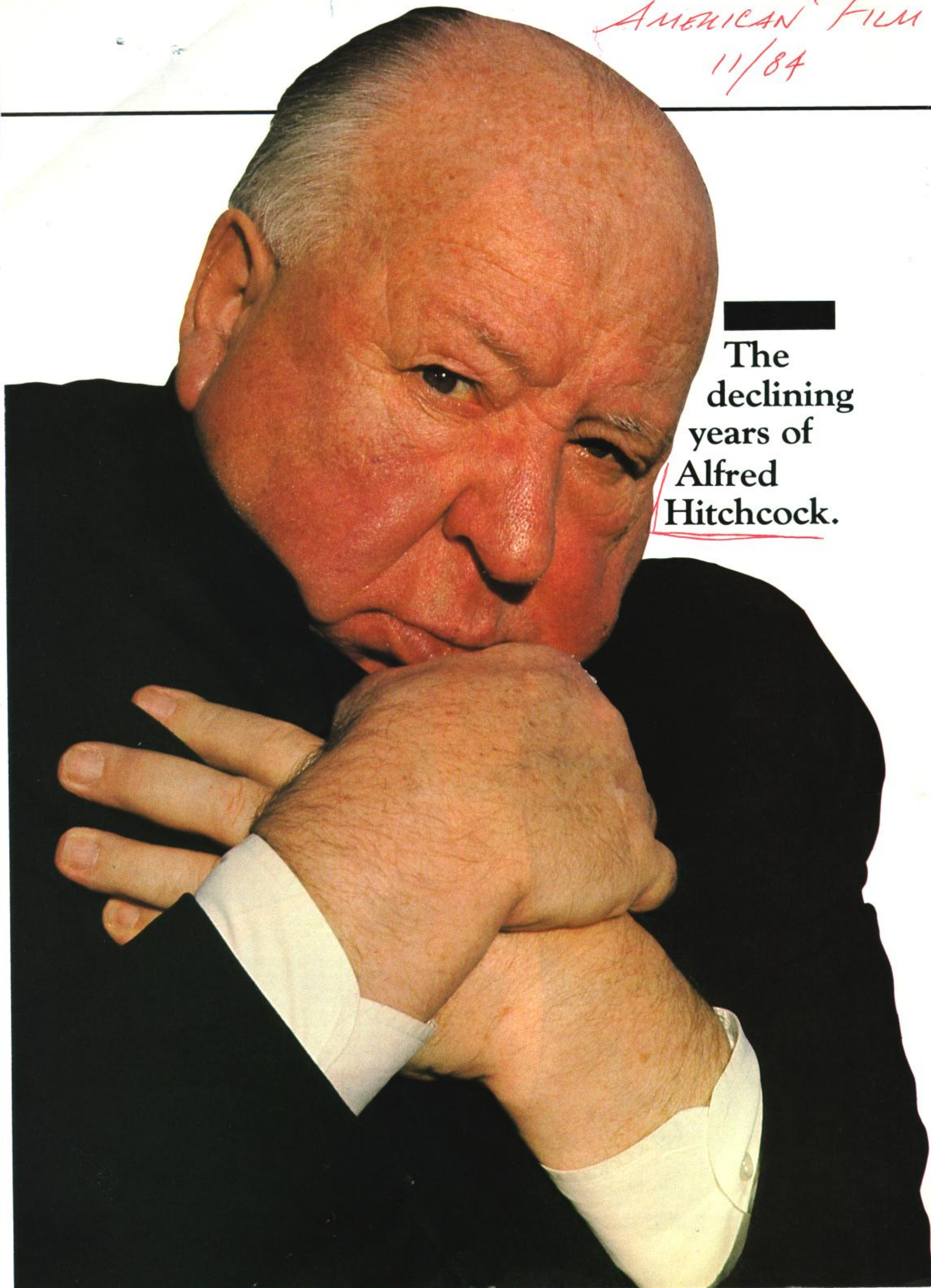
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The  
declining  
years of  
Alfred  
Hitchcock.





In 1962, Alfred Hitchcock was at the peak of his creative powers. During the previous ten years, he had made eleven movies, among them *Strangers on a Train*, *Rear Window*, *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, *Vertigo*, *North by Northwest*, and *Psycho*. Following the termination of his contract with David O. Selznick, he became his own producer, and even acquired the rights to several of his negatives, which is rare in Hollywood.

Starting with *The Birds*, all of his films were made under the auspices of Universal, the company of Lew Wasserman, his former MCA agent and closest friend. Hitchcock also became one of the five major stockholders of that company. In exchange for a large amount of stock, he gave Universal-MCA the rights to some two hundred hours of television programs he produced and supervised over a period of ten years.

In 1962, the major problem for Alfred Hitchcock was the disappearance of his star performers. James Stewart was too old to play the lead in his pictures (in private, Hitchcock attributed the commercial failure of *Vertigo* to Stewart's aging appearance). At the same time, despite the success of *North by Northwest*, Cary Grant had begun to abandon his film career in order to leave his fans with a seductive image of his screen personality. In fact, he turned down the lead in *The Birds*, and Rod Taylor, an actor who was competent but lacked charisma, was finally cast in the main role.

The problem with actresses was even more serious. Though he never forgave Ingrid Bergman for having left him for Roberto Rossellini, Hitchcock harbored no resentment against Grace Kelly. One reason was that Prince Rainier was not a film director; another was that the former cockney lad was rather awed by the title of princess the beautiful Philadelphia society girl acquired when she left Hollywood for the cliffs of Monaco.

But although he bore no grudge against Grace Kelly, he undoubtedly had regrets, and hoped to retrieve her for *Marnie*, a film based on a novel by Winston Graham to which he had acquired the rights especially for her. The deal was almost set: The princess was genuinely tempted, and Prince

# FADE

François Truffaut

Excerpted from *Hitchcock* (revised edition) by François Truffaut with the collaboration of Helen G. Scott. ©1984 by François Truffaut. Published by Simon and Schuster.





I am convinced that Hitchcock was never the same after *Marnie*, and that its failure cost him a considerable amount of his self-confidence.

Rainier, who was very fond of Hitchcock, seemed to favor the project. However, General de Gaulle, irritated by the fiscal advantages that the principality granted to French businessmen, launched an attack threatening Monaco's privileged status. In order to maintain his links with France, the prince was forced to compromise and to make concessions that would alter the frivolous image of his principality. In the process, Grace Kelly had no choice but to definitively abandon the cinema.

The immense success of *Psycho*—which was listed in second place at the box office for the year 1960, just behind *Ben Hur*—reassured Hitchcock on his ability to captivate a mass audience with a small film. He was therefore confident when he undertook the shooting of *The Birds* in 1962.

Nevertheless, it was precisely at the time when Hitchcock had finally achieved full recognition, by way of a series of homages, that his luck changed.

*North by Northwest*, which he defined as "a drama about a man on the run," was being plagiarized, botched, and caricatured—in particular by the James Bond series, the first of which had just appeared. Hitchcock felt he had to renounce the film genre he had built up for thirty years, since *The 39 Steps*, and this meant he would avoid big-budget pictures. *The Birds* was several years in advance of the current fad for catastrophe films. Because of the special effects, it was nevertheless fairly costly, but not as successful as it deserved to be. The following picture, *Marnie*, was a fascinating film, but a box-office flop, and

belongs to the category known as "greatest flawed films."

I am convinced that Hitchcock was never the same after *Marnie*, and that its failure cost him a considerable amount of his self-confidence. This was not so much due to the financial failure of the film (he had had others), but rather to the failure of his professional and personal relationship with Tippi Hedren, whom he had discovered through a television commercial. In casting Tippi Hedren in two of his films, he entertained the notion of transforming her into another Grace Kelly.

I think that Hitchcock was not really satisfied with any of the films he made after *Psycho*. This loss of self-confidence accounts for the fact that in shooting *Torn Curtain*, he allowed the studio to influence him, first in the choice of the two stars, Paul Newman and Julie Andrews, and—much more seriously—in dropping Bernard Herrmann, one of his oldest collaborators. Was Hitchcock so unfair as to attribute the impression of gloom that overshadows *Marnie* to the composer? Herrmann's removal was a flagrant injustice since it is a matter of record that his work on *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, *North by Northwest*, and *Psycho* had greatly contributed to the success of these films. Herrmann had written and directed a score of some fifty minutes for *Torn Curtain*. Its beauty, consistent with his talent, can be appreciated today—it was eventually released as a record.

Another important name was missing from the credits of *Torn Curtain*: Robert Burks, who had been director of photography for all of Hitchcock's films beginning with *Strangers on a Train*. The year before, Robert Burks had been killed in a fire at his home.

Deprived of his favorite stars, his director of photography, his musician, and even his chief editor (George Tomasini, who died shortly after the completion of *Marnie*), Hitchcock felt that he was embarking on a new phase of his career, and that it would be a rough one.

Hitchcock had always had the strength to reject projects he deemed inadequate—especially during the period he was under contract to Selznick—but in 1967 he allowed Universal's front office to persuade him to adapt a novel that the studio had just purchased at a very high price.

*Topaz* was a spy novel. Its only merits were that it was based on a true story (the presence of a Soviet agent in the entourage



The overtly anti-Communist *Topaz*.

of General de Gaulle) and that it was a best-seller in America. In France, the book had been banned by the Gaullist censorship, but one could acquire a French version published in Canada, under the counter.

Hitchcock had always avoided politics in his pictures, but *Topaz* was deliberately anti-Communist and included several very sarcastic segments on Fidel Castro's entourage. There were even scenes of Cuban policemen torturing people who were members of the opposition. When *L'Express* asked him, "Do you regard yourself as a liberal?" Hitchcock answered, "I think I am in every sense of the term. I was recently asked whether I was a Democrat. I answered that I was a Democrat, but in respect to my money, I am a Republican. I am not a hypocrite."

The key to the *Topaz* plot is of course the unmasking of the Communist spy. The screenplay winds up with the spy (who was played by Michel Piccoli), aware that he is about to be discovered, deliberately allowing himself to be killed by the protagonist (Frederick Stafford) in the course of a gun duel. The scene was shot in the awesome setting of an empty Charlety stadium, near Paris. During a sneak preview in Los Angeles, this scene provoked hoots of laughter from a youthful American audience. Hitchcock came back to Paris to reshoot the scene with a few variations. Back in Hollywood, at another sneak preview, there was once again a scornful reaction to the modified scene, but now Piccoli and Stafford were no longer available. Hitchcock finally discarded the duel scene, but he resented the reaction to it. He claimed that young Americans had become so materialistic and cynical that they could not accept the concept of chivalrous behavior. It was beyond their understanding that a traitor to his country should accept a gun duel in which he would allow himself to be killed.

#### Prime Hitchcock: Notorious





In any case, Hitchcock was under pressure, and for the first time in his long career, he could not think of an ending to his film. He eventually settled for a purely formal solution that, I suspect, was influenced by a picture enjoying a huge success at the time, Costa-Gavras's *Z*. In the final part of *Topaz*, there is a series of shots that includes close-ups of the film's characters, homogenized by a spirited musical score, with the rhythm of the image and sound track announcing that the conclusion is near. Nevertheless, Hitchcock insisted on letting the viewer know that Piccoli has finally committed suicide, *but how*, when all the footage shot at the Charlety stadium was deemed to be worthless?

Hitchcock resorted to a crude finagling, a solution of despair. Any director who has torn his hair out in front of the Moviola because he requires a scene that he has not shot is bound to sympathize.

However, the only piece of film Hitchcock had to convey his idea—that of Piccoli going home and killing himself—was a shot of fellow conspirator Philippe Noiret entering Piccoli's town house! Although the shot is filmed from a distance, it is impossible to mistake Noiret's silhouette for Piccoli, especially since Noiret walks with a cane throughout the film. So what we finally see is Noiret entering the house, but at the very end of the shot, when his arm holding the cane is already inside the apartment. Thus all that appears on the screen is the darkened half body of a man disappearing behind the door; the image of the house is then frozen and we hear a gunshot, followed by the music and the final credits.

It is obvious that despite a few scattered beautiful scenes, mainly in the Cuban episode, *Topaz* is not a good picture. The studio didn't like it, and neither did the public, the critics, nor even the Hitchcockians. The director himself wanted to forget it, and felt an imperative need to make up for it.

According to a letter I received from Hitchcock, Hollywood, in the summer of 1970, was going through a crisis, and was in a state of utter confusion. He wrote: "I am looking for a new film project, but it is very difficult. In the film industry here, there are so many taboos: We have to avoid elderly persons and limit ourselves to youthful characters; a film must contain some antiestablishment elements; no picture can cost more than two or three million dollars. On top of this, the story department sends me all kinds of properties which they claim are likely to make a good

Hitchcock picture. Naturally, when I read them, they don't measure up to the Hitchcock standards."

Soon after writing this letter, Hitchcock selected a British novel, *Goodbye Piccadilly, Farewell Leicester Square* by Arthur La Bern. He simplified the plot considerably and named the project *Frenzy*, the title of a screenplay he had once rejected.

In contemporary London, a sexual maniac strangles several women with a necktie. A quarter of an hour after the picture begins, Hitchcock reveals the identity of the killer, who has been introduced in the second scene of the story. We also meet a second character who is going to be accused of the killings: He will be suspected, followed, arrested, and condemned. For an hour and a half, we watch him struggling to escape from the trap like a fly caught in a spiderweb.

*Frenzy* is a combination of two kinds of Hitchcock films: those in which the director invites us to follow the itinerary of a killer (*Shadow of a Doubt*, *Stage Fright*, *Dial M for Murder*, *Psycho*), and those in which he describes the troubles of an innocent man who is on the run (*The 39 Steps*, *I Confess*, *The Wrong Man*, *North by Northwest*). *Frenzy* re-creates that nightmarish, stifling Hitchcockian universe in

which the characters know each other: the killer, the innocent man, the victims, the witness. That world is boiled down to the essential, where each conversation in a shop or in a bar happens to deal with the killings; it's a world made up of coincidences so systematically organized that they cross-cut one another vertically and horizontally. *Frenzy* is a crossword puzzle on the leitmotiv of murder.

In May 1972, I met Hitchcock before the Cannes festival, where he was going to present *Frenzy*. He appeared aged, tired, and tense, for he was always very emotional before introducing a new picture, very much like a young man about to take a school examination. At the request of a television network, I interviewed Hitchcock:

**Question:** You have always made stylized films. Do you miss black-and-white cinema?

**Hitchcock:** No, I like color. It's true that I filmed *Psycho* in black and white to avoid showing red blood in the killing of Janet Leigh in the shower. On the other hand, since color pictures, we have had problems with the decors. Violent contrast, for instance, extravagant luxury or ab-

*Politics forced Kelly, here with Stewart in Rear Window, to turn down Marnie.*





# Hitchcock: "When I enter the studios . . . and the heavy doors close behind me, there is no difference. A salt mine is always a salt mine."

ject poverty, can be expressed with precision and clarity on the screen. However, if we wish to show an average apartment, it is difficult to create a realistic decor because of the risk of lack of precision.

**Question:** A few years back, cinematographic audacity—eroticism, violence, politics—came from European productions. Today, American cinema has gone way beyond Europe in terms of insolence and freedom of expression. What do you think of the situation?

**Hitchcock:** It reflects the moral climate and the way of life that prevail today in the United States, as well as being a result of national events that have had an impact on the filmmakers and on the public. Still, American cinema dealt with social and political themes long ago, without attracting crowds to the box office.

**Question:** Are you in favor of the teaching of cinema in universities?

**Hitchcock:** Only on condition that they teach cinema since the era of Méliès and that the students learn how to make silent films, because there is no better form of training. Talking pictures often served merely to introduce the theater into the studios. The danger is that young people, and even adults, all too often believe that one can become a director without knowing how to sketch a decor, or how to edit.

**Question:** In your opinion, should a film suggest painting, literature, or music?

**Hitchcock:** The main objective is to arouse the audience's emotion, and that emotion arises from the way in which the story unfolds, from the way in which sequences are juxtaposed. At times, I have the feeling I'm an orchestra conductor, a trumpet sound corresponding to a close shot and a distant shot suggesting an entire orchestra performing a muted accompaniment. At other times, by using colors and lights in front of beautiful landscapes, I feel I am a painter. On the other hand, I'm wary of literature: A good book does not necessarily make a good film.

**Question:** Do you prefer to shoot a screenplay with strong situations and sketchy characters, or the opposite?

**Hitchcock:** I prefer the strong situations. It is easier to put them into images. In order to probe a character

in depth, you often need too many words. In *Frenzy*, the killer is likable. It's the situation that makes him disturbing.

**Question:** A few years ago, everyday life was banal, and the extraordinary was in films. Today, the extraordinary is commonplace: political kidnappings, plane hijackings, scandals, and the assassinations of chiefs of state. How can a director of suspense and espionage films compete with everyday life in 1972?

**Hitchcock:** The reportage of a news item in a newspaper will never have the impact of a moving picture. Catastrophes only happen to others, to people we don't know. The screen allows you to meet and to know the killer and his victim, for whom you're going to tremble with fear because you care about him. There are thousands of car accidents every day. If the victim is your brother, you are really interested. If the film is well made, a screen hero will become your brother or your enemy.

**Question:** *Frenzy* is your first European movie in twenty years. What is the difference between your work in

Hollywood and your work in England?

**Hitchcock:** When I enter the studios—be it in Hollywood or in London—and the heavy doors close behind me, there is no difference. A salt mine is always a salt mine.

A week later, when I met Hitchcock on his way back from Cannes, he looked fifteen years younger. *Frenzy* had been enthusiastically hailed at the festival, and Hitchcock, beaming with pleasure, admitted that he had been very scared. But now he knew that this "little film," whose budget was slightly less than two million dollars, would be successful, and that the studio would overlook the poor artistic and box-office results of *Topaz*, a picture made against his better judgment.

Three months later, Hitchcock acquired the rights to a new British novel, *The Rainbird Pattern* by Victor Canning, with the intention of transposing the action to Los Angeles and San Francisco. It was while working with Ernest Lehman (who had written *North by Northwest*) on the screenplay of the film—which became "Deceit," and finally *Family Plot*—that Hitchcock underwent heart surgery for the

*Hitchcock, here directing Bruce Dern in Family Plot, worked out his own emotions in his screen characters, like the frustrated Pygmalion played by Sean Connery in Marnie, above, and the innocent man implicated in the grisly rape-murders of Frenzy, right.*





implantation of a pacemaker. I am not being indiscreet in mentioning this, because of all the friends and journalists who saw Hitchcock from 1975 on, rare were those to whom Hitchcock failed to display this medical gadget by opening his shirt and revealing the rectangular object implanted in his chest. Detaching each syllable, and staring at his interlocutor, he would deliberately announce: "It's made to last for ten years."

Once the visitor was fully informed about the use of the pacemaker, Hitchcock would indulge in his favorite pastime: a scene-by-scene description of his forthcoming picture, as if to prove to himself that its construction was solid and that he had mentally worked out its every detail.

What particularly appealed to Hitchcock in *Family Plot* was the passage from one geometric figure to another. First, two parallel stories are introduced, then the gap between them gradually narrows, and finally they mesh, winding up as a single story.

Released in the United States and then in Europe in 1976, *Family Plot* was well received by the press, but the public's response was less enthusiastic. In this all-American film in which, once again, the



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weakness of the villain was responsible for the weakness of the picture, Hitchcock was renewing the blend of an intriguing kidnapping and humor, which accounted for the success of several of his British prewar pictures.

As with *Topaz*, a short suspense segment made American audiences snicker, so it was cut from the prints distributed in the United States. I believe the European prints correspond more closely to the original editing.

After *Family Plot*, Hitchcock felt miserable. I was in Montpellier in 1976, shooting *The Man Who Loved Women*, when I received this letter from him: "... At the moment, I am completely desperate for a subject.

"Now, as you realize, you are a free person to make whatever you want. I, on the other hand, can only make what is expected of me; that is, a thriller, or a suspense story, and that I find hard to do.

"So many stories seem to be about the neo-Nazis, Palestinians fighting Israelis, and all that kind of thing. And, you see, none of these subjects has any human conflict.

"How can you have a comedy Arab fighter? There is no such thing; nor can you have an amusing Israeli soldier. I describe these things because they come across my desk for consideration.

"Sometimes, I think that the best comedy or drama could be made right here in my office with Peggy, Sue, and Alpha. The only difficulty about that idea would be that one of them would have to be killed off, which I would regret extremely."

When I visited Hitchcock two months later, at Christmastime, in the Universal bungalow that had served for twenty years as the office of Alfred Hitchcock Productions, he was screening Peter Bogdanovich's *Nickelodeon*. He stopped the screening, ushered me into his office, and ordered two steaks; we resumed our conversation in the same place and under the same conditions we had left off fourteen years before.

Hitchcock advised me with real satisfaction that he had chosen the subject for his fifty-fourth picture, after having abandoned *Unknown Man No. 89*, a novel by Elmore Leonard, to which he had acquired the rights.

He was about to go back to an old project of adapting two books dealing with the same subject. The first was an investigative reportage titled *The Springing of George Blake* by Sean Bourke; the second was a novel by Ronald Kirkbride, based on the same story and titled *The Short Night*.

It was a spy story between East and West, based on the life of an Englishman named George Blake, a double agent sentenced to forty-two years of imprisonment



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Phototeque



**In the school yard he always stood alone, leaning against a wall, an expression of disdain on his face, as he watched his schoolmates playing ball.**

for spying on behalf of the Soviet Union. Blake and his Irish cell mate, Sean Bourke, had escaped from the Wormwood Scrubs prison in October 1966, with the complicity of some of their fellow inmates, but mostly with the help of members of the London underworld recruited by the KGB, which eventually shipped the two to Moscow. Bourke wrote of his adventure, which became the basis for the Kirkbride thriller.

Ernest Lehman had already created several versions of the scenario, but Hitchcock was not satisfied with any of them.

There was increasing skepticism in

Lehman, he hired a young writer named David Freeman to work out a new version of the screenplay.

However, Hitchcock's health continued to fail, and in the spring of 1979, shortly after he received the AFI's Life Achievement Award, he became resigned to the fact that he would never shoot another film. Hitchcock closed his office, dismissed his staff, and went home. The Queen of England bestowed the title of Sir Alfred on him, thereby settling an old secret rivalry with another London-born genius, Charles Chaplin. All that was left to Sir Alfred was

Hawks, he was a neurotic, and it could not have been easy for him to impose his neuroses on the whole world.

When, as an adolescent, he realized that his physique isolated him from others, Hitchcock withdrew from the world to view it with tremendous severity. More than once, in the course of our conversations, he used the expression "When the heavy doors of the studio closed behind me . . .," indicating that he practiced cinema as a religion.

It is obviously Hitchcock expressing himself in *Shadow of a Doubt* when Joseph Cotten says: "The world is a pigsty. . . ." And in *Notorious*, we recognize Hitchcock when Claude Rains timidly goes into his mother's room in the middle of the night to confess: "Mother, I married an American spy," as if he was a guilty little boy. In *I Confess*, when the sexton tells his wife—whose name is Alma and who is presented as an angel—"We are strangers who have found work in this country. We must not attract attention . . .," we again recognize Hitchcock speaking. Finally, in *Marnie*, the last picture to reveal Hitchcock's deepest emotions, can there be any doubt that Sean Connery—in trying to control, dominate, and possess Tippi Hedren by investigating her past, finding her a job, and giving her money—is expressing Hitchcock's own feelings as a frustrated Pygmalion?

In other words, I am less interested in Hitchcock's ritual personal appearances in each of his films than in those passages where I recognize his personal emotions, and the fleeting release of his controlled violence. I believe that all the interesting filmmakers—those who were referred to as "auteurs" by the *Cahiers du Cinéma* in 1955, before the term was distorted—have concealed themselves behind various characters in their movies. Alfred Hitchcock achieved a veritable tour de force in inducing the public to identify with the attractive leading man, whereas Hitchcock himself almost always identified with the supporting role, with the man who is cuckolded and disappointed, the killer or the monster, the man rejected by others, the man who has no right to love, the man who looks on without being able to participate.

André Bazin was not an unconditional admirer of Hitchcock, but I am grateful to him for using the key word of "equilibrium" in the connection with him. The whole world is familiar with Hitchcock's silhouette; it is the silhouette of a man who has always lived in fear of losing his balance. In Los Angeles, I was lucky enough



Cinemabilia

Hitchcock's entourage. Alma, who had suffered her first stroke in London at the end of the shooting of *Frenzy*, had become an invalid. She required nursing care around the clock. In the studio, no one could imagine how Hitchcock could abandon his wife for two months to go and shoot the film in Finland. Before making *Frenzy*, Hitchcock had traveled there to photograph locations, but now, afflicted with arthritis, his own mobility was becoming increasingly difficult. As the script was written, it seemed highly unlikely that the Finnish part could be shot by a second crew, with Hitchcock directing the interior scenes at the Universal studios.

Toward the end of 1978, he dispatched Norman Lloyd, one of his closest collaborators for thirty-five years, on another location tour in Finland, and, in an attempt to indicate that the delay was due to Ernest

to await death, a few forbidden vodkas hastening its advent. It came on April 29, 1980.

One cannot say Hitchcock was an underrated or misunderstood artist—he was a public moviemaker, and a popular one at that. At the risk of sounding paradoxical, I would add to Hitchcock's merits that of having been a commercial artist. It is not difficult to win the approval of a wide audience when one laughs at the same things, when one is sensitive to the same aspects of life, and moved by the same dramas. This complicity between certain creators and their audience has resulted in successful careers. But in my opinion, Hitchcock did not belong to this category; he was a singular man—in his spirit, his morality, and his obsessions. Unlike Chaplin, Ford, Rossellini, or



to meet an old Jesuit priest, Professor Hugh Gray, before his death. He was the first translator of André Bazin in the United States, as well as a fellow student of Hitchcock at the Saint Ignatius College of London at the turn of the century. He had vivid memories of Hitchcock as a very plump little schoolboy. In the school yard he always stood alone, leaning against a wall, with his hands already folded across his stomach, and an expression of disdain on his face, as he watched his schoolmates playing ball.

It is obvious that Hitchcock organized his life in such a way as to allow no one the familiar gesture of patting him on the back. David O. Selznick referred to this detachment when he wrote his wife in 1938: "I finally met Hitchcock. He seems a nice person, but he is hardly the kind of man you would want along on a camping trip."

This is why the Hitchcockian image par excellence is that of an innocent man who is mistaken for another man who is being hunted, a man who finds himself falling from a roof, hanging onto a drainpipe that is about to give way.

This man who has been impelled by fear to relate the most terrifying stories, this man who was a virgin when he married at the age of twenty-five and who never had any woman except for his wife, this man was indeed the only one who was able to portray murder and adultery as truly scandalous, the only man who knew how to do so—in fact, the only man who had the *right* to do so.

When cinema was invented, it was initially used to record life, like an extension of photography. It became an art when it moved away from the documentary. It was at this point that it was acknowledged that cinema was no longer a means of mirroring life, but a medium by which to magnify it. The filmmakers of the silent era invented everything, and those who were not able to invent were failures. Alfred Hitchcock often regretted the setback that occurred when stage directors were hired who were not concerned with visualizing stories, but were content to record them on film.

Hitchcock belonged to a different family: the family of Chaplin, Stroheim, Lubitsch. Like them, he did not merely practice an art, but undertook to delve into its potential, and to work out its rules, rules more demanding than those pertaining to the writing of a novel.

Hitchcock not only intensified life; he intensified cinema. ■

François Truffaut's most recent film is *Confessionally Yours*.



*"It could not have been easy for him to impose his neuroses on the whole world." Opposite, the fatal embrace in Frenzy; above, the protracted murder in Torn Curtain; below, the unexpected attack in The Birds.*

