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The amiable mystification of the first part here becomes deliriously and irresistibly comic. Fond of toys and models, Hitchcock makes use of electric trains and miniature buses for the chase sequence. *Number Seventeen* is a charming film to the extent that it shows us a grownup child playing with his favorite toys. But as diverting as this little film may be—it reveals Hitchcock as a Jiri Trnka [maker of puppet films] who is only half aware of himself—it is nevertheless an indication of the film-maker's confusion. It is a blow struck for no purpose. There is even cause to wonder if at the time Hitchcock was not considering abandoning the movies, or at least abandoning movie direction. Actually, his contract with British International was coming to an end. He was only the producer of the last film on which he worked for this firm. It was Benn Levy, his former scenario writer, who directed *Lord Camber's Ladies,* and it is no secret that Hitchcock never showed up on the set.

And so a period rich in remarkable works ended in a rout. Was Hitchcock looking for greater freedom? This is by no means certain. In any case, his only attempt at independent production ended in a real disaster. He agreed (one wonders why, and he himself has no idea) to adapt *Waltzes from Vienna* (1933), the Johann Strauss operetta, for the independent producer Tom Arnold. By the second week of shooting, the waltz had ceased to interest him. Perfectly aware that the film was dreadful, and having no intention of making it better, Hitchcock called together the actors, the technical crew, and the thousands of extras who had been assembled for the ball scene. Pointing to his director's chair, he announced: "I hate this film, I hate this kind of film, and I have no feeling for it. What I need is a drama, adventures!" The film was bad, and this time the execrable reviews were fully justified.

The Gaumont–British Period (1934–1937)

This slap in the face was salutary. Painstakingly, Hitchcock prepared a comeback. Remembering the immense success of