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Author(s)	Michael Goodwin
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T H E - L O S T - F I L M S - O F

# Alfred Hitchcock

Remember the one with the huge saltshaker of sex?  
Remember the one in which Hitchcock himself is the murderer?  
No? Read on . . .

**W** E HERE CONSIDER THE *OTHER* HITCHCOCK FILMS—the ones that critics never write about, the ones that never show at Hitchcock retrospectives. I don't mean the out-of-circulation pictures like *Vertigo*, *Rope*, and *Rear Window*; they turn up now and then if you know where to look. No, I mean the trailers. The coming attractions. The lost films of Alfred Hitchcock.

Considering the intense, critical attention that has been paid to the late Alfred Hitchcock in recent years, it's surprising that his trailers have been ignored. True, for most filmmakers, even great ones, the trailers that advertise their films are little more than camp curiosities, since the filmmakers themselves have nothing to do with them. Most trailers are made by anonymous trailer cutters in the employ of independent contractors specializing in this arcane art form. These outfits also create lobby cards, newspaper ad layouts, and

other promotional materials. But legend has it that Hitchcock directed most of his own trailers. Especially now, with Hitch gone to heaven (where, presumably, they've got him in charge of Surprises, Nasty and Otherwise), it seems high time to run the legend down once and for all. Call it a long goodbye.

But the trailers are hard to find and, once found, hard to get a peek at. After several false starts I turned to collectors. Collectors of illegal prints of commercial feature films are considered dirty, law-breaking criminals who face jail sentences, fines, and the loss of their precious collections if the FBI discovers them holding illegal prints—and almost all private prints of commercial films are illegal. The fact that most collectors are serious film scholars, that many cinematheques and film study centers regularly turn to collectors as the best archival sources of “lost” films, does not impress the FBI. Therefore, collectors do not like

**BY MICHAEL GOODWIN**

to talk to journalists. Fortunately, I have a few collector pals, and they put me in touch with some

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*Alfred Hitchcock surrounded by the tools of his trade and a feathered creature now, regrettably, no longer able to quoth, “Neer”*







trailer collectors—a marginally less paranoid group, since prosecution for violations of trailer copyright is rare.

“Hitchcock trailers are desirable,” said John Chance (not his real name), unlocking a tiny room near the screen of his Ford Theater, “but they’re not like posters. A *Frankenstein* poster goes for \$5,000.” He opened the door and pulled a chain. A bare light bulb swung overhead, casting expressionistic shadows over three wooden racks holding more than 500 reels of 35mm trailers. “I haven’t got anything before *Suspicion*,” Chance apologized.

## WHAT DO YOU THINK I’M GOING TO DO, KILL YOU?

JOAN FONTAINE’S FACE FILLS THE SCREEN. “THERE WAS SOMETHING strange about Johnnie Aysgarth,” she says directly to the camera. “I knew it long before I married him. Nothing you could put your finger on. . . .” A rapid series of images wipe each other off the screen—circle wipes, diamond wipes, vertical zigzag wipes, page-turning wipes. Cary Grant dissolves into a menacing, low-angle close-up. “What do you think I’m going to do?” he asks. “Kill you?” More wipes, more dissolves. Fontaine’s voice-over continues, “My life was filled with terror . . . the fear of not knowing, the agony of waiting, of wondering how it would happen.” Faces, stairs, odd cross-shadow shots flicker across the screen. “I would wake at night shaking with terror and find myself praying that whatever it was would be done quickly and with mercy.” The music stings. Fontaine appears in full-face close-up, talking to the camera. “I wanted you to know . . . in case I met a violent end.” Words appear: “Cary Grant’s most striking role. Joan Fontaine. *Suspicion*. An RKO release.”

One minute, 38 seconds—average trailer length. Otherwise, the *Suspicion* trailer is not average. For one thing, notes James Pollak, who wrote and directed it for RKO, it was the first time a star did a special narration for a trailer. “Hitchcock wasn’t involved at all,” Pollak goes on. “He looked at it when it was finished, and that was it.” None of the other pre-*Psycho* trailers give any indication of Hitchcock’s hands at the controls, either, and few of them are as good as *Suspicion*. Most, in fact, are disappointingly conventional. But there are a couple of gems.

The *Saboteur* trailer starts with a splendid, specially shot sequence that instantly propels us into Standard Hitchcock Situation 4A: The Wrong Man. Robert Cummings runs into the frame, sweaty and disheveled. “I’m Barry Kane, American,” he tells us. “Right now I’m a fugitive. A couple of days ago I was an aircraft worker. Then something happened . . .” Music sneaks in, and, very softly, alarm whistles begin screeching. Cummings continues without a break, “something that could only happen in times like these.” As he speaks the whistles rise to full volume, and suddenly, surreally, thick black smoke pours into the frame. Cut to a long shot of a blazing factory, people running in every direction. Cummings continues to narrate, voice-over, as a series of shots sketch the cross-country chase that leads to the famous dangling by a wrist hold from the Statue of Liberty sequence—teased at in the trailer only through a low-angle shot of people walking toward the statue. One of the thorniest problems in Hitchcock trailers is showing the most exciting scenes without giving away the surprises. The solution here doesn’t really work since the noncommittal shot isn’t exciting unless you’ve already seen the movie. In some ways, as we’ll see, the great Universal trailers (which Hitch *did* direct) are simply more elegant solutions to this problem.

The trailer for *The Trouble With Harry*, Hitchcock’s black comedy about a corpse that won’t stay buried, is, at two minutes, 40 seconds, the longest and most finely crafted of the pre-*Psycho* trailers. Although there’s no concrete evidence that Hitch worked on this one, it seems to be a clear foreshadowing of the

comical, slow-building trailers he would concoct for *Psycho* and *The Birds*. It starts with at least a full minute of gorgeous Technicolor footage of blazing autumnal countryside, accompanied by arch travelogue narration about beautiful New England. Presently, a kid with a toy ray gun discovers a man sleeping blissfully beneath a tree. “But wait!” gasps the narrator. “Something’s wrong!” Cut to one of Hitchcock’s slyest trick shots—a low angle that sets the kid’s torso on the man’s trunk. “This man isn’t sleeping,” wails the narrator. “He’s dead!” A title appears: “And Alfred Hitchcock did it!”—a rather amazing title, actually, speaking directly to Hitchcock’s main theme of linked guilt and innocence. The trailer continues blithely with a charming catalog of characters who trip over the corpse, kick the bottom of its feet, and exhibit general disrespect for the dead.

The *North by Northwest* trailer is unremarkable, but it is marvelously entertaining, featuring plenty of screenwriter Ernest Lehman’s polished dialogue. Significantly, unlike modern trailer style—which shoehorns every foot of action film into the trailer—the main action sequences of *North by Northwest* are not revealed; the cliff-hanging Mount Rushmore climax is referred to only in the form of a long shot of the monument and a scream on the soundtrack, and not a single frame of the airplane chase through the cornfield is shown.

## THE TWISTING OF THE . . . OF THE . . .

THE *PSYCHO* TRAILER, CONCEIVED AND DIRECTED BY Hitchcock, with a script by the late James Allardice (who penned the introductions to Hitchcock’s TV series, *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*), is probably the most audacious coming attraction ever made. And at six minutes’ running time, it’s certainly the longest. It shows virtually none of the film; instead, it takes us on a charming (if increasingly disturbing) guided tour of the Bates’ Motel and adjoining house, conducted by none other than the director himself, who encourages us to imagine a series of horrible murders. It’s a brilliant solution to the basic trailer puzzle—how to sell a thriller without giving away the thrills. And in its way, it’s every bit as experimental as *Psycho*.

Like all of the best Hitchcock films, the *Psycho* trailer makes its points visually—starting with a long, eloquent camera move that links the motel, the house, and Hitchcock in a sinister *ménage*. Beginning in an extremely high-angle shot of Hitch standing in front of the motel—“Here we have a quiet little motel,” he says, “tucked away off the main highway and, as you see, perfectly harmless looking”—the camera slowly cranes down, moving gradually into a close-up of Hitch—“This motel also has, as an adjunct, an old house, which is, if I may say so, a little more sinister looking, less innocent than the motel itself”—the camera moves through the close-up into a disturbing low-angle shot of Hitch that reveals the skull-shape house looming over him—“and in this house the most dire, horrible events took place. I think we can go inside, because the place is up for sale. Although I don’t know who’s going to buy it now.”

Inside, Hitch pauses at the foot of the stairs. “You see, even in daylight this place looks a bit sinister. It was at the top of these stairs that the second murder took place. She came out of the door there and met the victim at the top. Of course, in a flash there was the knife, and in no time”—he makes tumbling motions with his hands, his expression betraying deep distaste—“the victim tumbled and fell with a horrible crash, I think the back broke immediately, and hit the floor. It’s difficult to describe how the twisting of the”—his hands dance uneasily in the air—“of the . . . well, I won’t dwell on it.”

Hitch leads us back to the motel office and shows us Norman’s stuffed birds, “a crow here, an owl there.” He notes, “This young man, you had to feel sorry for him. After all, being dominated by an almost maniacal woman was enough to drive anyone to the



extreme of, uh, well, let's go along to cabin number one."

Hitch wastes no time getting us into the bathroom. "Cleaned all this up now," he notes with satisfaction. "Big difference. You should have seen the blood. The whole, the whole place was, well, it's too horrible to describe. Dreadful. The murderer, you see, crept in here, very silently, there was no sound, and, uh..." Hitch glances toward the curtained shower. By now this game has been going on for nearly six minutes; we know Hitch is just going to make another prissy remark and move on.

Hitchcock, face impassive, reaches out and pulls the shower curtain. Cut to a brutal close-up of Janet Leigh, backed against wet tile, screaming in mortal terror. Violins screech on the soundtrack. The shot doesn't last more than five seconds, but Hitchcock has been setting it up for almost six minutes. He's encouraged us to laugh at a series of murders and then punished us for laughing—a standard Hitchcock gambit. Hitch doesn't really think people should enjoy murder.

The *Birds* trailer, made three years later, is structurally very similar but a lot funnier. Once again, Hitch directed and Allardice wrote the script. They came up with a five-minute Hitchcock lecture on man's long-standing friendship with birds, contradicted by a series of visuals that show exactly the opposite. "This cave drawing," says Hitch, pointing to a primitive rendering of a dead bird skewered by an arrow, "is one of man's earliest sketches of his feathered friends." He picks up a hat adorned with a stuffed fowl. "Here man, or, rather, woman, thought enough of the birds to have an entire one as decoration. It's quite dead, of course. Originally, there were many varieties of birds on earth, but some have become extinct. Actually, they were simply killed off. But, of course, this is nature's way."

Presently, Hitch walks over to a table bearing a roast chicken. "I hope you don't mind if I have something to eat," he says, "but I'm rushed today, and I've begun to feel very close to the birds." He slides a sharp knife into the chicken's plump breast and begins carving. "And I've come to realize how they feel when—" he looks up. "I don't think I'll eat just now."

Hitch moves toward a golden bird cage and an imprisoned parakeet. "Surely the birds appreciate all we've done for them," he notes. "Don't you?" he asks the parakeet, which ignores him. "Beautiful cage, no other birds to bother you, none of that blinding sunlight." He sticks a friendly finger up to the bars, and the parakeet gives it a vicious peck. On the soundtrack, a few soft caws and cheeps can be heard. "Oh!" exclaims Hitch. "Now, why would he do that?" He looks around uneasily as the bird noises grow louder. "Most peculiar," he observes. "What on earth?" He looks at the camera, glances up, peers around the set with growing alarm. We hear a door opening.

Cut to Tippi Hedren throwing herself into a room, slamming the door behind her. The camera zooms into a tight, scary close-up of her face as she screams, "They're coming! They're coming!" Deafening bird noises explode on the soundtrack. Cut to a frame full of birds—real birds, mechanical birds, animated birds—attacking the camera. A title takes over the screen: "What is the shocking mystery of the birds? What was their evil intent?"

Compared to the trailers for *Psycho* and *The Birds*, the *Marnie* trailer is relatively conventional. It's also superbly entertaining—several collectors consider it superior to the film. Although a growing number of critics see Hitchcock's tale of a sexually frigid kleptomaniac (Tippi Hedren) and the man who grows obsessed with curing her (Sean Connery) as a brilliant, expressionist experiment, *Marnie* remains a problematic film, with crudely painted backdrops, stylized performances, and a story that is neither an action thriller nor a psychiatric case history. The trailer suggests how hard it was to find a selling concept.

It begins with a marvelous bit of behind-the-scenes razzle-dazzle. We are on a sound stage; technicians are loading counterweights into the base of a giant camera crane. Our camera tilts up and pans along the arm of the crane to the very top, where we discover Hitch seated serenely behind a camera. Gracefully, majestically, the crane begins to descend, swinging Hitch toward

our camera and into a close medium shot. "How do you do?" he asks as the crane brakes to a stop. "I'm Alfred Hitchcock. *Marnie*, my latest moving picture, is a very difficult picture to classify. It is not *Psycho*. Nor do we have a horde of birds flapping about and pecking at people willy-nilly. One might call *Marnie* a sex mystery. That is, if one used such words."

But, of course, sex is the selling point. The rest of the trailer consists of a series of exquisitely edited sequences taken from the film, mediated by a delicious, tongue-in-cheek commentary from Hitch. He underscores an extended embrace with, "Let me assure you that this is all in the spirit of investigation." He introduces a dialogue sequence with, "Here is further proof that *Marnie* is a talking picture." And, best of all, he footnotes a tense sequence in which Connery tears off Hedren's bathrobe and then puts his own around her bare shoulders with, "I don't think that was necessary. Actually, I think I should withhold comment since I'm not certain I understand this scene." Ambiguous titles close it out: "Is *Marnie* a sex story? A mystery? A detective story? A romance? A story of a thief? Yes—and more!"

## AUTEURIST PUZZLE

**B**OB FABER HAS WHITE HAIR, A SALT-AND-PEPPER MUSTACHE, lines in his face that make him about 60, and years of trailer expertise. He is also a key witness. He started out writing and directing trailers for National Screen Service years back and was assigned to Universal, where, as it happens, he made the outstanding *Saboteur* trailer. He was the head of the trailer department—a position he held during the Hitchcock years at the studio.

By the time *Marnie* was ready to come out in 1964, Allardice had passed out of the picture and Faber took over his scriptwriting responsibilities. Apparently, with Hitchcock's blessing, Faber took over direction of the *Marnie* trailer as well, and all the Universal Hitchcock trailers that followed, with one important exception. Regardless of who was standing behind the camera, the question of ultimate artistic responsibility for the Faber Universal trailers remains something of an auteurist puzzle.

"Give Hitchcock all the credit," said Faber, who was a journalist before he was a trailer maker and who knows about printing the legend. "It'll be better for your story." But when pressed, he admitted, "I was mostly responsible. When you see a man's style and you know what it is, you write for him. I would come to him with a half dozen suggestions, and he would pick up and amplify."

Peggy Robertson, assistant to Hitchcock for twenty years, emphasized Hitchcock's creative control: "You have to remember that every Hitchcock picture was 99<sup>9</sup>/<sub>10</sub> Hitchcock. It was always Hitch, and the trailers worked the same way."

Faber had persuaded Universal to poke around in the vault for us. Now he looked at his watch. "Well," he said, smiling, "let's go look at trailers."

## MY GOD! THE TIE!

**T**HE LOW, GRAY BUILDING ON THE UNIVERSAL LOT THAT housed Alfred J. Hitchcock Productions was still there, right next to stage ten, but workmen were shuttling furniture in and out.

"Who's moving into the holy of holies?" Faber asked.

"Oh, just some offices."

A few minutes' walk down the concourse, the Alfred Hitch-

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