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## T h e B i r d s

The Birds presents peculiar problems to the critic. Its subject is the Unknowable, the Irrational, that for which no words exist. As soon as the critic has explained that, there is suddenly very little more to say. Certain characters in the film are would-be critics of it (the ornithologist, Annie, the drunk man who quotes the Bible), yet obviously fail. A perfect and self-contained whole, The Birds offers few means of analysis. There is little, wonder, therefore, that we have no "review" of the film to offer here. Instead we present two very limited attempts.

### Random Notes on The Birds

To begin with, this is not the first time that Hitchcock has used birds as a subject. Three years earlier, in Psycho, we find Norman Bates stuffing birds (and his mother) as an avocation. The stuffed creatures surround the walls of the motel office and are often framed with Norman. Norman comments that Marian Crane (Janet Leigh) eats like a bird.

The haunting musical themes of all Hitchcock's recent works are supplied by Bernard Herrmann. Mr. Herrmann's first musical score was for Orson Welles' Citizen Kane, but since The Trouble with Harry he has been a Hitchcock regular. The track of The Birds is particularly interesting in that there is no traditional musical score, but only the sounds of birds in attack, created by electronic music. Hitchcock has reached the point where he can intensify a suspense-horror scene, usually achieved with building music, by absolute silence.

A recurring character in Hitchcock's recent films, and not absent in The Birds, is the faithful girl-friend who, although rejected by the male lead in the past, has remained true to him and continues a one-sided love affair. Remember Barbara Bel Geddes in Vertigo, Diane Baker in Marnie, and Suzanne Pleshette here in The Birds. All are wholly sympathetic characters, devoted to hopeless causes, who must stand by and watch their lost lovers be engulfed in the mystique of the leading lady.

Several of the key suspense scenes in The Birds have direct precedents in Psycho. As Tippi Hedren climbs the stairs to the attic where the birds await her, we are reminded of Vera Miles descending the stair to the wine-cellar to meet "mother." The ensuing attack in Psycho is illuminated by a light-bulb swinging back and forth, just as Melanie's flashlight flashes in the attack of the birds. And when Hedren is trapped in the phone-booth, birds attacking at all directions, the camera, action, and cutting is quite similar to the shower

murder in Psycho. Hitchcock has all the montage genius of Eisenstein integrated with a much more humanistic view of life.

- John Dorr

↑ ↑ pitie pour lui  
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### The Lovebirds

The pair of lovebirds which Melanie brings to Bodega Bay are perhaps the center of The Birds. For they combine two of the film's main subjects: Nature and Love, which they symbolize.

As Melanie's car zooms around the curves in the highway, the lovebirds are made to lean to one side. This shot hints at a major theme of the Birds, which may be called the perversion of nature. The pet shop where the film begins represents a facet of this theme, since imprisonment is an unnatural state. In fact, the whole world which Hitchcock presents us in the early part of his film is extremely perverted; nature has somehow been outraged. The main manifestation of this condition is, as often with Hitchcock, the absence of the Father and the resulting dominance of the Mother over the Son. Yet something is unnatural also in Melanie: her life is merely a frivolous game from a cheap sex comedy; and this is perhaps also due to a fault in the child-parent relationship. The structure of the Family, the fundamental unit which nature imposes upon all human society, is rotten. < Possiblement en ce film ???

One may well think of King Lear. For there, also, we find a perversion of the parent-child relationship. And there, too, a terrible cataclysm of natural forces is the result.

The storm on the heath leads Lear to an understanding of his folly and to a perception of love. The attacks of the birds lead Melanie and Lydia and Mitch Brenner toward the same perception. One cannot say, of course, that they find love as fully as Lear does, for they are in no sense tragic figures, and The Birds ends on a very inconclusive chord. Yet there is a hope, shown especially in Lydia's final acceptance of Melanie, that the natural cataclysm may ultimately purify mankind.

And Cathy takes the lovebirds away with them at the end. There are hints that the lovebirds somehow gave signals to all the other birds and caused the attacks. Whether they will allow the characters to escape remains a question of eternal suspense.

- Gary L. Davis



\* The Birds is a subtle horror film: it clubs no one over the head with a message. Even while using the old theme of animals turning upon man, Hitchcock realizes this new aspect of the horror genre.

The film is often criticized for being terribly "dead" and deadly dull. That is to miss the point. Hitchcock has tinged The Birds with a deliberate use of inaction and sweeping pans across nothing (somewhat like Antonioni) to augment carefully the scenes of frenzied terror. What could be more unsettling than waiting for an inevitable attack? Structurally, the film uses device after device to maintain suspense. For example, the soundtrack is in large part nothing but silence, the rest of the time electronically produced bird sounds—never music. And Hitchcock makes ordinary objects and creatures take on horrible aspects: beautiful birds become "ugly" attackers; a webbed pane of glass recalls the attacker that crashed into it. (attackers are always beautiful)

There are no deformed monsters in the picture: they are created in the viewer's mind. Hitchcock deals with the ordinary and depends upon the viewer to fill in the blanks. Those viewers with considerable imagination will find The Birds delightfully understated and more horrible in proportion to the time spent mulling it over. the logic of this sentence negates itself

—George L. Vogt

\* The Birds

dedicated to Truth + Carlton L. Tamm

The Birds is a subtle horror film

The Birds is a film of subtle horror

The Birds is a subtle horror of film

The Birds is a subtle film of horror

The Birds is a horror of subtle film

The Birds is a horror film of subtlety

The Birds is a horror film (no subtlety)