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together already in the form of a long piece of stage acting. . . .”[1] Besides being an admirable instrument for the building up of tension within the scene, Hitchcock’s cutting contributes to the boldness and ingenuity with which his plots are developed, with continuous speed and surprise. (His scripts are preplanned, his films edited in the camera rather than the cutting room). We are precipitated at once into the middle of events—*Young and Innocent*, for instance, starts brilliantly, at the climax of a murderous quarrel. With a few happy strokes a locale is sketched in, an atmosphere established; the stories proceed with a succession of ingenious visual, or sound-and-visual, effects (the Hitchcock touch) as the celebrated continuity from *The Thirty-Nine Steps* [the chambermaid discovers the body and screams, but we hear the screech of a train emerging from a tunnel in the next shot]; or the ominously sustained organ note in *The Secret Agent* (a film packed with ingenious touches, and Hitchcock’s favorite of the series), which announces the death of the Allied agent, strangled in the lonely little Swiss church.

Hitchcock’s best films are in many ways very English, in their humor, lack of sentimentality, their avoidance of the grandiose and the elaborately fake. And these qualities were threatened when, in 1939, he succumbed to temptation and signed a contract to work in Hollywood for David Selznick. He was ambitious to make films for the vast international audience which only Hollywood could tap; also no doubt he was eager to work with the technical facilities which only Hollywood studios could provide. It was particularly unfortunate, however, that Hitchcock chose the producer he did; for Selznick is a producer who has always relied on pretentiousness, the huge gesture, the imposing façade, to win success (*Gone with the Wind, Since You Went Away, Duel in the Sun*). Almost in advance Hitchcock was committed to all that is worst in Hollywood—to size for its own sake (his first picture for Selznick was 2,000 feet longer than any he had directed previously), to the star system for its own sake, to glossy photography, high-toned settings, lushly hypnotic musical scores.

The negotiations with Selznick were carried on while Hitchcock was working on his last British film, *Jamaica Inn*, a dully boisterous smuggling adventure with Charles Laughton. It was curious and unhappily prophetic that his first film in Hollywood should also be an adaptation from a Daphne du Maurier bestseller, *Rebecca*—a less boring book, but equally Boots Library in its level of appeal. *Rebecca* is a very skillful and competently acted film: Numerous imitations employing the same theatricalities of suspense—the great house dominated by a mysterious figure, the frightened girl, the

sinister housekeeper—emphasize the smooth plausibility of Hitchcock’s handling. But the film as a whole is not recognizable as the work of the Hitchcock of, say, *The Thirty-Nine Steps*; it is at once bigger and less considerable.

The films which followed it in the next four years are of uneven quality, and represent no progression, no real acclimatization. *Suspicion* (the next-but-two) was an attempt to reproduce the high-class tension of *Rebecca*, again with Joan Fontaine; it succeeds only in ruining a fine thriller by Francis Iles, the story of a sensitive, unattractive girl married and murdered for her money by a handsome wastrel. By dressing her hair with severity and intermittently fondling a pair of horn-rims and a book on child psychology, Miss Fontaine effected the conventional compromise between glamor and realism successfully enough to win an Academy Award; but the film lacks excitement or conviction. The English backgrounds (Hunting, Church) are pure Burbank; and the ludicrous happy ending—neither written by Iles nor desired by Hitchcock—sets the seal of failure on the film.

Suspicion was preceded by a comedy, *Mr. and Mrs. Smith* (of which one would welcome a revival), and a thriller, *Foreign Correspondent*; after it came another reminiscence of the Gaumont British period, *Saboteur*. The earlier of these, written by Charles Bennett in collaboration with Joan Harrison, has excellent sequences embedded in a diffuse and vexatious story. The assassination of an elderly statesman in Amsterdam is brilliantly staged: rain drizzling, the square thronged with umbrellas, the news camera which fires a bullet, the assassin’s escape through the crowd of bobbing umbrellas. There is a pleasantly sordid scene many reels later in which the kidnapped diplomat is grilled in a Charlotte Street garret, while a terrified German girl (in thick-lensed spectacles) sobs in terror by the wall; and the climax is worth waiting for—a transatlantic airliner shelled and nose-diving into the sea (entirely from within the plane), water crashing through the pilot’s window, passengers fighting hysterically, and finally a handful of survivors clinging exhaustedly to a floating raft.

Saboteur is even more an affair of sequences, and is remarkable for its barefaced pilfering from almost every film Hitchcock had ever made. Its handcuffed hero and heroine (limp derivatives from *The Thirty-Nine Steps*) are pitched from one exotic location to another, individual episodes are directed with enjoyable virtuosity —the aircraft factory fire at the start, a gunfight in a cinema, the final megalomaniac climax on the Statue of Liberty—but the film as a whole has the overemphasis of parody.

It was not until 1943 that Hitchcock made a film which might be construed as an attempt—his last—to justify himself as a serious

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[1] [The article is reprinted in this volume, pp. 32–39.]

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