I

BIOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND

The facts of Alfred Hitchcock's personal life are only minimally documented. Both book-length biographers, Donald Spoto and John Russell Taylor, lament the lack of letters and other testimony and proceed from the premise that the films represent the life.[1] Taylor goes so far as to say that there is no Hitchcock outside his films. While Spoto's biography is not "authorized" like Taylor's, both men have difficulty describing this enormously complex, secretive, and influential personality, who lived virtually his entire adult life in the public eye, yet apparently had no close friends other than his wife, Alma Reville Hitchcock, and his daughter, Patricia. Spoto, on the basis of a range of testimony concerning Hitchcock's cruel practical jokes, immoderate drinking, and other neurotic behavior, concludes that his personality was somehow aberrant, as pathological perhaps as the personalities of some of the characters in the films. Unless otherwise noted, the facts related here are taken from the Spoto and Taylor biographies.

Born August 13, 1899, Alfred Joseph Hitchcock was the third and last child of William and Emma Hitchcock, Cockney Catholics who had moved to the Leytonstone District near London in order to expand their grocery. The hard-working family moved twice more, and throughout Hitchcock's youth, his older siblings were away attending school, a situation that contributed to his development as a loner. His isolation is explained by several factors: a sensitive artistic nature, his weight problem, his minority status as a Catholic, and a typical lower-middle-class upbringing that supported him well economically but was otherwise repressive.

While Hitchcock's father is frequently described as "strict," there is not much evidence that his discipline was any more severe than that normally applied by working- or lower-middle-class parents who aspire to improve opportunities for their children. On the other hand, Hitchcock's main public association with his father, which is a story of his being placed at a young age in the local jail in order to be taught a lesson, definitely indicates some harshness. Patricia Ferrara, through an analysis of the elements of the many versions of this well-known story—Hitchcock's age, the nature of the infraction, the length of the punishment—shows that it has always been presented by Hitchcock as "personal myth," that is, used not to explain his family background but to illustrate his filmic ideas about fear, suspense, and the law.[2] Some versions of the story are even accompanied by the information that Hitchcock "made it up."

In any case, an apparently extremely close relationship with his mother, with whom he lived alone from the age of fifteen after the death of his father, provided him with special confidence and high self-esteem. Much later, at the time of *Stage Fright* in 1950, he would describe the mother in the film, a grey figure of unpredictable but sweet response and bourgeois social pretensions and prejudices, as like his own.

Until 1913 Hitchcock attended a variety of Catholic schools, including Saint Ignatius, a Jesuit institution. Spoto tells of Hitchcock arrogantly playing cruel and reckless practical jokes in school, resulting in his nickname, "Cocky." The influence of the Catholic aspect of his youth is unclear. It is not unusual for Catholics to approach dogma with a free spirit, and such facts that are presented to prove Hitchcock's piety, such as Alma Reville's conversion to Catholicism before their marriage, do not necessarily support the conclusion that Hitchcock or his family were "strict Catholics." In any case, Hitchcock throughout his life indicated that his love of his work was far greater than any moral or religious influence. Emmanuel Decaux argues that Catholicism in Hitchcock's work is more of a popular theme than a religious underpinning. She emphasizes the minority status of Catholics in Great Britain to suggest that the importance of Hitchcock's religious upbringing is in its placement of him as a "marginal," making him sensitive to being "in" or "out." [3] Hitchcock himself indicated that what he learned most from the Jesuits was organization and control as well as how "to be realistic." [4]

A far more lasting influence on him was the death of his father on December 12, 1914, when he was barely fifteen years old, an event that was at the least economically devastating. Because of his father's illness, Hitchcock had already left school and was helping out with the family business. He had many solitary diversions: maps, wall charts, travel schedules, cinema, theater, books, and the popular boys' literature of the time, some of which, like the novels of John Buchan, he would later adapt into films. He also attended evening classes in navigation, mechanics, and draftsmanship at the University of London evening school.

In early 1915, he began working at the Henley Telegraph Company as a clerk while he continued with night classes in art history, economics, political science, and drawing, especially illustration. His talent was noted and he was transferred to the advertising department. At this time he began buying issues of technical and trade film magazines; he also read the work of Edgar Allan Poe, which made an enormous emotional impression on him.[5] By 1917, he had taken an Army medical exam and been excused from service for reasons that are unclear, enlisting instead in the volunteer corps of the Royal Engineers, a circumstance that no doubt further isolated him as different. But he remained with Henley's and seems to have eagerly taken advantage of whatever opportunities they could offer him. His short story, "Gas," was printed in the first issue of the company's staff magazine.[6]

In early 1920, he took some sample work to Famous Players-Lasky, a U.S. firm that had opened a branch in London, and was hired part-time to draw title designs. "It never occurred to me to go and offer my services to a British company," he said later, but the United States inspired him; "I did regard their movie making as truly professional and very much in advance." [7] He continued to work at Henley's until late in the year when the first films for which he did titles were successful enough for him to be employed full-time with Famous Players-Lasky. During the next couple of years, he designed drawings and lettering styles for all their films, also working on sets, costumes, props, and scripts; he was to all accounts a cheerful, willing, and extremely talented worker. During this time he met Alma Reville, who was near his age but who had been working in films for several years before him; she was already writing and editing.

By the end of 1922 he was assigned the direction of a two-reel short, *Number 13,* but the project was aborted due to the deteriorating financial condition of Famous Players-Lasky. The ailing company began to rent out its studio at Islington to independent producers, in particular Michael Balcon and Victor Saville, who set up Gainsborough Pictures.

In the summer of 1923 Balcon and Saville produced, and Graham Cutts directed, *Woman to Woman,* with Hitchcock working on sets, script, and whatever else needed to be done. The film was unusual in that it was a huge success in the U.S. market because it was well made and, more important, had an American (U.S.) star. Tom Ryall explains in detail the extent to which the British film industry was floundering at this time, a crisis that reached its nadir in 1925, when national debate led to the quota laws of 1927.[8] A few years later, a press kit for another film describes Hitchcock during the summer of 1923 as a man who spent "his spare cash on entertaining pressmen to drinks. He had a theory, youthful though he was, that the way to fame was via the newspapers and was a rabid publicity seeker." [9] In late 1923, Hitchcock asked Alma Reville to marry him, a move he later said he put off until he had achieved a position securely superior to hers.

So Hitchcock not only impressed people with his hard work and talent, but also made sure that anyone who might be in a position to help him knew about him. More important during this period, as in fact throughout his life, he continued to build his expertise in filmmaking through spectacular energy and ambition. His set design work on *The Passionate Adventure* in 1924, for instance, involved the design and building of a "complete stretch of canal with houses beside it, all on a 90-foot stage." [10]

Subsequent work with Cutts (which sent Hitchcock to the Ufa Studios in Germany where he was able to observe F. W. Murnau on the set of *The Last Laugh*) produced a situation of jealous competitiveness between Hitchcock and the British director. On assigning Hitchcock his first directorial position in 1925 on *The Pleasure Garden* (and then, because he was pleased with that effort, *The Mountain Eagle*), Balcon wrote later, "I had to arrange to have these two subjects made in Germany, at least as far as Hitchcock is concerned, because of the resistance [in England] to his becoming a director. At that time, we were very much dependent on distributors' support and it was hard to convince them that new people were any good." [11]

In March of 1926 the press screening of *The Pleasure Garden* produced a rave in the *Bioscope,* but C. M. Woolf, who headed the distribution company, found the film too sophisticated and persuaded Balcon to shelve it on the grounds that it might confuse the audience and endanger other bookings. Balcon nonetheless continued to support Hitchcock and the next month gave him *The Lodger* to direct; it too, along with *The Mountain Eagle,* was shelved by Woolf for being "too highbrow" and arty. Balcon was embarrassed financially and brought in Ivor Montagu, a leading figure of what Ryall calls Great Britain's "minority film culture," to suggest changes in *The Lodger.*

Ryall offers an extensive picture of this "minority film culture," in which many people Hitchcock knew participated, and its promotion of "art" cinema through the London Film Society, and later, journals like *Close Up.*[12] Art cinema for this intellectual group was not generally perceived to be made in Great Britain; Soviet, German, French, and even American films were considered much more interesting. Nonetheless, there appears to have been something of a "cause" surrounding Hitchcock's talent and its squelching by C. M. Woolf. In March of 1926, when Hitchcock's pictures had been seen only at previews, Cedric Belfrage, in an article oddly titled "Alfred the Great," declared the films to be "almost perfect in their technical and artistic production" and Hitchcock to be an "unassuming and delightful personality." [13]

Hitchcock later described the painful evening when he and Alma waited for the verdict on the streamlined version of *The Lodger,* knowing that it was unlikely he would ever direct another film if none of these first three had a commercial run. Fortunately, Balcon convinced Woolf to release the film in September 1926, and its huge success allowed the first two films to be released as well. "There you see the thin red line between failure and success," Hitchcock commented.[14]

Shortly thereafter, on December 2, 1926, Alfred Hitchcock and Alma Reville were married. She continued to script and edit other projects but was usually involved with Hitchcock's as well; these included *Downhill, Easy Virtue,* and especially *The Ring,* the next picture for which she was credited after *The Lodger.* She was generally seen to have a keen sense of people and business as well as a large talent that some thought would result in an independent directorial career; but after 1929, she worked solely on his projects and later said that she was never very ambitious. By the end of 1927, *The Ring,* which was the first picture Hitchcock made under a new contract with British International as "the highest paid director in England," was lauded as "the most magnificent British film ever made." [15] At Christmas 1927 Hitchcock designed and sent to his friends the first version of his famous caricature profile, drawn on a wooden puzzle.

Easy Virtue, made before *The Ring,* showed in its main theme Hitchcock's acute consciousness of the difficulties of the media image he was so avidly pursuing. By 1928, the conflicting elements of this image—artist? entertainer?—which had already nearly cost him his career, were being played out in the press over his other films. *The Ring* was sarcastically dismissed in *Close Up* as the overpraised best of the worst, and Rachel Low summed up Hitchcock's dilemma of the time: "Had Hitchcock been German, Russian, or French, had he even presented himself as a more Bohemian figure, he would almost certainly have been taken more seriously." [16] Ryall describes the other side of the bind: "Hitchcock was developing an artistic reputation during this period and an identity as a film maker which was at odds with the expectation of business figures in the industry like Woolf."[17] On the one side, he was too artful to be commerical; on the other, his art was mere pretension, not deep enough to be truly "art."

Hitchcock, however, as an intelligent product of the working class, would always be first concerned about earning a living; if he could say what he wanted, so much the better, but if he could not, well, that was more than understandable. Nonetheless, he displayed an outspoken idealism concerning excellence in filmmaking, and throughout his British career, he never hesitated to proclaim publicly his ideas in this area, which were frequently critical of the established ways of production. In a letter to the *London Evening News* in 1927, he admonished the British film industry to learn better "the nouns and verbs" of their trade just like a "great novelist," and defended the artistic mission of the film director in creating mood and tempo.[18]

On July 7, 1928, the Hitchcocks' daughter, Patricia, was born, but the business year brought only commercial disappointments. Though *The Farmer's Wife* was a successful and witty play adaptation and *The Manxman* an extremely moving melodrama, *Champagne* was a frothy star vehicle for Betty Balfour, and none of the three made a distinctive impact. Later, he wrote of his "bitter disappointment" that *Blackmail* was to be shot silent, though he planned ahead for eventual reversal of this decision by the producers, and, indeed, ended up reshooting the film with sound.[19] In June of 1929, the "talkie" version of *Blackmail* was screened to much excitement and immediate international recognition; it contains Hitchcock's first clearly recognizable personal appearance. By 1930, he had formed a publicity company, Hitchcock Baker Productions, Limited, for the purpose of "advertising to the press the newsworthiness" of himself.[20]

The next year *Murder!* was also very well received. John Grierson, another leader of Great Britain's "minority film culture," in this case the documentary movement, described Hitchcock around this time as "the best director . . . of unimportant films."[21] It is interesting to note that Grierson and the other film people with whom Hitchcock was friendly—Montagu, Balcon, other members of the London Film Society and critics for *Close Up*—were university-educated men. Hitchcock appears to have been the only Cockney at these high levels in what was by 1930 a growing but still relatively small film culture. In 1932, after seeing *Rich and Strange,* Grierson assessed Hitchcock's "weaknesses" as those of a "provincial, a true-born Londoner [who] knows people but not things, situations, but not events."[22] Further, he suggested that Hitchcock had been sent off in the wrong direction by the "highbrows."

During this period, Hitchcock first publicly expressed his ideas on the importance of women characters, who "must be fashioned to please women rather than men, for the reason that women form ¾ of the average cinema audience. . . . Most women are idealists and want to see ideals personified in heroines."[23] His own idealism—and diligence in seeking out whatever marketing information about the audience was available at the time—is apparent. This kind of practical pronouncement continued to be issued in the industry press under his name, resulting in articles like "Are Stars Necessary?" in which he explained that stars were a gift to the audience, who had "little enough glamour in their drab business world."[24]

As the top director at British International in the early 1930s, Hitchcock was handed the prestige theater projects of the day: *The Skin Game* and *Juno and the Paycock.* These were handled in interesting ways but were disparaged by the "art" cinema intellectuals, while not having exceptional appeal to the moviegoing public, either. During 1932, *Rich and Strange,* from his and Alma Reville's own idea and script, was received poorly, and *Number Seventeen* gave the impression of being a throwaway. Indeed, Rodney Acklund, who worked on the script with Hitchcock, described it as a juvenile parody meant to provoke the ire of stuffy studio executives. According to Spoto, Hitchcock was depressed during this period. Later he told Truffaut, "I don't ever remember saying to myself, 'you're finished, you're at your lowest ebb.' Yet, outwardly, to other people, I believe I was. . . . *Number Seventeen* represented a careless approach to my work. There was no careful analysis of what I was doing." [25]

In 1933, Hitchcock signed a short-term contract with Alexander Korda, but Korda was unable to supply financing for any project, which eventually freed Hitchcock to go with the independent producer, Tom Arnold, and film *Waltzes from Vienna.* Hitchcock's unconventional approach to the musical resulted in a film of distinctive charm, but he was nonetheless reportedly bored and unhappy with the project. Michael Balcon once again rescued him with an offer to produce *The Man Who Knew Too Much,* a project Hitchcock had purchased from British International Pictures and then sold to Balcon for double the price Hitchcock had paid.

In December 1934, *The Man Who Knew Too Much* opened to plaudits, though C. M. Woolf had first announced he would have the film reshot and then released it on the second half of a double bill. It was the final episode in the struggle between Woolf and Hitchcock, however, as the enormous success of the film assured that Hitchcock's security would never again be threatened.

The "thriller cycle"—*The Man Who Knew Too Much, The 39 Steps, Secret Agent, Young and Innocent,* and *The Lady Vanishes*—that filled the decade of the 1930s ended Hitchcock's reputation as a "critic's director" in Great Britain, while bringing him cult fame in New York City. The thrillers also showcased his marked ability to portray contemporary times and issues—in this case, the political turmoil of the 1930s. During this extremely successful period of working with Ivor Montagu and Michael Balcon at Gaumont, and then with Edward Black at Gainsborough after Gaumont was sold and its producers fired, Hitchcock continued to place his ideas about filmmaking before the public.

In his self-appointed position as educator of the masses, he wrote many articles for the fan and trade weeklies. Some related the circumstances of his own career, such as "My Screen Memories"; others were more theoretical, such as "If I Were Head of a Production Company." In the latter he complained that American films "lack what we call soul," while British films, by contrast, are a "product of individuality." [26] "Why Thrillers Thrive" discussed subjective camera viewpoints versus spectatorship in the live theater, and "More Cabbages, Fewer Kings" lamented that English producers appeared to be interested only in the rich and the poor.[27] This piece recommended the production of more film stories about the middle class, where "manners and ways [flow] easily, speech [is] unaffected, emotions more free, and instinct sharper." The diligence paid off; by 1937, when Hitchcock first visited New York, autograph-seeking fans greeted him outside a movie theater.

Around this time, he began to negotiate with several different U.S. studios and producers. Professionally, he had never made a secret of his frustration with the lack of qualified technical personnel in England and had always openly admired American methods, if not the message of the films. After signing in the middle of 1938 with David O. Selznick, Hitchcock returned to England to complete his final British production, *Jamaica Inn,* for Charles Laughton. Leonard Leff indicates that the Selznick contract left more than the usual freedom for Hitchcock but paled in terms of remuneration next to the salaries of the most famous U.S. directors of the time. Hitchcock had first to prove that he could work fast and make large profits in the new atmosphere, no matter what amount of resentment he might have over the exploitation of his talents. Having been the "highest paid" in Great Britain, Hitchcock was sensitive in this area, and Selznick's persistent loanouts of him at twice or more the salary he was paying him, which began immediately after *Rebecca* in late 1939, exacerbated his annoyance.

After arriving in the United States in March 1939, Hitchcock began work at Selznick International Pictures in Los Angeles, according to Spoto, appearing at his small office usually with Alma. In June, Selznick rejected "the entire composition" of the treatment for *Rebecca* that Hitchcock had prepared. The Selznick-Hitchcock relationship, which lasted through several renegotiated contracts until 1947, would always be marked by this type of creative power struggle. For these reasons—money and creative freedom—Hitchcock began to seek more independent ways of production soon after his arrival in the United States.

By his own and others' accounts, Hitchcock survived the battles with Selznick by devious rather than confrontational means. This description of his personal style became a repetitive aspect of his interviews and can be related to a major theme of the films—neutrality, a sophisticated, distanced, kindly tolerance of the vagaries of human nature. Patricia Ferrara argues that "the public persona of macabre, straight-faced joker that he cultivated . . . [emphasized] the obviously false distance between himself and his films." [28] She argues, as others like Jean Douchet do more elaborately, that the aesthetic distance of the films is commercially effective, as well as critically interesting, because it is a passionate resolution of the conflict between the commercialism that assured the continuation of his career and the personal satisfaction he derived from making films exactly as he pleased. This tension led to the sympathetic movement from character to character that is a marked feature of the films and which remains in stark contrast to his treatment of people in real life, behavior that was to all accounts considerably more rigid and demanding. Said Hitchcock himself, "I dislike conflict. But I won't sacrifice my principles. I draw the line at my work. I loathe people who give less than their full effort. . . that's deceit. I cut such people off." [29]

The struggle with Selznick made Hitchcock tougher. While he generally acceded to Selznick at the script stage, he became crafty about avoiding the producer's interference in areas like shooting where Selznick was less knowledgeable. *Rebecca,* originally budgeted at $950,000, eventually cost $1,000,000; it was, however, a huge success and won for Selznick an Academy Award for best picture.

By the end of 1939, Hitchcock was working with independent producer Walter Wanger on *Foreign Correspondent,* a film that further satisifed his ambition by providing him with another budget significantly larger than the ones that had been available to him in Great Britain. Costing $1,500,000, it included sets of a square in Amsterdam that required drainage for a rain scene, "a strip of Dutch countryside with windmills, several parts of London, and a large plane, interior and exterior, the latter requiring the use of a giant studio tank for the spectacular air crash sequence." [30] The film was another success, noted in the press to be much more of a "Hitchcock film" than *Rebecca* and admired for its propagandistic value in encouraging the United States to enter the war, a message that was of primary concern to Wanger.

The next year, with Europe in the middle of war, Hitchcock returned to England to try to persuade his mother to move to the United States; she refused, however, and he quickly returned to work on the script of *Suspicion* for RKO.

In the latter part of 1940, Michael Balcon publicly accused Hitchcock of preferring to stay in Hollywood rather than return to Great Britain for the war effort. Hitchcock replied in a New York newspaper: "By what authority does this man take this attitude? . . . The British government has only to call on me for my services. The manner in which I am helping my country is not Mr. Balcon's business." [31] Several years later he would provide such services, but for now he continued to work on his third production that year, again for RKO: *Mr. and Mrs. Smith*. *Suspicion* was filmed in the first half of 1941, and *Saboteur* for Frank Lloyd at Universal followed quickly thereafter.

In August 1942, his mother died at the age of 79; a few months later his brother, William, also died. In early 1943 Hitchcock, weighing just under 300 pounds, went on a well-publicized diet and lost one-third of his weight.

At the end of 1943, after completing *Shadow of a Doubt* and *Lifeboat* for Twentieth Century-Fox, Hitchcock returned to England at the request of his friend, Sidney Bernstein, then head of the film division of the British Ministry of Information. There, he directed *Bon Voyage* and *Aventure Malgache* for the M.O.I. in French with an exiled French theater troupe, the Molière Players.

Upon his return *Lifeboat* was released to a "storm of controversy" over its supposed "elevation of the Nazi superman" in the character of Willie. This protest, along with the weak propagandistic qualities of the two shorts he had made (neither was widely distributed) illustrate the paradoxical aspects of Hitchcock's essentially apolitical nature. On the one hand is his limited ability to assert distinctly any particular ideology, even the most commonly felt one of the time; on the other is his appealing knack for and glee in offending the powers that be. Sam Simone's characterization of Hitchcock as an "activist" during the 1940s is unusual in this regard as it belies most of the evidence regarding Hitchcock's interest in embracing an ideological agenda.[32] It seems more likely that Hitchcock had a natural curiosity about the nature of current events, and illustrating them was merely another way of relating to the people, assuring their attendance at his films. As many have pointed out, a significant part of Hitchcock's popularity was his talent for reflecting the contemporary society in which each of his films was made, despite shaky ideological underpinning. In fact, Hitchcock's films repeatedly showed that the reflection need not be realistic in order to be effective. *Frenzy*, for instance, was criticized for its old-fashioned view of mercantile London, yet its treatment of criminal sexual behavior was very up-to-date.

In subsequent years, between 1945 and 1947, Hitchcock made *Spellbound* and *The Paradine Case* with Selznick, and *Notorious* for RKO. Throughout this period, he flew several times to England to meet with Sidney Bernstein over a possible partnership, which came to fruition in April of 1946 under the name Transatlantic Pictures.

After mining Hollywood studios for all the support they could provide, Hitchcock, as his own producer at the end of the decade, began a new stage of radical technical innovations and ever more concentrated methods of control. Transatlantic Pictures' first production, and Hitchcock's first color film, *Rope*, was rigorously designed around ten-minute takes. The shooting in Los Angeles was to all accounts frustrating for the actors, who were blocked into long, complex camera movements involving furniture and walls being rolled in and out of their path. *Under Capricorn,* an even more elaborate mixture of long takes, bold technicolor, and difficult behavior for the actors, was a greater trial. Hitchcock himself assessed his actions in producing it as "stupid and juvenile," probably because the film cost $2,500,000 and was a financial failure that brought about the end of Transatlantic Pictures.

Under Capricorn, however, sparked a reevaluation of Hitchcock in France; Alexandre Astruc equated the film with the British cinema's greatest theme of "the mystery of the human personality." [33] John Belton considers *Under Capricorn* important in preparing Hitchcock for his next decade of extraordinary productivity and effectiveness.[34] At this point also, the pattern of Hitchcock's career became set: the extremely successful entertainments, primarily of the thriller genre, interspersed with the more somber melodramas, which provoked a varied response. By now his income and his independence as a producer were not only secure but were also accompanied by growing international fame. As Ado Kyrou put it in a typical anti-Hitchcock diatribe, the director has the freedom and prestige to make a great film, "but we await it with little hope." [35]

After he had moved to the United States, Hitchcock ended the idealistic public pronouncements in which he had occasionally indulged in Great Britain, even, in 1947, sarcastically noting (or perhaps, ghost-noting) that he no longer worried about what would happen to the "heroine" as he was now "hardened, and emotionally muscle-bound." [36] In interviews he gave in 1938 Hitchcock mentioned his desire to make films of "sociological interest," perhaps an anti-capital punishment film or a film about the general strike of 1926; but he also indicated that these were precisely what the British censor would not allow him to make. His comments probably reveal more about his sensitivity to restriction than his desire to express any particular ideas.[37] By 1952, after twelve years in the technically and politically less restricted environment of the United States as well as several years of independent producing, his view was much more pragmatic: "I would say it is harder to make a film that has both integrity and wide audience appeal than it is to make one that merely satisfies one's own artistic conscience." [38]

To the social isolation to which he had always been susceptible in England was now added cultural isolation; several critics, Alexander Doty at length, describe the transition period of the 1940s as a deepening and darkening of the vision. [39] During this period Hitchcock became fanatically attached to the trappings of English culture, and the change of country clearly solidified his disinclination to be assimilated into any group beyond his immediate family. Many have remarked that in the United States his identity became subsumed into his public image. Chabrol and Rohmer theorized that Hitchcock began as early as the production of *Sabotage* (1936) deliberately to create "a second personality that completely corresponded with the idea that others had of him." [40]

Changing approaches to talent in the studios allowed him to be one of the first to take advantage of newer, freer contracts. In January of 1949, he signed with Jack Warner to produce and direct four pictures over a six-and-a-half-year period for a total of $999,000: *Stage Fright, Strangers on a Train, I Confess,* and *Dial M for Murder.*

He next contracted an unusual arrangement with Paramount Pictures that allowed the rights of the films he made for them eventually to lapse to him: *Rear Window, To Catch a Thief, The Trouble with Harry, The Man Who Knew Too Much,* and *Vertigo.*

By 1955, he had signed over the use of his name to Richard E. Decker, who published the *Alfred Hitchcock Mystery Magazine* with ghostwritten introductions. Most spectacularly, he had signed with CBS and Bristol-Meyers for a network television show, "Alfred Hitchcock Presents," at $129,000 per episode, to be produced by his own company, Shamley Productions. In 1955, he also arranged with Vera Miles the first of a series of contracts with actresses who were signed to work exclusively on his productions. The same year, while shooting *To Catch a Thief* in France, he met François Truffaut and Claude Chabrol. The films of this period, especially *Rear Window* and *Vertigo* (the latter was not commercially well received) were uniquely recognized by French critics as important art.

Hitchcock's critical reputation had now come completely full circle. A cover story for *Newsweek* magazine pronounced him a "bona fide celebrity" because of his appearances on television, and capsulized his British films as "art-house." [41] Between the years 1955 and 1960, he directed twenty episodes for the television series at the same time he was completing five feature films. By the end of 1959, after *North by Northwest* had delivered the planned-for blockbuster success, he was at a peak of international fame few directors have experienced. Characteristically, after a couple of extremely expensive aborted projects on the same level of *North by Northwest,* he pragmatically decided in 1960 to turn away from the formula.

Instead, Hitchcock turned to *Psycho* and the expressed intent of "shocking" his audience, though he first had to contend with producers and colleagues appalled enough at the thought of the project to refuse to be associated with it. Stephen Rebello speculates that the extreme change in production values that *Psycho* represents was a result of this lack of support as well as other frustrations—with star salaries, with aborted projects, and with the success of *Les Diaboliques,* which had provided its French director, Henri-Georges Clouzot, with an international reputation as a suspense director that rivaled Hitchcock's own. Rebello compares the gritty black and white *Les Diaboliques* to *Psycho,* most convincingly in their similar advertising campaigns, both of which pleaded with the audience not to reveal the film's ending.[42] In any case, what many saw to be a great risk, even at the extremely low cost of $800,000, turned out to be an even greater height for Hitchcock's commercial career, inspiring a promotional tour of openings around the world in mid-1960 that included Japan and China.

Critically, *Psycho* enjoyed a belated but astounding success, encouraging Hitchcock to exercise his power openly at even broader levels. According to Robert E. Kapsis, the development of *The Birds* revealed Hitchcock to be expressly conscious of his new found "art" audience; he argued for certain points in the script with reasoning such as "We are going to run into all kinds of critiques from the highbrows." Hitchcock not only tailored the film to appeal to this group but also launched a "propaganda campaign [to] transform his image" into that of a serious director of film art. To enhance this image he mailed out with publicity for *The Birds* the monograph by Peter Bogdanovich, which validated as great art a Hitchcock retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art, and a "solicited tribute" from François Truffaut, with whom he was also about to embark on their famous series of interviews."[43]

The Truffaut interviews of 1962 show Hitchcock generally agreeable to

Truffaut's prior judgments and eager to share his technical knowledge but also occasionally non-plussed at Truffaut's opinions. When Truffaut insisted that the films, in their treatment of "metaphysical anxieties" such as fear, sex and death, avoided more "daytime" anxieties such as unemployment, poverty, or "everyday love conflicts between men and women," Hitchcock objected, "Isn't the main thing that they be connected with life?" [44] Kapsis argues that Hitchcock's cooperation with Bogdanovich and Truffaut not only solidified his own critical reputation but also affected the reputation of the thriller genre and heightened critical consciousnes of film aethestics in general.[45]

The rest of the decade saw the beginning of what is considered to be the director's decline, with *Marnie, Torn Curtain,* and *Topaz,* though the first has already been significantly reevaluated through feminist criticism. Michael Walker relates the more lumbering qualities of the latter two and their persistent theme of betrayal to the melancholia of the director's "old age." [46]

After these commercial embarrassments (*Topaz* went through three different filmed endings) Hitchcock rebounded in 1972 with *Frenzy,* largely seen to be a successful return to formulaic horror, though hardly formulaic in its brutality.

The next year he had a heart pacemaker implanted, and two years later, he completed his final film, *Family Plot.* His perennial youthful spirit and rebellious attitude is well illustrated by an anecdote from the set of that film. Knowing that Hitchcock owned a sizable amount of MCA stock, Bruce Dern, one of the stars, suggested that they paint the garage door in the film with graffiti of the *Jaws* logo, an MCA-financed hit. Hitchcock replied, "No, Bruce, I know what we should write—Fuck MCA!" [47]

Awards and honors flowed during this period: the Irving G. Thalberg Memorial Award, given by the Association of Cinemotographers, Television and Allied Technicians at the Academy Award ceremonies; honorary degrees from the University of California at Santa Cruz and Columbia University; and a spectacular gala sponsored by the Film Society of Lincoln Center in 1979.

Though Hitchcock, at the age of 79, began work on another film, David Freeman related a sad story of his senility while working with him on this last project, *The Short Night.*[48] In May of 1979, he finally closed up his offices at Universal Studios, and on April 29, 1980, he died in Los Angeles.

Notes

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