**-Hitchcock-**

Before, During & After - By: Brent Antonio Polk - Paper #1

DC\_206\_201\_0945 - HISTORY OF CINEMA PRODUCTION

On deciding which film or Director to study for a review of film making before the Second World War and after was difficult. After some thought on the issue I came to conclude that I should review the work of someone I admire as a director and someone who had some private insight into the visceral meanings there in. Alfred Hitchcock, being born in London England of English parentage, one would only expect him to have both strong opinions and reactions to the War.

Alfred Hitchcock’s own career began at the *Lansky Studio* located in Great Britain and he continued later at the German *Gainsborough Pictures* where he worked to exhaustion as writer, title designer and art director. Alfred was constantly apart of the lifestyle of the German people during this time, giving him a close-up fly on the wall perspective of the social and political attitudes of the German peoples. By 1925 Alfred had married a German woman (Alma Reville) and had become a regular member of the countries society. Hitchcock only left Germany when Hitler officially came into power. Before he left Hitchcock had his hands dirty in the political arena with the direction of an onslaught of questionable messaged films such as The Man Who Knew Too Much *(1934),* The 39 Steps *(1935),* Secret Agent, Sabotage (both 1936) and The Lady Vanishes *(1938)* all of which set the enemy in a clear light.

*The Secret Agent (1936)* is the film I will be using as the starting point for the change in Hitchcock’s manner of filming. By this time Alfred had stated with clarity his position as to the Nazi party and the rest of the world. This film uses the “spy” as ammunition to assassinate the character of the Nazi party. Set during WWI this film is situated within the auspicious era of “now” wherein the agent or “General” that is being stalked (Peter Lorre) is German and the spies chasing the General are British (John Gielgud-Captain Edgar and Madeleine Carroll-Elsa Carrington). This film is one in a series in which without much effort disguises itself as a period piece. It appears to me that Hitchcock was injecting his own feelings of the situation happening in Europe and Germany in general.

The directing of this film seems either rushed or simply sloppy. It is possible that Hitchcock himself was under some stress. Michael Balcon, one of Hitchcock’s bosses vocally attacked Alfred by saying “I had a plump young technician in my studios whom I promoted from department to department. Today he is one of our most famous directors and he is in Hollywood while we who are left behind short-handed are trying to harness the films to our great national effort.” A message which Churchill himself and Lord Lothian (British Ambassador to America) was against and which Alfred’s wife Alma became a U.S. citizen over. The declaration of war in Europe was in 1939 one year after *The Lady Vanishes* the last in Hitchcock’s “spy” dramas in Britain. Hitchcock was in fact a subsequent factor in helping as much as he was able during the War efforts. From attending a party Selznick had for the first anniversary of the release of Gone With the Wind, which was to benefit the British War Relief Fund, he also regularly attended secret meetings of Hollywood's English Colony to discuss ways in which they could slip mentions of the war into their films without offending the censors and the Communist party.

By 1940 Hitchcock had left Britain to direct films in the U.S. and London leaving his counterparts left calling him a coward. During the War Hitchcock continued to indulge in politically charged films, from *Foreign Correspondent (1940)* to *Notorious (1946)* Hitchcock did his best to utilize the lessons being garnered from the active war in his choices of films. It was 1947 when the House Committee on Un-American Activities or the (HUAC) under the strangle hold of fear decided to launch its own attack on itself. Hitchcock himself was not implicated directly, but again he showed his devote reasoning skill and broke the black list by hiring Norman Lloyd to be associate producer on Alfred Hitchcock Presents ten years after.

In contrast to these films and *The Secret Agent;* things certainly changed for Alfred. Alfred’s longtime friend and most famous pairing with David O. Selznick was extinguished. He was free to loosen the true grit of his new mastered methodology upon the silver screen. *Rope (1948)* which was not a major success when released was the ultimate show of what Hitchcock had learned by this time. Starring only a handful of actors and inspired by the true events of Leopold and Loeb, Hitchcock throws everything he has in this endeavor. From a “no-cut” continuous filming method in which he used black-out transitions to make it appear that the film was one continuous reel to tell a pure linear story of two young college students (Phillip & Kenneth) that kill one of their “imperfect” counterparts (David), then continue to have a party to prove their superiority. This film in itself is not in any strong means a direct contrast to Hitchcock’s directing methods or content, it is merely a sample of the direction Hitchcock went after the War was over. Alfred absorbed the lessons he learned while in Germany and utilized both Deco styling in his framing and a modernistic approach in his lighting, creating a unique noir mood.

Hitchcock had exorcised the demons haunting his past by this era by in part being associated with a documentary called *Memory of The Camps.* Discovered in the vault of the London’s Imperial War Museum and not televised until the early 1980’s this documentary was composed of footage shot at various concentration camps at the direct end of the War in the summer of 1945. Only partly edited by Hitchcock it stands a direct testament of his willingness to be intimately involved in such a labor. He also sent special messages to the camera men on how to shoot some of the scenes. Hitchcock also directed shorts for the British Ministry of Information on the French resistance.

In the mid-1950’s, he returned to his now classical method with the two thrillers *“Strangers on a Train”* *(1951)*, which was rehashed in 1987 starring Danny DeVito and Billy Crystal called *“Throw Momma From the Train”*, and “*Dial M for Murder”* *(1954)*, a 3-D movie which was a success and *“Rear Window”(1954)*. By the 60’s Hitchcock’s films did not draw the old crowds at the box office. Both *“Marnie”* *(1964)* and *“Torn Curtain”* *(1966)* took a production hit due to casting problems, and the script of Torn Curtain was scattered to say the least. Hitchcock himself and his work were crippled by the sudden departure of composer Bernard Herrmann (who solely scored every Hitchcock movie since 1957). Bernard was one of the three major forces of nature which made a Hitchcock film what it was. Hitchcock like many other principal Hollywood creative talents had hit his cinematic bottom by this time. The expected “gimmick” that Hitchcock became famous for is the same thing that anchored his talents to the deep. Of his final three movies, only *“Frenzy”* *(1972)*, of which brought him back to his British thrillers after 30 years missing, was successful. It was during the shooting of Frenzy when his wife Alma had a devastating stroke which rendered her unable to walk. His last film, *“Family Plot”* *(1976)*, has achieved some respect from a cult driven group of Hitchcock followers.

By 1980 the infamous Hitchcock and all the power he gained as master of suspense was over, affected by angina induced kidney failure the great Hitchcock was deceased now just a few months after being knighted to become Sir Alfred Hitchcock. The only thing that will live on forever is the skill set Alfred Hitchcock mastered by refining and sharpening the cinema thriller to a knifes razor edge. Anyone who wishes to follow the Hitchcock method now has a path laid out in blood and fear.

Citations

**Books:**

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**Web:**

**Hitchcock at War** | Article: Great Directors | Focus Features." *Focus Features*. N.p., n.d. Web. 02 Feb. 2015.

DePAul Professor comment: Very nice- well researched and detailed, with a fascinatingly broad look at the complex and long career of a master filmmaker- I like the idea of tracing Rope to his early days at UFA (so controlled), and his work on Memory of the Camps is crucial, and something that is not often talked about with regards to who many perceive as an apolitical filmmaker. Rich and descriptive- the historical depth of this paper is impressive. Great job.