

A study of Hitchcock's work can be used specifically for the Media coursework unit for NEAB English GCSE syllabus, by the study of a single film or comparison of two or more films. The following approaches could be adopted for any GCSE English syllabus as:

- stimulus for discursive written or oral work (e.g. on Hitchcock's recurrent themes, his characters – by gender or as heroes and villains – or on issues of film censorship)
- stimulus for creative writing
- a comparison of the original literary source and the final film

Films to be recommended for study at this level are:

*Rebecca, The 39 Steps, Rear Window, North by Northwest, The Birds, Psycho* and *The Lady Vanishes*.



HITCHCOCK ON HITCHCOCK  
*On his mission in life:*  
*"To scare the hell out of people."*

*"Psycho gave me very wrinkled skin. I was in that shower scene for seven days – 70 set-ups. At least he made sure the water was warm."*

JANET LEIGH

For this resource, the study of **narrative** has been chosen as a focus for study in preparation for a coursework unit (it could easily be divided into smaller units if desired) for NEAB GCSE English, but it could be adapted to other syllabuses to produce creative writing, as indicated below. References to **Tasks** in bold correspond to those in the **Students' Notes**.

## ■ NARRATIVE IN HITCHCOCK

TEXT *Rear Window* (1954)

In the NEAB syllabus the Media unit of coursework "should demonstrate the candidate's ability to **analyse, review and comment** on features of media texts..." (NEAB 1999/2000 syllabus). It also stipulates that "Where a film or video version of a text is the subject of a coursework response, there must be analysis and review of the **medium**." These should inform the learning outcomes of each specific task or coursework assignment. Specific learning outcomes should be clearly stated

to pupils before each element of the scheme of work is undertaken as it is important, especially if this kind of study is new to them (and especially if they think they are just watching a film), precisely why they are doing it.

The study of Hitchcock's films offers an excellent opportunity to study the **medium** of film as they are less about the mere visual illustration of a story and more about **how** to tell a story in moving images, sound and editing.

In English, pupils learn how writers create **narrative, characters** and **themes** using written language, structured as poems, plays, novels and short stories. Films use the language of the medium of film, which is complete with its own grammar, syntax and the style of the "author".

Hitchcock has been frequently credited with the status of author, or "auteur" as French film theorists referred to great directors, because his authorial presence is inscribed within the themes and stylistic motifs of all of his films. This is what makes him very suitable for study on an English GCSE course.

The opening few scenes of *Rear Window* are very rewarding to study with pupils of all abilities, as they are an exercise in **pure film narration**, mostly (for the first 3 minutes 40 seconds) without any spoken words. This unit and its tasks encourage pupils to look very carefully at how all of the elements of film language are constructed to create a vital component of any narrative: to engage the audience.

Pupils may initially find that the film is slow (a perennial problem with using any films but high-action ones), however, with repeated viewing, pupils notice more and more details that the director and his team have created. It is fair to say that study of all aspects of film language, especially narrative structure, helps to develop transferable skills when returning to analysis of the construction of literary texts. For most of our pupils, after verbal communication, the visual medium of the moving image, in television programmes and films, is more primary than the written one. Yet there is little opportunity to study precisely **how it is constructed**. With this focus, the study of film and more traditional literary texts is entirely complementary and goes beyond the more obvious, though legitimate, comparisons of the book and the film of the book.

One of the frequent concerns of teachers when teaching about film, if they have little or no Media or Film Studies training, is the lack of knowledge of film terms. However, in the case of this and similar activities, this is not a significant problem. It is important, and motivating, for pupils (of all abilities) to learn some camera and editing terms (they probably know many already) and it will help them to be specific and clear in their writing.

There is a basic list of useful terms in the **Students' Notes** and it is unlikely that they will need any more advanced terms. If you want additional terms, they may be found in most GCSE and A level Media Studies textbooks or a video skills manual. You could provide a short glossary worksheet for them, or you could engage the pupils in researching and producing their own glossary. If you would like to investigate film language and narrative structure in greater detail yourself, there are several useful titles in the bibliography provided.

## ■ A SUGGESTED SCHEME OF WORK FOR 6/7 WEEKS

### AIMS

- To introduce the study of narrative in films
- To compare film language with that of literary texts

### PRE-SCREENING PREPARATION

- An introduction to Hitchcock using the biography provided or other sources. Discussion of what pupils already know about Hitchcock and his films.
- Study of the components of written language and narrative structure and investigation into the film language equivalents, for example, by comparison of the similarities and differences between novels and films. **(Task 1.1)**
- Screen *Rear Window*. Ideally films should be seen once through at the cinema, but the reality of timetables and challenging classes makes this impossible for most schools. Therefore, the following are suggested:
  - a) screen the film on video without interruption by teacher (in two or more parts, if necessary, preferably with a re-cap between screenings)
  - b) or by watching it in parts with regular interventions by teacher in the form of open questions to the class at significant moments ("Why did he say that? What does this look/sound like? What do you think will happen next?") to increase pupil concentration and involvement.

### POST SCREENING ACTIVITIES AND COURSEWORK SUGGESTIONS

#### 1. The minor characters

- **(Task 1.2)** A second screening is very useful, especially for this activity. Assign the minor characters (Miss Torso, Miss Lonely-Hearts, Lars Thorwald, the musician, the sculptress, etc.) to small groups to make notes through the second screening of the film to collect information about their individual narratives. This can be shared with the rest of the class to prepare for the following written assignments.
- **(Task 1.3)** Pupils could individually or in groups draw a diagram representing where everyone lives in the apartments Jeff can see from his rear window. The purpose of this would be to increase pupil engagement with the clever construction of the sense of place and the relationship of all of the characters in this drama. It would also support the following work.

### COURSEWORK ESSAY SUGGESTION

- **(Task 1.4)** Pupils could choose one of the minor characters to write either a diary or a first person narrative of their individual perspective of the murderous events in their neighbourhood or "a day in the life of" piece about a typical day for that character.

#### 1. Film Language – creating narrative and character

- **(Task 2.1)** Study of the openings of novels, short stories and films.
- **(Task 2.2)** Pupils to produce a storyboard for the opening sequence of a novel or short story.



- **(Task 2.3)** This uses detailed study of the opening sequence from the credits to the arrival of the main character's nurse, the first 7 minutes 46 seconds. The sequence should be watched several times and it is important to make pupils aware that, like studying a literary text in small bits, repeatedly, this is far from how it was intended to be read/watched. The purpose is to reveal how it was constructed, the film language techniques used and the effect on the audience. The danger is always that a section of a text can be "done to death".
- Divide pupils into small group to make notes, with a specific focus (e.g. one for sound, one character, music, lighting, set, camera movement etc.), and report back to the rest of the class; this increases their concentration during the process of collecting textual evidence for their written analysis.
- The outcome is an essay that could be used for coursework.

### COURSEWORK ESSAY SUGGESTION (TASK 2.4)

- *Discuss the ways in which Hitchcock sets the scene for the audience in the opening minutes of his film **Rear Window** (1954)*

There are many other essay possibilities, which include the rest of the film, for example:

- a character sketch of L B Jefferies
- a discussion of the importance of the theme of marriage, or privacy, in the film.

These approaches may be successfully used with any Hitchcock, or other, film. The **Students' Notes** will be most effective if you go through them with the students; they contain a great deal of material which could be easily divided into individual sessions and the process may take much more time than you think, because the pupils will want to share their observations.

## ■ TASK 1: FILM LANGUAGE

Written language uses words arranged in sentences and paragraphs. Writers choose particular adjectives or metaphors to tell us about places and people. In a similar way, films have shots arranged into scenes and sequences. Film directors choose lighting effects and camera angles to tell us about people and places. Before you study a few scenes from one film in particular, take time to consider the relationship between film and literary texts (novels, plays and poems) and how they communicate stories, ideas and emotions to us.

### TASK 1.1

- Create and complete a table with two columns, that compares the components of written language with film language
- Try to pair the ones that are the same and show which ones are different
- Have a go at finding an example for each one, if possible, from a novel or poem you have read recently
- Consider what the specific function of each component is

### TASK 1.2

Track one of the minor characters throughout the film, collecting information about what we learn about their life, personality and point of view.

### TASK 1.3

- Draw a diagram of the view through Jeff's window. Try to work out the spatial relationship of the apartments to Jeff's and label it with who lives there.

### TASK 1.4

#### CREATIVE WRITING

- Choose one of the minor characters and write one of the following:
  - a) a diary for the period of the murder and Jeff's investigations
  - b) a first person narrative of their point of view of the murderous events
  - c) a day (or week) in the life of this character before the murder
  - d) a character sketch using third person narrative

## ■ TASK 2: FILM NARRATIVE – OPENINGS

Everyone loves a good story, whether it is real or made up. Hitchcock loved a good story, but more than that, he loved to entertain and thrill an audience. He would do this by keeping the audience in suspense, eager to find out what will happen to the hero in the end. Or squirming in our seats because we know something that the character on screen doesn't.

But, in the case of every film, before the audience can get involved with the details of the plot and its outcome, they first need to have some essential information about location, characters and clues to the plot. The verb “**narrate**”, means to tell a story and the telling of the story is the **narrative**. In a novel, for example, the story may be narrated by a character (first person “I” narrative) or by an objective narrator (in the third person “She/They” narrative).

### TASK 2.1

- Look at the opening pages of a selection of novels or short stories and study how location, time, mood, character and plot are established. Try to identify the narrator.

In a film, there are additional ways of telling a story, creating a narrative using film language, rather than just with words.

- Study the opening 5 minutes or so of a variety of films and see how they establish the above elements with images, lighting, action, music and dialogue.

### TASK 2.2

#### PRACTICAL

- Produce a storyboard of shots you would choose to open a film version of a novel or short story of your choice. Write an analysis of your own narrative construction.

HITCHCOCK ON HITCHCOCK  
*“Always make the audience suffer as much as possible.”*

### TASK 2.3

#### FILM LANGUAGE – TECHNICAL TERMS

- Find out the definitions of the film terms below and create a worksheet of them to help you with your analysis
- Using your glossary of terms, try to identify which components of film language are used, where and why, in the opening few minutes of Hitchcock's *Rear Window*.

## *Useful terms*

#### Camera shots

- close-up, medium shot, long shot, wide shot, establishing shot, low/high angle shot, framing

#### Camera movement

- pan, track, crane, zoom, reverse zoom, tilt

#### Editing

- cut, montage, fade in/out, dissolve, superimpose, slow-motion

#### Sound

- soundtrack, musical score, sound mixing and editing

#### Other useful terms

- scene, sequence, set, mise-en-scène, lighting, actor, extra, theme, narrative, style, genre



## TASK 3: TELLING A STORY – THE CONSTRUCTION OF NARRATIVE

The **genre** of *Rear Window* is, on the surface, a whodunit, a murder mystery or thriller. But it also contains several themes: what they are is for you to find out in the course of watching the film. However, the film is very famous for being, almost like, a visual essay on how an audience responds to watching a film at the cinema.

### TASK 3.1

- The similarities between us, the audience watching the film at the cinema or on video, and the position of the main character, Jeff, are signalled to us in the opening few minutes of the film. Can you find where this is and what the similarities are?

Now, to study the opening minutes of the film in detail, you will need to look and listen very carefully. Use these questions to help you to analyse the narrative techniques used. It is very important that you give more than one word answers and provide **evidence** from the film for your answers to earn marks for analysis. Remember every shot, angle, sound and object was chosen very carefully to tell the story, so don't miss anything! Explain in detail the **reasons** for your answers. This is a crucial aspect of academic work, as you need to give textual evidence to back up your points. This is an important way of testing whether your points are convincing or not.



There are very few spoken words in the first few minutes of this film, but we know where we are, where the apartments are in relations to the open window and we know a bit about Jeff, the main character. Perhaps we have also got some clues as to what the story will be about? How is this done?

### TASK 3.2

Watch the first few minutes of the film, up to where the nurse arrives, and time each short sequence. Then divide each sequence into sections to collect notes with these headings e.g. credit sequence, apartments opposite the window, Jeff's apartment, Jeff's telephone conversation.

- The credit sequence opens with window blinds being rolled up slowly. What does this remind you of and why might it be a good way to start a film?
- Listen to the music. Which instruments can you hear? Does it remind you of anything? What kind of mood does the music create?
- Who, or what, is the narrator here? What points of view are we given?
- Where are we?
- What time of day/year is it?
- What is the weather like?
- What sounds can you hear?
- Who can you see and what have you learned about them?
- The main character, played by James Stewart, is L B Jefferies. What do you learn about him, from a) purely visual information b) from his telephone conversation?
- What do you think the story of the film will be about?

You will need to watch this section of the film at least four times to collect detailed notes. Develop and structure your notes to prepare for your essay on the construction of narrative.

### COURSEWORK ESSAY

- Discuss the narrative techniques used by Hitchcock to set the scene for the audience in *Rear Window* (1954).

#### HITCHCOCK ON HITCHCOCK

*"When an actor comes to me and wants to discuss his character, I say, It's in the script. If he says, But what's my motivation? I say, your salary."*

# GCSE Media Studies Teachers' Notes

The study of a specific film is a suitable coursework assignment for all syllabuses (provided a specific focus for learning outcomes is chosen, for example, by highlighting one particular syllabus concept) and the following films are recommended at this level: *The 39 Steps*, *Rebecca*, *Sabotage*, *The Lady Vanishes*, *North by Northwest*, *Rear Window*, *To Catch a Thief*, *Dial M for Murder*, *Strangers on a Train*, *Shadow of a Doubt*, *The Birds*, *Psycho*, *The Trouble With Harry* and *Torn Curtain*.

A study of Hitchcock's work can be used specifically for the OCR GCSE Media Studies syllabus in the following ways as:

- a case study for the Section B topic on Film Promotion;
- a coursework assignment on Film Promotion (provided this topic is not chosen for the exam).

However, the following scheme of work can be easily adapted to the coursework requirements of other syllabuses.

## Hitchcock and Film Promotion

Texts: *Dial M for Murder* (1954), *Psycho* (1960) and *The Birds* (1963)

Other Texts: *A Perfect Murder* (Andrew Davies 1998) and *Psycho* (Gus Van Sant 1998)

It is not necessary to watch all of the above films for this unit of work but *The Birds* should be watched, preferably at the cinema, if possible, with a video version available for follow-up study. The posters for all films will be required. It would be fair to say that *A Perfect Murder* does not claim to be a re-make, but is closely based on Hitchcock's *Dial M for Murder*.

## A suggested scheme of work for 6/7 weeks:

This scheme of work contains a great deal of activities that can be extended or curtailed depending on the elements you wish to follow.

### Aims:

- To study and compare the various methods used to promote films (in general and/or by Hitchcock)
- To produce a promotional package for a re-make of Hitchcock's *The Birds* (you may choose another Hitchcock film if you wish)
- To demonstrate analytical, evaluative and practical skills

### Resources:

**Internet movie database** ([www.imdb.com](http://www.imdb.com))

Reviews, production information and film posters are available on this site. It is an invaluable resource for teachers and pupils alike and contains at least one poster for every film listed but also some links to many websites dedicated specifically to poster archives. It is worth printing colour copies of the posters required and to laminate or cover in clear plastic to protect them.

### **Official sites**

There are many official sites for recent films maintained by distribution companies. They can also be reached via the Internet movie database and many are very elaborate containing production notes, trailers, stills and extra information. The two recent Hitchcock re-makes used in this unit, have official sites by Warner Bros., *A Perfect Murder* and Universal for *Psycho* which should be accessed during this unit.

### **Teaching Packs**

The Film Education Film Industry Pack contains a great deal of essential information about the stages of film production, distribution and exhibition, together with useful wall charts and a video. Their Study Guides (and the Film Ed. website link to *A Bug's Life*) are also very useful for industry examples of promotional methods as well as teaching approaches.

### **Pre-screening activities**

In advance of this unit (preferably before a major school holiday when many films are being released) ask students to collect materials for a forthcoming film release (e.g. newspaper/magazine reviews, merchandise, food tie-ins, flyers, posters, website info., TV trailers etc.) to create a dossier for later reference.

Teacher to start unit by teaching a brief overview of the three stages of film-making to provide context (use Film Education Film Industry pack).

In small groups, pupils share their film promotion dossiers and develop a brainstorm of all of the promotional methods discovered from evidence collected. From this, each group to create a classroom wallchart, illustrated by examples, of the range of methods of film promotion used in general.

### **TASK 1.1**

Teacher to provide a biographical profile of Hitchcock, particularly looking at his involvement in the promotion of his own films (e.g. the original *Psycho* trailer featuring him is on one of the video versions of the film).

Pupils to produce a textual analysis essay (this could comprise a coursework task in its own right if desired) of the original posters for Hitchcock's *Dial M for Murder* and *Psycho*. They should examine the use of colour, layout, words and images as well as identifying the methods used and their function.

Reference to additional Hitchcock posters or to the marketing of Hitchcock on video (e.g. the Universal Collection video covers and trailers) may be made if desired. The trailers for the original films and the re-makes, either on the internet or at the front of some video versions, can be accessed which will make for interesting comparison.

### **TASK 1.2**

Coursework essay/Exam question essay suggestion: Compare the originals with the posters for the 1998 re-makes of both *Dial M for Murder* and *Psycho* to produce a coursework essay concentrating on the methods used to market Hitchcock past and present. Teacher to devise an essay title as appropriate to assessment.

### **Screening**

Watch *The Birds* through once (see notes in GCSE English section for advice on screening in class).

## **Post screening activities**

### **TASK 1.3**

Coursework practical

Produce a production and promotion package for a re-make of *The Birds*.

This may be done individually or in small groups. Either way, there should be the opportunity for pupils to share and evaluate their final package in a small group. Display and discussion of each other's work should be encouraged.

Pupils to produce an individual written evaluation of their package (it is a good idea to produce a worksheet for them on what an evaluation should contain). De-brief with pupils on the whole unit.

# GCSE Media Studies Students' Notes

As your preliminary work should have shown you, film promotion is an essential part of the film industry. Alfred Hitchcock knew this very early on in his career and was closely involved in the promotion of many of his own films.

In this unit you should learn the following:

- The various methods used to promote a film to audiences.
- The methods used to promote the films of Alfred Hitchcock, past and present.
- Textual analysis, practical and evaluative skills.
- How to create and evaluate a production and promotion package for a re-make of Hitchcock's *The Birds*.

## TASK 1.1

Produce a detailed textual analysis of the original posters for Hitchcock's film *Dial M for Murder* (1954) and *Psycho* (1960).

You should include:

The use of typography, colour, layout, words and images.

The use of the director, stars, genre and other industry information.

And how these are intended to attract an audience.

## TASK 1.2

Write an essay comparing the original posters with those for the 1998 re-makes, *A Perfect Murder* (Andrew Davies, Warner Bros.) and *Psycho* (Gus Van Sant, Universal).

In addition to the above points for Task 1.1, you should concentrate on the similarities and differences in the way in which the films are marketed, then and now?

## TASK 1.3

**Production simulation:** Create a production and promotion package for a re-make of Hitchcock's 1963 classic, *The Birds*.

Here are the original taglines for *The Birds*:

"Suspense and shock beyond anything you have seen or imagined!"

"It could be the most terrifying motion picture ever made!"

"Nothing you have ever witnessed before could prepare you for such sheer stabbing shock!"

Firstly, research and write an introduction to the project, which includes the following:

- Write your own personal review of the film.
- Try to find out how Hitchcock promoted *The Birds* before its American release.
- Analyse the original poster (and trailer, if available).
- Why would a re-make of *The Birds* be considered? Would you make any changes to the story, time or location (you could research the original novel by Daphne du Maurier)? If so, why?
- Produce an audience profile, based on market research. Who would go to see a re-make of such a classic and why? Who could you persuade and how?

**Production package**

This could contain the following:

- A compilation of original and subsequent reviews for the film.
- A plot synopsis, together with a list of locations.
- Suggestions for new casting with a list of actors of previous roles.
- Suggestions for a director, with previous films (and any other personnel, such as producer, production designer, soundtrack composer etc.).
- A press release or EPK (electronic press kit) announcing the re-make to generate interest possibly including stills (depending on how inventive you feel!).

**Promotion package**

This could contain the following:

- A brief overview of the USP (unique selling point) and timing of the promotion campaign.
- Poster designs in several drafts.
- Suggestions for taglines.
- Storyboard and script (drawn or photographed) for a cinema or television trailer.
- Suggestions for website, merchandise and tie-ins as appropriate.

**Evaluation**

Write a textual analysis of your poster designs and storyboard. Evaluate the effectiveness of your simulation package. This should be done with as wide an audience as possible.



A study of Hitchcock's work can be used within the OCR A Level syllabus as (some activities are also suitable for other syllabuses):

- an auteur study examining his signature style and recurring themes
- individual student research papers on single films or comparisons of two or more films
- a case study for British Cinema of the 1930s and 40s
- a case study of the strengths and weaknesses of the Hollywood studio system 1930-59
- practical production exercises in montage editing

Below is an additional approach to Hitchcock's work that would be compatible with any A level syllabus and is considered to be a good introduction to film study and the work of Hitchcock. However, it will not be sufficient in itself to meet the topic demands of any syllabus. Reference could also be made to the other activities contained in this book, as they could be adapted easily, especially the **A level Film Studies** material.

## ■ TEXTUAL ANALYSIS SKILLS

TEXT *North by Northwest* (1959)

Textual analysis is a reading skill. Whether students approach it from the perspective of semiological theory or not is largely irrelevant. The act, or art, of **looking closely** at, and **asking questions** of, a text is more important. The term **deconstruction** has negative associations of dissection and destruction, but nevertheless, the film was **constructed**, scene by scene and frame by frame, and deconstruction involves the study of **how** it was put together.

The danger is that this kind of detailed analysis can ruin students' enjoyment of a text; the same risks are involved with the study of fine art, literature or music. But it is possible for such study to enhance students' appreciation and enjoyment of film as film, as well as a text to be examined. It is important to make students, at any level, understand that the process of repeated screening and analysis is an artificial, academic one, not intended by the film makers (or is it, in this age of the digital freeze frame when we can rewind and replay our favourite scenes?).

It is also important to understand that detailed textual analysis, or deconstruction, is not an end in itself. It is the reading skill that allows deeper analysis of a film's meanings and significance for the individual student, or for a wider audience, and their interpretations, including critical perspectives from academics. The next stage is to provide students with extracts of critical writing (see bibliography for suggestions) which they can consider in their study of particular films and respond to.

Reading skills should encompass the understanding of the spoken and written word, as well as images and sound/music (a much neglected subject for study). Incidentally, there is an excellent documentary on the composer Bernard Herrmann, ***Music for the Movies: Bernard Herrmann*** (Channel 4 1999), as well as some essays analysing his scores for Hitchcock on a Hitchcock website if you would like to explore this dimension. Enlist a music colleague to help you to prepare analyses of

specific passages from some Hitchcock scores to see what their reading is and to learn their critical language.

Reading skills are vital as they provide the textual evidence for analysis of whole-text aspects such as narrative structure, debates on representation, ideological interpretations etc. Too often, students' examination answers are vague and superficial because they are not rooted in close observation and supported by specific textual examples.

Students can progress from the exercises in these notes to study of the film ***North by Northwest*** as a whole and it is evident that close analysis creates confidence and critical autonomy in the student. When next applied, students will notice much more, more quickly, as their eyes and ears will have been trained to be attentive and perceptive. The art to avoiding tedium is not to "do anything to death" and it is particularly important for the teacher to demonstrate textual analysis first with a film which enthuses them as this will be communicated positively to the students.

The work below obviously cannot be undertaken for every Hitchcock film that you wish to study as it would take several years! Please see the **Teachers' Notes** in the **A level Film Studies** section regarding approaches to student presentations and independent research to cover several films. It is important that clear and specific learning outcomes are planned for each unit of study. It is also important to make reference to the syllabus requirements, past examination papers, mark schemes and Chief Examiners' reports in order to ensure that any scheme of work is tied to the syllabus being followed.

## ■ A SUGGESTED SCHEME OF WORK FOR 3/4 WEEKS

### AIMS

- To teach detailed textual analysis
- To introduce and/or demonstrate understanding of film study terms

### PRE-SCREENING ACTIVITIES

- Introduce students to life and work of Hitchcock, discuss their expectations and what they already know and have seen of his work.

### SCREENING

- Watch ***North by Northwest*** preferably at the cinema, with a video copy available for follow-up study.

### POST-SCREENING ACTIVITIES

#### TASK 1.1

- Using the commentary in the **Students' Notes**, watch opening five minutes several times to make notes to write an essay

#### TASKS 1.2 and 2

Analysis, to be written or conducted as class discussion.

#### TASK 3

Students to use open questions provided to progress to their own analysis of the auction room scene from ***North by Northwest*** for an essay.



TEXT *North by Northwest* (1959)  
CAST Cary Grant (Roger Thornhill);  
Eve Marie-Saint (Eve Kendall);  
James Mason (Phillip Vandamm).

## TEXTUAL ANALYSIS: ESTABLISHING CHARACTER, PLOT & THEMES

This section offers a brief textual analysis of the opening of *North by Northwest* and provides some ideas about how to approach textual analysis. The aim is to introduce some important terms and concepts for further study. After this there are questions to help you do your own analysis of the **set-piece** scene in the auction room.

### TASK 1

- Write a detailed textual analysis demonstrating how the first five minutes establish the characters, plot and themes of Hitchcock's film *North by Northwest* (1959).

## OPENING TITLE SEQUENCE (2 MINS)

### TASK 1.1

- Watch this sequence several times using the commentary below and add your own observations and examples.

HITCHCOCK ON HITCHCOCK

*"I didn't say actors are cattle. I said they should be treated like cattle."*

Hitchcock presents us with an **image system** for the film from the opening of the **title sequence**. He holds the attention of the audience with a lurid bright green screen, with parallel lines drawn across, which eventually fades to reveal the **establishing shot** of the front of a Manhattan skyscraper reflecting the busy Madison Avenue world in which the **hero**, Roger Thornhill, resides.

An image system is one way in which a director can give coherence of style and visual effect, while underlining the **subtextual themes** of the whole **narrative**. The use of shapes, patterns, **camera shots, movement and angles**, dress codes, sets, movement of characters, **visual motifs**, are all put to use in such signifying practices. In the film parallel lines are used in many of the **set pieces** and **set-ups** and are an important part of the **mise-en-scène**.

### TASK FOR LATER

Look for evidence of these parallel lines in:

- the cropduster scene
- the auction room scene
- the set design of the Townsend/Vandamm library
- the set design of Vandamm's house near Mount Rushmore (a Frank Lloyd Wright design)
- roads and rail networks.

The **title** of the film is a direction – north-by-northwest – the one which the hero takes in the film. It's also an **allusion** to a line from Hamlet:

*"I am but mad north-north-west; when the wind is southerly I know a hawk from a handsaw"* [II.ii]

when Hamlet feigns an act of lunacy. The fact that appearances can be deceptive, an important aspect of the film, is signalled at the outset of the film. On the other hand, Hitchcock denied a deliberate allusion when questioned, but the reference is still one that might work within the minds of some viewers.

While the credits are rolling we also hear the now famous **musical score** by Bernard Herrmann, a boldly dramatic start with a foreboding theme of danger and excitement, relentlessly taking us to the appearance of Hitchcock himself as he misses the bus. The **orchestration** consists of an imbalance on the woodwind section, with heavy emphasis on bass clarinets and percussion – a perfect match for Hitchcock's melodramatic style.

But the director does more than this. He presents us with a **montage** of people going about their busy lives, in a hectic and frenetic world:

- street scene of people walking in direct lines
- a subway entrance sucking the people in
- crowds crossing the roads
- people descending large concrete staircases
- two women fighting for the same cab.

This world is not immediately attractive, but it is the one in which our hero feels secure. It is the establishment of the **equilibrium** that the hero enjoys and which is about to be dramatically disrupted by the intervention of the **villain**.



HITCHCOCK ON HITCHCOCK

*"The length of a film should be directly related to the endurance of the human bladder."*

*"The Donald Spoto biography of Hitchcock was absolute nonsense. Hitchcock couldn't have been a nicer fellow. I whistled coming to work."*

CARY GRANT



## ■ OPENING SCENES (3 MINS)

The lift opens and the **plot** begins. The **appearance** of Roger Thornhill is very important: he is immaculately attired in a light grey, single-breasted suit and, superficially, he is a sophisticated, witty, advertising executive. He is also shot from a low angle to emphasise his status. It is demonstrated to the audience, however, that he has talents, abilities and an attitude to life that helps us to **believe** how he will cope with the demands placed upon him in the ensuing narrative. Hitchcock said that he placed ordinary men in bizarre situations, and this is partly the appeal of his films.

### TASK 1.2

What do the following tell us about Roger Thornhill?

- He has to dictate on the move.
- He doesn't carry a briefcase.
- His secretary organises his life and reminds him of important details.
- He is friendly to the elevator man.
- He sends flowers and excuses to his lady friends.
- He is personally known to the waiter in the hotel.
- He feels heavy – so he needs to “think thin.”
- He is going to the theatre with his mother in the evening.
- The way he walks.
- He works in advertising – is this relevant?
- His name.
- The casting of Cary Grant
- What else have you noticed?

An interesting aspect of his behaviour is when he steals the taxi-cab from a man in the street by lying that his secretary is unwell and needs the cab urgently. His defence is that it made the man a Samaritan, and that in advertising lying is merely “expedient exaggeration” – a hint of a major **theme** to come when the truth becomes very elusive for both him and the audience.

When he arrives at a very grand hotel for his business meeting one of the men remarks how much he can tolerate alcohol – “no-one faster coming down the home straight” – and again **foreshadows** his escape from the villains when he is drunk in the car.

Hitchcock, in great style, has established the **setting** and the **protagonist**, but so far, the major **storyline** has not really started. So how does the director do it? As Thornhill explains to his colleagues that he needs to send a telegram to his mother, we hear the name “George Kaplan” being paged in the background not once, but five times. Thornhill clicks his fingers and shouts “Boy” and the main narrative has begun. Hitchcock **pans** to the left and **zooms** in on the two **stereotypical** East-European henchmen, who were previously **framed** in the top right hand corner of the previous shot; in other words, we have already seen them without realising who they are – it reinforces the reality of the space in the *mise-en-scène*. This moment is called the **inciting incident**: it is the point in the narrative when the main **plot** is kick-started into **action**.

Of course, the film revolves around the issue of mistaken identity, one of Hitchcock's favourite themes. An innocent man being in the wrong place at the wrong time; or, in this case, he clicks his fingers and is suddenly taken into the bizarre world of a Hitchcock narrative.

When Thornhill is abducted by the two villains he asks a number of questions. In fact, he asks the kind of questions the audience are probably asking themselves. These questions are called **enigmas**, and at the end of the plot all major and minor enigmas will be **resolved** and the equilibrium will be established again, albeit with important **changes**. The **conflict** that has now been introduced is the engine that drives the narrative and puts the hero under stress. Conflict is essential in any narrative to engage the viewer's attention and emotions. Notice also that the audience will share Thornhill's **point-of-view** for a substantial part of the film.

Finally, when we look at the **genre** of this film (cold-war romantic-comedy-thriller) it is not difficult to see that in some ways it is a prototype for James Bond, at least in **style** and **characterisation**. Grant brought a lightness of touch to the role that kept it constantly good-humoured. In fact, despite his age, Grant was originally offered the role of Bond after making *North by Northwest* but didn't want to be tied down to a three picture deal.

### TASK 2

#### CLOSURE

As a comparison you might like to look at the closure of the narrative and see the economy with which Hitchcock brings the film to an end. The sequence from the point where Thornhill and Kendall are hanging off Mount Rushmore to the end of the film is only 47 seconds long.

- How many enigmas are answered in those 47 seconds and how does Hitchcock do it?
- Find out what a “MacGuffin” is and see how it fits into those 47 seconds.

### TASK 3

#### ANALYSING THE AUCTION ROOM SCENE

By answering the following questions prepare notes to write an essay demonstrating a detailed textual analysis of this scene.

- 1 How is the camera used in this scene? Consider distance, movement and angle.
- 2 Vandamm's ‘ownership’ of Eve is subtextually evident in a number of places. Where can you spot this and what is its relationship to the auction setting? Does his attitude change at any point?
- 3 Describe the *mise-en-scène* of the auction room? Where is the image system of parallel lines evident and what effect does it have.
- 4 There are a couple of master shots in operation. How and why are they used?
- 5 How is the climax of the scene achieved?
- 6 What is the change in Thornhill's character by this point in the film and how is it evident?
- 7 Vandamm refers to Thornhill overplaying his various roles. How does this relate to major themes in the film?
- 8 What new enigmas are created in this scene? Are any resolved?
- 9 The “MacGuffin” appears. What is it and why is it important?



A study of Hitchcock's work can be undertaken for examination or coursework assessment of the WJEC A Level Film Studies syllabus content, in particular for:

- Film Form and Film Narrative
- Critical Approaches to Hollywood
- Critical Approaches to British Cinema

It is important to have specific learning outcomes clearly in mind when devising a scheme of work. This is especially so when there is so much to learn about Hitchcock and the danger is that students will become overwhelmed. Look carefully at the syllabus and its guidance on assessment (as well as past examination papers and Chief Examiner's reports) to decide how best to approach a study of Hitchcock. Different emphases may be chosen from a wide variety of aspects of study according to the method of syllabus assessment chosen.

These emphases might include:

- Auteur study
- Production and promotion history
- The influences on Hitchcock's work, including German Expressionism
- Hitchcock's relationships with producer David O. Selznick, Paramount and Universal and/or his stars
- Hitchcock's men and women – representation and ideology
- Narrative and suspense
- Use of *mise-en-scène* and *mise-en-shot*
- Genre
- Readings of sections of an individual film or comparisons of two films

Films to be recommended for study at this level are:

All of them! Choose films that are accessible to you, appropriate to the level of your students and that you will be enthusiastic about teaching. For this resource, the study of Hitchcock as an **auteur** has been chosen.

## ■ AUTEUR STUDY OF HITCHCOCK

Hitchcock's films offer an embarrassment of riches for Film Studies teachers and students alike and he is an obvious and popular choice of director for questions on auteur study. What follows is a suggested, but not exclusive, approach for teaching this aspect of Hitchcock.

It goes without saying that the nature of auteur study can only be undertaken after consideration of several of a director's films and this always presents a challenge to teachers with the constraints of timetables and the demands of covering any syllabus. Therefore, this scheme of work is predicated on **independent student research**, in order to cover his work in sufficient breadth and depth within the available timetable as well as to develop these important learning skills. It is of course, perfectly acceptable to teach the same content in a traditional lecture/seminar way. The topic culminates in asking students to study *Vertigo* (1958), for many, the most perfect, personal and important film of his oeuvre, in the context of a preliminary study of his other films to assess the claims for auteur status. *Vertigo* should be watched in its entirety, preferably at the cinema.

Making your own extracts from a selection of Hitchcock's films can afford a useful introduction (or, even better, encouraging your students to do it as indicated below), as are some of the television profiles that have been made over the years, BBC2's *Reputations* (June 1999) being the most recent. Please note that it is possible for schools and colleges to gain access to the off-air video libraries of universities and colleges of Higher Education. The new Universal Hitchcock collection on video includes useful extra features, such as trailers and documentaries, for example on the Universal restoration of *Vertigo*. Students will need advice with sources of research and access to materials. The internet has some useful academic and industry material and Hitchcock specific websites are included in the bibliography of this booklet.

## ■ A SUGGESTED SCHEME OF WORK FOR 6/7 WEEKS

### AIMS

- To prepare students for the auteur question (although more than one director should be referred to in the exam) in the Critical Approaches to Hollywood paper
- To engage students in detailed textual analysis of a single film (preparation for Film Form and Film Narrative exam paper or for coursework in a reading, practical project or essay)
- To develop independent research skills

### PRE-SCREENING ACTIVITIES

- Supply definitions of the term **auteur**, explain origins of the term and outline areas of debate to the class or set students to do this individually or in small groups (**TASK 1.1**)
- Using extracts or video biographies to introduce the topic to class
- To cope with the demand of watching a number of films in class, an effective way to cover a great deal of ground and increase student engagement, is to divide students into groups to study a different Hitchcock film of your choice, independently. They need to make notes and select extracts on video for a presentation to the rest of the class. (**TASK 1.2**)
- De-brief presentations, compiling observations, perhaps by making a grid or worksheets of the major points arising from them, for example, **narrative structure, themes, use of *mise-en-scène* and *mise-en-shot*, music, representation and ideology and production context**, all with references to key scenes for later reference for their essays.
- Initial demonstration of the ways in which Hitchcock's work may be seen as the work of an auteur – production of a worksheet summary for whole class use for drafting of essay.

### POST-SCREENING ACTIVITIES

- Collection and examination of a selection of existing critical responses to *Vertigo* (**TASK 2.1**)
- Application of the above major points of analysis in *Vertigo* to consider conclusions and drafting of essay (**TASK 2.2**)
- Essay tasks (**TASK 2.3**)
  - a) A past paper essay question on auteur study
  - b) An essay question on *Vertigo* – to be designed by student (individually or in small groups)
- Coursework opportunity – to be devised by you as appropriate



## HITCHCOCK AS AUTEUR

Hitchcock was a highly visible director. He never shunned publicity, made fleeting cameo appearances in his own films and agreed to many interviews. He also used himself in his cinema trailers and even had a TV series in the 50s named after him, *Alfred Hitchcock Presents ...* Reviewers and film fans alike use the term 'Hitchcockian' to describe classic moments of his own work and that of other directors' films. In his foreword to Dan Aulier's "*Vertigo*. The Making of a Hitchcock Classic", Martin Scorsese sees *Vertigo* as Hitchcock's most personal work and the one that bears the strongest signature of the author, despite the constraints of the Hollywood studio system.

Hitchcock used the term "pure cinema" to describe the entirely personal signature that he used to 'sign' his work. So what was this individual signature based on and is it appropriate to study films in this way?

Simply, the term 'auteur' is French for 'author'. However, the term is used, judgementally, to describe directors who have attained the status of an artist or author, rather than a mere technician (or metteur-en-scène) and who have superseded the material a film was derived from, to produce a uniquely personal film that can be identified as their own. In his interviews, Hitchcock used many analogies for the process of film making from painting and composing music; he was scornful of critics who emphasised his technical skills or "tricks" and demanded the same respect afforded to more conventional definitions of art. However, debate is focused on the essentially **collaborative** nature of film making which makes claims of authorship very difficult, especially when many directors rely regularly on the same lighting cameraman or editor.



### QUESTION

- Many moments from Hitchcock's films have been described as 'typical Hitchcock' – which other directors could have the status of auteur claimed for them and why?

Auteur theory has been the source of critical debate on film since the 1950s. It can be grouped into the following theories or stages:

- **Auteur policy in France** – in the writings of critic/film makers in *Les Cahiers du Cinema*, by Truffaut, Chabrol, Rohmer, Rivette and Godard (1950s)
- **Auteur policy in Britain** – in the writings of the critics in *Movie* magazine, by Perkins, Shivas, Cameron and Mayersberg (1960s)
- **Auteur theory in North America** – the writings of Andrew Sarris (1960s)

The debate has continued since the sixties and John Caughie's book, "Theories of Authorship", is useful to outline them, but the work of Robin Wood (especially with reference to Hitchcock), John Ellis and Peter Wollen are also useful for research.

The construction and promotion of the auteur by the use of the director's name in contemporary film marketing has become very far removed from the original definitions of the term, being principally motivated by the economics of the film industry.

### RESEARCH

- Try to find examples from the work of a number of contemporary directors in recent years. What is this use of the director's name based on? Is it effective?

### TASK 1.1

- Undertake research on the origins and definitions of auteur study, including challenges to the theories, and produce your own detailed summary of notes – you will need them to write the essay at the end of the topic.

### TASK 1.2

- In your group, prepare a presentation on the film you have been given. You should prepare a worksheet for the rest of the class that summarises your main points. You should research its production history and context, analysis of its key scenes, critical perspectives and the hallmarks of Hitchcock's authorial signature. Remember, your presentation will be used by you and the whole class to inform your essay and exam preparation.

*"I've never seen Hitchcock look through a camera – some directors never stop."*

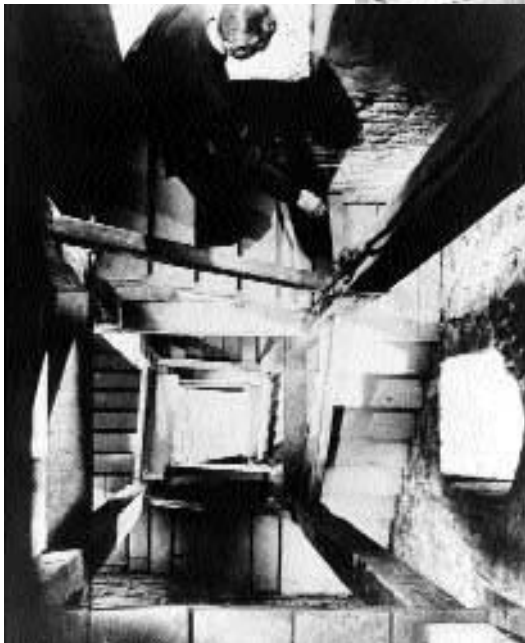
JAMES STEWART

HITCHCOCK ON HITCHCOCK  
*"Disney has the best casting. If he doesn't like an actor, he just tears him up."*



### TASK 2.1

- Collect a range of different critical responses to *Vertigo* to compile useful quotes for consideration in your essay and to indicate interpretations you might not have thought of. Examine your initial personal response in the course of your academic analysis.



Here are examples of two scenes you could use:

#### Extract 1

The extract starts at the end of the famous Saul Bass credit sequence and lasts 1 minute and 31 seconds. This sequence contains the essence of the film's themes and image system. Note that the following information is established in this sequence:

- The location – San Francisco
- A rooftop chase, a manhunt by the law
- The star as hero – James Stewart as a Hitchcock “everyman” in a dangerous situation
- The famous dolly out/zoom in shot – technical invention
- Fear (of heights) and guilt (responsibility for another's death)
- A combination of omniscient and restricted narration
- Musical score as narrative accompaniment
- Where have you seen these before in Hitchcock's work?

#### Extract 2

A later sequence that starts at 12 minutes 56 seconds into the film (at *Ernie's* club) and can be studied under the following headings (use these for your analysis of other scenes):

- **Narration**  
Mostly omniscient, with some restricted narration from Scottie's point of view.

- **Mise-en-scène**

The use of colour – red flock wallpaper and Madeleine's green stole are contrasted against the greys, browns and blacks of the other diners to make her stand out. When in profile, Madeleine's head is backlit to create an almost angelic aura, it increases in brightness as the music swells to reach another key in an expressionistic way.

### TASK 2.2

A textual analysis of the whole film – this is best done using a video copy for repeated viewing. Having seen the film as a whole, consider and make notes on the following aspects:

- Narrative structure – divide the film into scenes and acts (using the screenplay, if available or video) with timings using diagrammatic representation – this makes the structure more obvious and shows its rhythms and repetitions.
- Genre
- Themes
- Image system
- Representation and ideology
- Production history and context
- Textual analysis of specific sequences

This evidence should then be used, together with your findings from Tasks 1 and 2.1, in order to demonstrate the auteur theory as applied to Hitchcock's work.



## ■ **Mise-en-shot**

The melodramatic sweeping pans and slow zooms establish the spatial relationship between the characters, each other and their environment.

## ■ **Musical score/sound**

Bernard Herrmann's romantic and suitably haunting theme starts here – look at precisely when it starts. What does it tell us about how Scottie is feeling at this point? Where is the usual **diegetic** sound of the club? When do we finally hear the low murmur and chatter? Which instruments are being used and what associations do they have?

## ■ **Editing**

The rhythm of images and music is perfectly in time in the editing of this scene. Look at the rhythm of the cuts when Scottie turns to see Madeleine, as she turns away from him – it creates an erotic tension between them as it is tantalisingly close, but not close enough and the moment of eye contact between them is deferred.

## ■ **Visual motifs**

Madeleine's profile is repeatedly used (in this and other scenes) as from this angle she may be seen, without the voyeur being noticed. The colours green (signifying a dream/a ghost?) and red (signifying danger or death?) are used repeatedly to create part of the image system used to unify the film. Arches, doorways and mirrors are also used repeatedly – have you noticed any others?

## ■ **Themes**

Love and death, the unattainable versus the domestic/mundane, dreams/nightmares – you will notice that all of these are **binary oppositions**, used because they create conflict, which in turn, increases the audience's engagement in the narrative. The recreation of the perfect woman (actress?) – the unattainable glacial blonde.

## ■ **Acting direction**

In his interview with Hitchcock, Francois Truffaut said that "In both films (*Rear Window* and *Vertigo*) James Stewart isn't required to emote; he simply looks – three or four hundred times – and then you show the viewer what he's looking at." Consider Stewart's performance in this film in the light of this quote and how mise-en-shot is used to exploit his "looking".

## ■ **Representation and ideology**

**Masculinity and femininity:** For a character who would traditionally be represented as a man of action, he starts and proceeds throughout the film as a follower, passive and powerless to prevent the deaths of three people. He looks and feels, rather than acts, a great deal in the film and this scene establishes this, together with his slight unease – he almost looks guilty and turns away, so he is not discovered. Here Madeleine is a trophy, the perfect fantasy woman, she also does not make eye contact, but pauses before him in a dreamlike state, almost oblivious, and then glides past.

*"Hitchcock loves to be misunderstood, because he has built his whole life around misunderstandings."*

FRANÇOIS TRUFFAUT

- These headings may be used for analysis of subsequent scenes. See how the one that follows this has continuity, in most respects, with this one.
- Where have you seen similar examples of the above aspects of Hitchcock's pre-occupations, style and technique? Compare them with your collection of specific examples from his other films.

### HITCHCOCK ON HITCHCOCK

*"I am scared easily, here is a list of my adrenaline-production: 1: small children, 2: policemen, 3: high places, 4: that my next movie will not be as good as the last one."*

### T A S K 2 . 3

Answer both a) and b)

- a) Choose one of the following past examination paper questions (or any others supplied) from the *Critical Approaches to Hollywood* paper:
  - 1) How useful is auteur study in approaching films made in Hollywood which, almost by definition, are a product of a large number of creative individuals working collaboratively? Refer to two directors in developing your answer.
  - 2) Auteur status is claimed today by Hollywood marketing hype for almost any director. What, in your opinion, are the characteristics which make a Hollywood auteur? In answering this question refer in detail to one or more directors and their work.
- b) Design your own essay title to assess your study of the film *Vertigo*. You should write the aims and objectives of your essay as well as the criteria by which your essay should be assessed.

## RESEARCH SOURCES

In addition to the books listed (not exclusive so search for other books and journals using the BFI bibliography on Hitchcock), there is a list of websites for study of Hitchcock at the back of this booklet. In addition, Matthew Parrott's Media Studies website ([www.bamaca.demon.co.uk](http://www.bamaca.demon.co.uk)) has a handy media links section which contains shortcuts to many sites. Specifically, to Dr Daniel Chandler's comprehensive Media and Communication Studies website at Aberystwyth University which has a Film Studies section containing articles by international academics and students. If your institution has access to Reuter's online service, you can access features on Hitchcock from newspapers as well as from *The Guardian/The Observer's* CD-Rom collection.

# Film Synopses



Hitchcock  
A TEACHER'S  
GUIDE

## ***The Lodger; a Story of the London Fog* (UK 1926)**

Stars Ivor Novello, June Tripp, Malcolm Keen. Her parents' mysterious lodger attracts Daisy Bunting. Daisy's detective boyfriend becomes jealous and begins to suspect the lodger is a famous serial killer who is on the loose in London.

## ***Blackmail* (UK 1929)**

Alice has a row with her boyfriend, Frank, and agrees to go to a male artist's studio. The artist, Crewe, tries to rape Alice and she stabs him in self-defence and runs away. Frank finds one of Alice's gloves, but the other is found by Tracy, a friend of Crewe's. Tracy then blackmails Alice. Stars Anny Ondra (who is voiced by Joan Barry in the sound version), Cyril Ritchard and John Longden.

## ***The 39 Steps* (UK 1935)**

Cast includes Robert Donat and Madeleine Carroll. A spy sent to warn the British about a major security breach is murdered. Adventurer Richard Hannay is framed for this murder but, on the run from the police in Scotland he chances on the ringleaders. Richard is thrown together with Pamela, an innocent bystander, and exposes the ringleaders' plot, in order to prove his own innocence.

## ***Sabotage* (UK 1936)**

Verloc is an anarchic cinema manager who accidentally kills his brother-in-law Stevie when he sends him to plant a bomb. Verloc's wife Sylvia suspects his guilt, and kills him. Starring Sylvia Sydney and Oscar Homolka.

## ***The Lady Vanishes* (UK 1938)**

Margaret Lockwood and Michael Redgrave star in this espionage adventure. When an elderly Englishwoman disappears from a transcontinental train, fellow travellers Iris Henderson and Gilbert Redman attempt to solve the mystery...

## ***Rebecca* (US 1938)**

Joan Fontaine plays a timid lady's companion who meets rich grieving widower, Maxim de Winter (Laurence Olivier) and accepts his sudden marriage proposal. When they go to Manderley, de Winter's Cornish mansion, de Winter's new wife discovers the memory of his beautiful, dead wife is being kept alive by his sinister housekeeper, Mrs Danvers.

## ***Suspicion* (US 1941)**

Lina, a wealthy country girl, falls in love with charmer Johnnie Aysgarth. They marry and Lina discovers Johnnie was sacked from his job for embezzling funds. Lina's disapproving father dies, having cut her out of his will and Lina suspects Johnnie of murderous intent. Stars Cary Grant and Joan Fontaine.

## ***Saboteur* (US 1942)**

Barry Kane is suspected of sabotage following a fire at the aircraft factory where he works. Kane goes on the run across America and tries to find Frank Fry, the man who framed him. Stars Priscilla Lane and Robert Cummings.

## ***Shadow of a Doubt* (US 1943)**

When Uncle Charlie visits his family in California, his niece, Young Charlie, suspects he may be the infamous 'Merry Widow Murderer'. Teresa Wright and Joseph Cotten star.

## ***Spellbound* (US 1945)**

John Ballantine is convinced he has murdered someone – but suffers from amnesia and cannot remember committing the crime. Psychiatrist Constance Petersen becomes romantically drawn to him and sets about proving his innocence. Stars Ingrid Bergman and Gregory Peck.

## ***Notorious* (US 1946)**

US agent Devlin presses Alice Huberman into spying on a group of German exiles in Rio de Janeiro. She marries top Nazi Alexander Sebastian, then starts to fall for Devlin. Cary Grant and Ingrid Bergman star with Claude Rains.

## ***Rope* (US 1948)**

Cast includes James Stewart and Farley Granger. To prove their intellectual superiority over their friend David Kentley, Brandon and Philip strangle him. Guests arriving at their apartment shortly afterwards are served food from the chest containing Kentley's body. But one of the guests, their former teacher Rupert Cadell, begins to suspect something is amiss...

## ***Strangers on a Train* (US 1951)**

Screenplay by Raymond Chandler. Starring Robert Walker and Farley Granger. Guy Haines and Bruno Antony, two strangers, meet on a train. Bruno suggests they 'swap' murders – that he kills Guy's wife Miriam and Guy kills Bruno's father in return. Bruno murders Miriam and Guy must clear his name...

## ***Dial M for Murder* (US 1954)**

On discovering his rich wife, Margot, is having an affair with an American writer, former tennis champ Tony Wendice hires an old acquaintance to murder her. However the plan misfires. Starring Ray Milland, Grace Kelly and Robert Cummings.

## ***Rear Window* (US 1954)**

Starring James Stewart, Grace Kelly and Raymond Burr. A wheelchair-bound photographer spends his days looking out of his window into the flats opposite. When the invalid wife of his neighbour disappears, the photographer suspects murder and enlists his own girlfriend's help to find out the truth...

## ***To Catch a Thief* (US 1954)**

Stars Cary Grant and Grace Kelly. The infamous retired burglar John Robie is suspected of a series of jewel robberies by French police. Robie goes on the run and decides to track down the real thief, with the help of beautiful heiress Frances Stevens.

## ***The Trouble With Harry* (US 1954)**

Captain Wiles discovers a corpse while shooting in the woods, and wonders if he has accidentally killed the man. He decides to bury the body, and while doing it he is interrupted by all sorts of characters who have had contact with Harry, the dead man. Starring Shirley MacLaine, Edmund Gwenn, John Forsythe.

## ***The Man Who Knew Too Much* (US 1955)**

Cast includes James Stewart and Doris Day. Ben and Jo McKenna witness the murder of a Frenchman on their holiday in Marrakech. They hear his dying words thus their son is kidnapped to ensure their silence. So Ben and Jo travel to London to rescue him and avert a political assassination.

## ***Vertigo* (US 1958)**

Stars James Stewart, Kim Novak and Barbara Bel Geddes. An ex cop is hired to follow Madeleine, his old friend's suicidal wife. The ex cop falls in love with Madeleine but fails to prevent her death, then falls in love with her apparent double.

## ***North By Northwest* (US 1956)**

Cast includes Cary Grant, Eva Marie Saint and James Mason. Roger Thornhill, an advertising executive, is mistaken for a secret agent by an enemy espionage chief. He is framed for the murder of a United Nations diplomat, then escapes from New York on a train where he meets a curiously sympathetic woman.

## ***Psycho* (US 1960)**

Stars Anthony Perkins and Janet Leigh. Marion Crane escapes with \$40,000 of her boss' money and decides to stay in the Bates motel. Things start to go terribly wrong when Marion takes a shower...

## ***The Birds* (US 1963)**

Melanie Daniels, a wealthy playgirl, follows Mitch Brenner to his mother's home in Bodega Bay. Trouble starts when thousands of birds start attacking the town's residents. Stars Rod Taylor and Tippi Hedren.

## ***Marnie* (US 1964)**

Starring Sean Connery and Tippi Hedren. Marnie Edgar is a compulsive thief who empties her publisher boss' safe and takes off with the money. However, her fascinated boss runs after her and blackmails Marnie to marry him.

## ***Torn Curtain* (US 1966)**

Michael Armstrong is a nuclear physicist who flies to East Berlin to obtain important information from a German scientist. However he goes under the guise of defecting to the Russians... Stars Paul Newman and Julie Andrews.

## ***Topaz* (US 1969)**

A French intelligence agent works with an American official, to find out information on Russia's involvement in Cuba. Starring Frédérick Stafford and Dany Robin.

## ***Frenzy* (US 1972)**

An innocent man is wrongly suspected of a number of 'necktie murders'. With a warrant for his arrest, he tries to avoid the police while the real murderer continues killing people... Starring Jon Finch, Barry Foster, Anna Massey and Barbara Leigh-Hunt.

## ***Family Plot* (US 1976)**

Stars Karen Black and Bruce Dern. A phoney psychic gets involved in a murder plot hatched by a sinister man...