

# Movie analysis: alfred hitchcock's 'rear window'

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The film 'Rear Window, directed by Alfred Hitchcock in 1954, enthralled worldwide audiences through its clever and original depiction of a suburban murder. It is a widely renowned crime thriller that employs many conventions of the genre, while subverting others, in order to portray a realistic environment that collapses into tension and mistrust. The depiction of protagonist L. B Jefferies as the 'everyman' is an important subversion of the conventional detective, piquing the audiences curiosity and interest in the film.

From behind Hitchcock's camera we are invited to compassionately view the world of a 'normal' man who is plucked from his ordinary life through the extraordinary events that he witnesses. By playing with the idea of a 'normal' guy getting caught in threatening circumstances, Hitchcock suggests that crime can infiltrate any part of society, and affect anyone.

Hitchcock's inventive camerawork, in showing us the apartment complex from Jefferies' point of view, is an interesting technique used to involve the viewer in the film's action.

By watching the other apartments through Jefferies' binoculars and camera lens, we are incriminated in his voyeuristic pursuits. Later in the film Jefferies echoes the viewers sentiments, questioning the 'ethics' of watching someone even if they're not guilty. Yet he continues to observe, and there is a certain 'guilty thrill' in that for both him and the audience. A subversion of the crime fiction genre occurs through Hitchcock's depiction of the protagonist as injured and incapacitated. In both the 'classical' and 'hard-

boiled' eras of crime fiction, the protagonist was portrayed as a ' physical' investigator.

Particularly in texts like ' The Big Sleep', where investigator Philip Marlowe traverses multiple settings in order to piece together the differing parts of a crime. To overcome the limitations of an incapacitated protagonist Hitchcock gives the camera human qualities, making it view things Jefferies cannot, and revealing hints on character and plot details. The beginning of the film is a good example of how he employs this technique. The camera pans around Jefferies apartment, pausing on certain objects to emphasize their importance.

The viewer realizes that he is a photographer who broke his leg in an accident, as evident from his leg cast, the photographs mounted on the wall and the broken camera on the table.

Circumventing the problem of a physically ' unable' Jefferies also uncovers another subversion of a genre element through Hitchcock's portrayal of Lisa. Jefferies ' secondhand' viewing is coupled with Lisa's physical investigating to give a rounded view of the crime and investigation. Furthermore, the film depicts Lisa taking the traditional gender investigator, and calling into question the stereotypical role of the male ' hero'.

Lisa is depicted as a sort of femme fatale' in ' Rear Window through the representation of her dysfunctional relationship with Jefferies. In a style characterized by the ' hard-boiled' works of authors like Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett, the two fire off cynical and sharp witticisms at each other, while hinting at their romantic chemistry. The crime of murder is a <https://assignbuster.com/movie-analysis-alfred-hitchcocks-rear-window/>

very conventional part of a crime fiction story, but the way in which Alfred Hitchcock chooses to depict the murderer in 'Rear Window' is in a uniquely sympathetic light.

In the context of the 1950s this was a bold move that separated the story from other similar thrillers within the crime genre. In both the 'classical' and 'hard-boiled' eras of crime fiction, the criminal or murderer was generally portrayed without many redeeming features, yet in Hitchcock's film there is a sense that Thorwald (the murderer) may have been drawn to the deed through the incessant nagging of his wife, and we begin to pity him as he is watched by Jefferies without any knowledge that he is under scrutiny.

Furthermore, Jefferies' involvement in the crime seems to be a want of 'diversion' from the normal, or to satiate his need for excitement, and his eager viewing from his apartment window initially makes him a hard investigator to trust and heightens sympathy for Thorwald. With the limited selection of people in an isolated environment Hitchcock uses a convention popularized by the 'classical' era of crime fiction, of which authors like Agatha Christie and Arthur Conan Doyle were a part.

The murder occurs in a closed community with a limited number of incongruent suspects. In essence Hitchcock shows the audience a microcosm of 1950s American society through Jefferies' rear window, with each apartment and character representing a different facet of that society.

By limiting the scope of the investigation Hitchcock is able to focus on, or give a commentary about the different issues of the time, reflecting the

context of the film with Cold War sentiments of unease and distrust of 'neighbors'.

Alfred Hitchcock thrilled audiences in the 1950s with his crime thriller 'Rear Window, through its unique and realistic depiction of a claustrophobic apartment complex thrown into disarray after a murder takes place.

Hitchcock both employs and subverts many conventions of the crime genre in making the film such a large commercial and critical success.