

Alfred hitchcock 1922-1939 essay sample



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Alfred Hitchcock's name will be remembered forever throughout history, but a man does not become a legend overnight. Before becoming a master of any given skill, one must experiment with the boundaries and capabilities of his specific field of choice. From the beginning Hitchcock had to find what boundaries he could push and which others he couldn't. From 1922 to 1939 Alfred Hitchcock made 24 films, and through the development of those films he experimented with technique, theme and style. Hitchcock kept the techniques, themes and styles that he believed worked best and utilized them to full extent in his American masterpieces. Alfred Hitchcock proves that there is no true right or wrong way to make a film, but throughout time and experimentation one gains wisdom and knowledge far greater than most can imagine.

The Lodger (1927), is the perfect film to express how Hitchcock's overall experimentation came into full swing. He planned every part of the production on paper, in pre-production, from the shots to the props and furniture. The Lodger, was filmed using techniques not seen in Britain at the time. Hitchcock set up hanging rigs from the roofs of his sets to get intricate shots from staircases and overhead views. He utilized Close Ups to spike tension within a scene and used overlays in editing to show things impossible to view with the human eye. His themes were incredibly strong and can be seen throughout several of his American Films. His Heroine is blonde, simple, and being pursued by an unwanted man, but wants the man who society doesn't approve of. In styles he utilized sexual themes such as bondage and bathing in a film about murder and crime. The Lodger, was

Hitchcock's first experiment with his psychological attraction between sex and murder, and ecstasy and death.

The Ring (1927) is an original story and screenplay, put together by Hitchcock in two weeks. The fact that he saw an English audience dress up in a suit and tie, just to go sit around a ring, inspired him to write. In technique, this film explores how boundaries can be pushed. Hitchcock has shots of peoples reflections in water, overlays, and a very intricately planned final montage scene of action. He explores shooting Inside – Outside action, along with cutaways of audience's reactions to emphasize the climax. Much of his themes in this scene can be seen as an influence to Scorsese's masterpiece Raging Bull. The theme of a romantic triangle is put to use, which was accepted widely in The Lodger. In style we see the use of his title having multiple meanings, wedding ring and boxing ring, along with portraying marriage as " rounds," or " cycles" that compromise a long struggle. This film is Hitchcock's first original screenplay and it shows how his careful use of symmetry, story telling means, and psychological sophistication.

The Farmer's Wife (1928) is a look at the lighter side of Hitchcock. The film has a highly comedic appeal and shows his great uses of set and design. In technique we see much better lighting, uses of dissolves, overlays of unrealistic events, montages to pass time and scoring. His themes seem to change with a softer look at life and a heartfelt story of a man looking for love when it has always been nearby. His style seems to change with simpler setups but experimental editing to add more comedy in situations. He enjoyed the back roads and simplicity of British country life, which would show later, for example, in films like The Trouble with Harry.

Easy Virtue (1928) shows a darker side of how Hitchcock can view love and society. He utilizes Point of View shots, and Close shots on objects in one scene then pulling back to reveal them in another. He begins utilizing his score to rise tension and set moods. His theme of a woman in love but unable to run from her past is new and is one that reverts back to later in his American films, such as the film Notorious. His style seems much darker with clothing and lighting, exploring the darker sides of society. Champagne (1928) was still in the realm of comedy and lighthearted theme. In technique he utilized an experimental shot of seeing through the bottom of a glass that a man is drinking. He utilized realism and comedy as scenes on a boat would rock back and forth, at times sending actors across the boat. He also experimented with tracking in and back out on reverse cuts. Overlays would spin in front of a characters showing what it is they were thinking. Thematically the film shows how a man comes to be accepted by a woman's father. This theme follows up from The Farmer's wife, showing love being discovered and accepted.

The Manxman (1929) shows an uncharacteristic morbid and unhappy ending. In technique, Hitchcock, utilizes montage and very simple camera set-ups to utilize easier blocking. The film has an extremely clear story and never leads the audience astray. Through the acting he is able to build tremendous performances of tension and suspense. His theme reverts back to that of a love triangle that unfortunately goes sour for all three. His style is very straight forward and remarkably done with his help from Jack Cox's beautiful location photography.

Blackmail (1929) is most remarkable and most ground breaking for the simple fact that it is indeed a talkie. Although for the majority of the film it is apparent that he utilized sound stages for a primitive version of ADR and slightly abruptly placed sound effects. But for the first time these techniques were discovered and utilized to change the mood, aura, and perception of any given scene. In a particular scene he utilized an obnoxious bird chirping to show how disturbed the heroin was.

These concepts are be utilized still today un such films as The Social Network, with room tone of air conditioners getting louder in each scene as the character is being convicted of more offenses. His lighting is remarkably used especially in the opening scene of a man being arrested in his home. One thing is made apparent, although dialogue can now add tremendous power to the films story tone and overall message, technically Hitchcock seems tied down to utilizing a wide two shot and allowing characters to deliver all of their lines before cutting. With theme, he seems to revert back to The Lodger, with the use of a heroin having a cop as an unwanted pursuer only looking out for her good. The heroin wants the man who society wouldn't approve of. In style he seems to utilize his watch over every aspect of the film by dressing each scene properly, having all of it show in wide shot, with wide depths of field, and letting the scenery affect us. Blackmail is a pivotal film in Hitchcock's career and it is a film that pushed him even further to exploring cinemas possibilities.

Juno and the Paycock (1930) is a film that Hitchcock was forced to make by Maxwell and is a film he would say is uncinematic. In technicalities, one can see how he attempted to make a boring job exciting. He utilizes a craning

shot in the middle of dialogue on the opening scene. He strengthens his use of sound effects. Thematically, the film seems political, and an attempt at propaganda. He utilizes craning shots up sides of buildings and sticks to the full shots of dialogues. His style is shown the sets, casting, and costume. Everyone and everything seems to be poor. Although the film was well received Hitchcock always looked upon it as an embarrassment.

The Skin Game (1931) is a film about rivaled families and flows like that of a play or a theater piece. Technically, even his use of camera set ups and blocking have play like attributes. He allows for dialogue to play out in long two, three, or four shots. He pushes the boundaries of perception by cutting away to a field and pulling back to reveal it as a photo posted up on a village street. He uses tracking shots to emphasize movement and impact.

Thematically, he explores the tragedies of society and economic change. He shows what extents people will go to, in order to protect what they believe in. His style is very simple with minimal locations, easy set ups and the use of sets to set mood. This seems highly underrated and is a very good example of the versatility in Hitchcock's storytelling abilities.

Rich and Strange (1931) seems to be a bit too much of a personal journey for Hitchcock, and in being so, he was upset by its unpopularity. The film follows two central characters, and shows his great use of a subjective camera. He utilizes cutting between dialogue and doesn't seem tied down completely with dialogue. He masked the frame on written words and utilized jump cuts to show the couple viewing people in a room and it has a close resemblance to The Birds, as the heroine watches chaos from a window. Thematically, the couple resembles Alfred and Alma Hitchcock on adventures such as the

vacations the Hitchcock's would take in their spare time around this time period. The feeling is lighthearted and comedic, along with a dark message of being grateful for what you have. Style is shown through locations and editing with jump cuts and playfulness. He makes everything seem appealing so the audience becomes just as tempted as the characters to go with the wrong decision. Although the film is a kind of open diary, the characters in the film prevail because of the special appreciation for one another's personality.

Number Seventeen (1932) is a film that was shot quickly and edited so swiftly that the whole point was lost. This film baffled the public and lost its flavor of fun when the studio executives failed to catch its purpose.

Technically Hitchcock explored with a long moving introduction and a wide use of craning shots. Hitchcock broke out of his lock that had been placed on his camera with the microphone and found ways to bring his moving camera and cutting back to life. Thematically, the satire seems too unfocused and the first portion of the film is full of atmosphere, and yet so empty of plot and character. His style seems experimental and jarring, possibly in order to provide some kind of amusement in the making of the film.

The Man Who Knew Too Much (1934) is a milestone and what ended up before the camera on this film became a sort of outline for a number of later Hitchcock films. Techniques in this film show how Hitchcock has mastered the use of dialogue and moving shots. He utilizes montage in the opening sequence to heighten tension in a near skiing accident. He utilizes tracks forward on a person to emphasize moments of urgency and shock, along with cutting to close ups in dialogue to give the audience a characters

reaction or look of anticipation. He utilizes point of view shots and out focus to emphasize a characters state like seen in previous films. Thematically we see Alfred Hitchcock combine all things that work in all of his films and mix them just right. We have affection, light comedy, and cramped dark suspense. Stylistically he opens with a beautiful scene, sends us to the dark with cramped London interiors and then a completely reversal from the beginning to the end with a deadly sloping roof at night. This film is proof of Hitchcock learning how to utilize everything he had been using before and just picking out the things that weren't.

The Thirty-Nine Steps (1935) continues Hitchcock's new career trend of political terrorism and international espionage. His technique remained the same with track ins to emphasize moments along with inserts and overlays to either read a document or see what a character is thinking. He utilizes sets to stage stronger set ups with more camera movement during dialogue. Thematically they used comic-romantic elements to compensate for the weakness in material. Stylistically he also utilizes the McGuffin, like he had in The Man Who Knew Too Much. Also he uses humor, adventure, and conspiracy all to his advantage.

Secret Agent (1936) His technique seems to stay generally the same from The Man Who Knew Too Much, but there were countless mistakes, jump cuts, and continuity problems. Peter Lore, the assassin in the film would hide out on set to tend his morphine addiction. Thematically, this film started Hitchcock's legendary habit of favoring a female lead to satisfy his infatuation of her beauty. Stylistically he utilized everything from previous films and put the majority of his focus on the female lead. Sabotage (1936)

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opens with a false death, rendered in a movie-within-the-movie and ends with multiple deaths as the theater itself explodes. In technique, Hitchcock seems to impact the audience more, with Over-The-Shoulder shots and cutting into close ups on specific lines of dialogue. He still utilizes tracking shots, inserts, and montages to emphasize, open a scene, or push the story further. Thematically he must of chosen to adapt this story due to the banality of evil, the transference or assumption of guilt, the disaffection and unsteadiness in human relationships, the duplicity of espionage and tracking down spies.

These all seem to be his new pursuit of storytelling, and each film is a matter of refinement. Stylistically he refines his use of comic dialogue, romanticism and scandal with use of lighting and choice of setting. This film seems to be the result of a series of experiments following *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, and finding a way to express them clearly while also utilizing more technical advancements. He seems to have a stronger focus on story then technicalities. *The Lady Vanishes* (1938) is Hitchcock's last real advancement in film before leaving to the United States. Technically we see advancements never before done. The film opens with one long craning shot over train tracks, through houses, and dissolving into a shot moving through the window of the train station passenger waiting room. This shot alone can be seen as inspirational openings utilized by Brian De Palma in *Body Double*, Martin Scorsese in *Hugo*, and countless of other films. He utilizes quick cutting, dialogue staging, cutaways and inserts to emphasize events of the film.

The locations and staging seem to be made in order for Hitchcock to utilize advanced camera movement. In theme we see how he utilizes the use of filming scenes on train cars and also the use of spies, looking to deliver something which turns out to be his famous use of McGuffin. Stylistically his realism becomes very apparent through masterful lighting, camera staging, and locations. He uses a snowy intro, which is an aspect that has been repeated from the past, and shows realism through the rocking of shots while the train is moving. Although, he had made a film prior to this, and a film following this, neither seems to be much more than the opportunity to sharpen his technique and make his audiences happy. His screening of *Young and Innocent* almost lost him his contract with David O Selznick. There are very specific Techniques we see kept by Hitchcock and others that slowly seem to vanish from his arsenal of filmmaking. First the simple use of camera movement became a huge defining technique. He learned to begin films in close and track backwards to reveal, or vice versa. He learned to utilize the tracking shot subjectively and objectively.

This is a trend that continues onto his American films where he will later shoot a film almost entirely in one take ten minute reels of tracking. Another major technique that Hitchcock kept and elaborated on was the use of cutting on tension. He utilized the close up for cutaways, inserts, or to magnify dialogue. Hitchcock's use of tempo and craning shots toward the end of his British films also became a huge difference in how his American films became so technically advanced. Theme is probably the most important skill that Hitchcock learned to develop before moving to the United States. The use of the McGuffin, which didn't truly become a major

use in his plots until after he began making talkies, is the most important aspect in his use of theme. He utilized it in every one of his major Box Office hits in America. Also the use of a plain and everyday Heroine becoming the player of unfortunate events is something seen from *The Lodger* and kept until his final films such as *Frenzy*. The other very important theme would be the use of his famous love triangle which can be seen in later films such as *Dial M for Murder* and *Notorious*, just to name two. Stylistically Hitchcock grew and adapted quite a bit. Early on we saw him utilize one central style all throughout a single film then he began to combine the styles of multiple movies and create a well-rounded picture that brought about expectations and feelings for all audiences.

He can have light comedy and jokes flowing through a film and at the same time hold the audience in great suspension upon one's death or another's loss. He found how to use strong lighting and angle to bring about certain tension or tragedy. Combining comedy, tragedy, and cruelty into one film is a feature that is apparent in every one of his American Masterpieces. An example would be, *North by Northwest* with his interesting and funny beginning that becomes a tragic in a quick and abrupt manner. Another would be *Rear Window*, where the joyousness, and liveliness of a courtyard and the people that occupy it. The Styles that Hitchcock learned early on shaped his filmmaking style from the writing of the script all the way to the final product. After the long journey of exploring the major films from Alfred Hitchcock's career start until leaving for America shows that A master Director does not roll out of bed one day with habits of technique, theme and style that move people for centuries.

Through slow and steady trial and error, he was able to learn how to utilize things that he knew went well in a film and integrate out the things that went wrong. In the beginning he went over the top and tried to push film to new limits but in the end, learned that the limits he needed to push were those he had originally learned and used from early filmmakers, such as D. W. Griffith and F. W. Murnau. The grammar of filmmaking began to open and he learned to explore the simplicities, to make much more elaborate stories. Through trial and error he learned what makes a good story and a successful hit, with plot twist, humor, romanticisms, leading women, sexual innuendos, and grotesque crimes. Stylistically he learned that his over exaggerated habits of controlling a production from props, to wardrobe, to set design became a massive advantage with later films. All and all Hitchcock utilized trial and error to become better. From his start in Britain to his end in the United States, Alfred Hitchcock always remained a student in the Art of Filmmaking.