**The Films of Alfred Hitchcock**

**354:250, AHp**

**Professor John Belton**

*"To speak of Alfred Hitchcock is to evoke a remarkable series of histories: the history of cinema generally, in which Hitchcock plays an exemplary role as a technical and stylistic innovator; a history of Hitchcock's films themselves, . . . a history of film criticism, especially given Hitchcock's status as a primary test case for auteur theory, which held that commercial films . . . can and should be discussed in the same terms as were previously reserved for "art" films; a history of contemporary film theory, understood at least in part as involving a return to more sociological concerns after the excesses of auteurism; etc."*

*--* A Hitchcock Reader

The artistic career of Alfred Hitchcock ranges from the silent period to the seventies. The films produced during this extensive career have won over popular audiences with their morbid sense of humor and ability to reveal the dark side of everyday life. But his films aren't just box office hits; they also hold a special fascination for film critics. Hitchcock and his films have helped shape the direction of film criticism: he's been used as a basis for the development of the French *auteur* theory, he's been touted as the genius of the psychoanalytic narrative, and both Marxist and Feminist critics find class and gender to be central motifs for the director. Each week we will view and discuss a Hitchcock film in light of the criticism that it has generated. Previous knowledge of film techniques aren't necessary (though helpful) -- Hitchcock will lead us to an understanding of both.

**SAS CORE GOAL AND ASSESSMENT PLAN FOR AHp:**

This course is designed to address SAS CORE learning goal AHp, “Analyze arts and/or literatures in themselves and in relation to specific histories, values, languages, cultures, and technologies.” Assessment will be conducted using the using the generic rubric for AHp, and will be based on one of the three essays students will be writing for the course. Please see sample essay assignment attached.

**COURSE OBJECTIVES:**

• This course will extend and deepen the power of students’ critical analysis through in-depth consideration of texts.

• Students will explore critical debates surrounding Hitchock’s films.

• The course will aim to provide students with the critical skills necessary for the analysis of visual texts. This will involve an understanding of: basic film theory; the uses of the frame and editing; the place of the ‘star’; the nature of genre; and the ‘auteur theory’.

• Regarding both literary and cinematic art works, it will also aim to extend the students’ skills in the reading of narrative and the understanding of the relationship of a text to its cultural/social context.

• Students will be encouraged to share analytical and critical views on the texts ascribed in class discussion, perhaps including short presentations, and will focus research skills in the writing of a final research paper.

• In their papers, the students will show that they have developed the relevant skills for researching and writing on film.

**SAMPLE PROMPT FOR CORE ASSESSMENT:**

A 5-7-page paper is due on XXX. The paper should be typewritten, double-spaced, and carefully proofread for typographical (and other) errors. Late papers will not receive full credit (nor will the comments on them be as extensive as those submitted on time). Do not consult any secondary sources other than those indicated. Plagiarism will not be tolerated. Your paper should have both a topic and a thesis. The thesis (which shapes the topic around a position or attitude and is set forth in subsequent argumentation) should be presented in the first (or second) paragraph of the paper, should be developed in the body of your paper and be illustrated by specific examples from the films. As often as possible, discuss the topic by citing specific formal devices which illustrate it. Formal devices include such things as mise-en-scene (set and costume design, lighting, composition, framing, camera angle, height, and movement), editing, and sound (including the use of dialogue, sound effects, and music).

Your goal in writing this paper is to discuss the moral vision of one of the Hitchcock films seen in class by examining one scene from that film in detail. You should select one of the scenes posted on Sakai. The assumption is that this one scene will contain the DNA of the moral vision (i.e., the way Hitchcock sees the world) of the film as a whole and that you will be able to relate specific elements of the narrative situation presented in that scene to that vision and/or to the larger themes of the film. (Note—any description of the contents of the scene should be presented in terms of its **thematic significance**; do not merely describe what happens; but analyze and draw conclusions.) In referring to and discussing events in the film, **do not merely provide a synopsis of the plot**; deal with these matters in such a way that you write about the **significance** of these events. Also, you are advised to avoid reducing the film’s moral vision to a conflict between good and evil. Those two terms are extremely broad and virtually useless for purposes of critical analysis. You might find the term “moral complexity” to be a more productive starting point for your discussion of the way (s) in which moral issues are addressed in this scene.

**REQUIREMENTS:**

The course will meet during two 80-minutres class periods each week and will have one evening screening (outside of class) from 6:10 to 9:00 once each week. Given the lab-like nature of the extra two periods of class time, the course is valued at four credits. Attendance at both lectures and screenings is mandatory. Students may have no more than five unexcused absences. If you expect to miss one or two classes, please use the University absence reporting website [https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra/](https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra/" \t "_blank" \o "https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra/) to indicate the date and reason for your absence.  An email is automatically sent to the instructor.Reading must be done before class. Required reading: xeroxed materials posted on Sakai (sakai@rutgers.edu). Students are expected to have completed the readings on the day for which they were assigned. Written Assignments: Students will be asked to write three 4-5 page papers. Late papers will be penalized. Plagiarism will not be tolerated (English Dept. subscribes to Turnitin.com). Exams: Short quizzes will be given periodically on the readings and there will be a final exam during the examination period. Final grades will be based on the papers (25% each), the final exam (15%), and the quizzes (10%).

Required reading: Deutelbaum, Marshall and Leland Poague, eds. *A Hitchcock Reader.* (HR) Modleski, Tania. *The Women Who Knew Too Much*. (TM). Essays posted on Sakai.

**SYLLABUS**

Week one: The Controlling Hand -- *Auteur* Theory. Screening: *North by Northwest* (1959). Read: Andrew Sarris, “Notes on the Auteur Theory in 1962” and Stanley Cavell, “*North by Northwest*” (HR). Modleski, “Hitchcock, Feminism, and the Patriarchal Unconscious” (TM).

Week two: Comic Espionage. Screening: *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (1935). Read: Silet, “Through a Woman’s Eyes.” (HR).

Week three: Death and Desire. Screening: *Rebecca* (1940). Read: Modleski, “Woman and the Labryinth” (TM).

Week four: Hitchcock’s American Gothic? Screening: *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943). Read: James McLaughlin, “All in the Family: Alfred Hitchcock’s *Shadow of a Doubt*” (HR).

Week five: Perverting the Fairy Tale: *Notorious*. Screening: *Notorious* (1946). Read: Richard Abel, “*Notorious*: Perversion par Excellence” (HR) and Tania Modleski, “The Woman Who Was Known Too Much” (TM).

Week six: A Most Elaborate Pattern: Cross-Cross. Screening: *Strangers on a Train* (1952). Read: Robin Wood on *Strangers on a Train* (HR).

Week seven: Looking and Longing: Backyard Ethics. Screening: *Rear Window* (1954). Read Richard Allen, “Looking through *Rear Window*” and Modleski, “Rear Window.” Also read Robert Stam and Roberta Pearson, “Hitchcock’s *Rear Window*: Reflexivity and the Critique of Voyeurism” (HR).

Week eight: Death and Desire, part 2. Screening: *Vertigo* (1958). Read: Modleski, “*Vertigo.*”

Week nine: An Immaculate Transfer of Guilt. Screening: *The Wrong Man* (1956). Read Paula Marantz Cohen, "Hitchcock's Revised American Visions: The Wrong Man and *Vertigo*." Also read: David Sterritt on “*The Wrong Man*.

Week ten: *Psycho* (1960). Read: “Hitchcock and Film Theory: A *Psycho* Dossier”(HR) and Raymond Bellour, “Psychosis, Neurosis, Perversion” (HR).

Week eleven: Fowl Play and Practical Jokes. Screening: *The Birds* (1963). Read: Margaret M. Horwitz, “*The Birds*: A Mother’s Love” (HR). Read: Richard Allen, "Avian Metaphor in *The Birds*."

Week twelve: Red, White and Blue. Screening: *Marnie* (1964). Read: Robin Wood on *Marnie*. Read Bellour, "Hitchcock, the Enunciator."

Week thirteen: Has Hitchcock gone too far? Screening: *Frenzy* (1973). Read: Tania Modleski, “Rituals of Defilement: *Frenzy* (TM). Read: Jeanne Allen, "The Representation of Violence to Women: Hitchcock's *Frenzy*."

Week fourteen: A Final Wink at the Audience. Screening: *Family Plot* (1976). Read Bill Khron, “A Hitchcock Mystery.”