

RANDOM HOUSE  BOOKS



Spellbound by Beauty: Alfred
Hitchcock and His Leading
Ladies

Donald Spoto

Contents

About the Book
About the Author
Also by Donald Spoto
Title Page
Dedication
Epigraph
Acknowledgements
Foreword

1. Love in Handcuffs (1920-1926)
2. Of Sound and Sense (1926-1934)
3. The Mastery of Mystery (1934-1935)
4. Shaking the Dust (1936-1938)
5. Passport to Hollywood (1939-1940)
6. Chilling Elegance (1941-1942)
7. From Raw Stuff to Poetry (1943-1944)
8. Desires and Pulsations (1945-1946)
9. Breaking and Entering (1947-1948)
10. The Lure (1949-1950)
11. Anne, and a Year of Grace (1951-1954)
12. Women Who Knew Too Much (1954-1957)
13. No One at the Centre (1958-1960)
14. Obsession (1961-1962)
15. The End of Art (1963-1964)

Afterword: The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo (1964-1980)

Picture Section
Notes
Bibliography
Index
Copyright

About the Book

Spellbound by Beauty examines Alfred Hitchcock's well known collaborations with the leading ladies of his day, and, in so doing, delves into his creative life and his uniquely curious professional and personal relationships. The result is a singular kind of life story - a book about film and film stars; business and power; sex and fantasy; romance and derailed psychology.

Donald Spoto casts a new light on this most famous of directors and deals frankly with his strange marriage to Alma Reville, his distance from his daughter, Patricia, and his obsessive relationships with a number of his leading ladies from Grace Kelly and Kim Novak to Tippi Hedren.

With original material, marvellous anecdotes and never-before-told personal observations, *Spellbound by Beauty* illuminates the complex personality of one of the most brilliant and strange men of the twentieth century.

About the Author

Donald Spoto is the author of *The Art of Alfred Hitchcock* and *The Dark Side of Genius: The Life of Alfred Hitchcock*. Born in 1941, he received his PhD from Fordham University, New York, in 1970 and taught on the college level for many years. His twenty-four books include internationally acclaimed biographies of Tennessee Williams, Marlene Dietrich, Marilyn Monroe, Ingrid Bergman, Audrey Hepburn and Alan Bates. He is married to the Danish academic administrator Ole Flemming Larsen; they live in a quiet village an hour's drive from Copenhagen.

Also by Donald Spoto

Otherwise Engaged: The Life of Alan Bates
Joan: The Mysterious Life of the Heretic who Became a
Saint
Enchantment: The Life of Audrey Hepburn
In Silence: Why We Pray
Reluctant Saint: The Life of Francis Assisi
Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy Onassis: A Life
The Hidden Jesus: A New Life
Diana - The Last Year
Notorious: The Life of Ingrid Bergman
Rebel: The Life and Legend of James Dean
Dynasty: The History of the Royal House of Windsor
A Passion for Life: The Biography of Elizabeth Taylor
Marilyn Monroe: The Biography
Blue Angel: The Life of Marlene Dietrich
Laurence Olivier: A Life
Madcap: The Life of Preston Sturges
Lenya: A Life
Falling In Love Again: Marlene Dietrich - A Photo-Essay
The Kindness of Strangers: The Life of Tennessee Williams
The Dark Side of Genius: The Life of Alfred Hitchcock
Stanley Kramer: Film Maker
Camerado: Hollywood and the American Man
The Art of Alfred Hitchcock

Spellbound by Beauty

Alfred Hitchcock and
His Leading Ladies



Donald Spoto



arrow books

for Mona and Karl Malden with grateful love and devotion

... why are we so haggard at the heart, so care-coiled, care-
killed ... so cumbered, when the thing we freely forfeit is
kept with fonder a care, fonder a care kept than we could
have kept it ...

Gerard Manley Hopkins,
'The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo' (1882)

Acknowledgements

My first debt is to Alfred Hitchcock, with whom I spent many hours between 1975 and 1980. He granted me a number of taped interviews in which I found him astonishingly frank on a variety of important issues. He also invited me to lunch more than once, and during those times, the talk flowed very freely indeed.

Conversations with those who appeared in his films were of critical significance in the original preparations for both *The Art of Alfred Hitchcock* and *The Dark Side of Genius*. During the years of my research for those books (1974 through 1982), several people asked me to suppress some material for a period of time, because of his recent death; in some cases, they asked that details not be set down during their own lifetimes. That explains both the lacunae in my earlier work and the main reason for *Spellbound by Beauty* - which, of course, contains very much new material.

I wish to acknowledge, therefore, especially the following actresses, who spoke to me on the record: Diane Baker, Anne Baxter, Ingrid Bergman, Karen Black, Doris Day, Joan Fontaine, Dolly Haas, Barbara Harris, Tippi Hedren, Grace Kelly (Princess Grace of Monaco), Janet Leigh, Margaret Lockwood, Vivien Merchant, Mildred Natwick, Claire Griswold Pollack, Elsie Randolph, Eva Marie Saint, Sylvia Sidney, Jessica Tandy, Ann Todd,

Kathleen Tremayne, Alida Valli, Josephine Wilson (Lady Miles) and Teresa Wright.

A number of actors also cooperated generously: Brian Aherne, Martin Balsam, Hume Cronyn, Bruce Dern, William Devane, Jon Finch, John Forsythe, Barry Foster, Sir John Gielgud, Farley Granger, Lord (Bernard) Miles, Reggie Nalder, Paul Newman, Gregory Peck, Anthony Perkins, James Stewart and Rod Taylor.

Hitchcock's writers knew him in ways others never could, for they sat with him for months and came to know how his prodigious mind worked. I was fortunate to have the confidence of Jay Presson Allen, Charles Bennett, David Freeman, John Michael Hayes, Evan Hunter, Arthur Laurents, Ernest Lehman, Brian Moore, Anthony Shaffer, Joseph Stefano and Samuel Taylor. Among Hitchcock's close creative team, I also knew and interviewed Henry Bumstead, Herbert Coleman, Edith Head, Peggy Robertson, Leonard South and Albert Whitlock.

The original idea for this book derived from conversations with two of my closest friends, Gerald Pinciss and Lewis Falb. They have enthusiastically endorsed my writing for many years.

Once again, my brother-in-law, John Møller, dispatched the difficult creative task of transferring photographs onto disks. John is not only a talented designer but also a superb technician, and I am grateful for his generous allotment of time on behalf of this book.

Claus Kjær and his colleagues at the Danish Film Institute, Copenhagen, have welcomed me most warmly to this prestigious archive and library, and they have graciously invited me to be a frequent guest lecturer at the Cinematek. I am grateful to be associated with them and their audiences.

My London literary agent, Elizabeth Sheinkman, at Curtis Brown Ltd, is the attentive advocate and guide of my British interests, and I am grateful for her caring and her friendship. In her office, Felicity Blunt has supervised a myriad details with unfailing cheerfulness.

Once again, I am very fortunate to be published at the Hutchinson imprint of Random House UK by Paul Sidey, whose friendship for three decades I count as a signal blessing. His creative contributions and his generous camaraderie benefit my life as they do my career. His assistant, Tess Callaway, had dispatched the daily round of chores with graceful efficiency, and Ilsa Yardley was the keen-eyed copy editor.

Ole Flemming Larsen, with whom I share my life, gives me more than I can ever deserve.

* * *

With enormous gratitude and devotion, I dedicate this book to my dear friends Mona and Karl Malden. Their presence in my life means more than I can say.

D.S.
Sjælland, Denmark
Christmas 2007

Foreword

The book you are holding is my third volume on the life and work of the great director. The first, *The Art of Alfred Hitchcock*, is an analysis and critical appreciation of each of his films; it was first published in English in 1976, during the director's lifetime and after I had interviewed him on several occasions. I was very gratified indeed when he celebrated and promoted the book, which is still in print, and in many languages. *The Dark Side of Genius: The Life of Alfred Hitchcock* appeared in 1983, three years after his death; it, too, is still available and has appeared in several dozen foreign-language editions.

Why, then, another book, with specific reference to the director and his actresses?

First, because it is remarkable how infrequently, over a period of more than fifty years, Hitchcock said anything – much less something favourable – about his players. His most repeated remark about them became a famous personal motto: 'Actors are cattle' – or, more puckishly, 'I never said actors are cattle – I said that actors should be treated like cattle.' Actors and audiences laughed together at this, but behind the sardonic statement was the undeniable fact that, while he knew that he needed good and attractive talent to draw audiences and so to guarantee the commercial success of his movies, he seems to have had no great opinion of actors, and he often openly resented their stardom, privileges and salaries. 'Actors! I

hate the sight of them!' he cried in one unusually bitter fit of pique.

Hitchcock rarely had anything to say about his male stars - estimable performers like John Gielgud, Michael Redgrave, Laurence Olivier, Cary Grant, James Stewart, Sean Connery and Paul Newman, who were well established in their careers when they came to work for him. Many of his leading ladies, on the other hand, achieved international stardom precisely because of their Hitchcock roles - Madeleine Carroll, Joan Fontaine, Grace Kelly, Janet Leigh and Tippi Hedren are good examples. That he maintained an insistent silence about the quality of their performances is a curiosity that cannot be ignored.

'Some of us actors have ideas,' Ingrid Bergman said at a tribute to him, in his presence, a year before his death - 'and then Hitch can become a little truculent.' Princess Grace of Monaco wrote, in her Foreword to my first book, that 'sometimes he merely wears [actors] down until he gets what he wants.' They spoke these words in the context of affectionate and laudatory remarks, and they were not nearly as taciturn about their appreciation as he was. Nor is there anything unusual or malevolent about directors making demands or seeming defiant with their actors, as Ingrid and Grace attested. Moviemaking, after all, is a collaborative craft, movie sets (even those of the punctilious Hitchcock) are usually chaotic places, laced with the strong aroma of ego and dependent on the countless variables of human temperament and technical accidents. Hitchcock had a lot to put up with from eccentric, sometimes boorish studio moguls, from mediocre workmen and moody colleagues. But his reticence, his refusal to praise or thank those who gave him their best, must be explored.

In François Truffaut's book-length series of interviews with Hitchcock - which covers the production of every one of

Hitchcock's films - I have counted more than 140 references to actresses. Hitchcock's remarks about them were mostly neutral but frequently hostile. Indeed, he did not have a good word to say even about the women he apparently liked: Ingrid Bergman and Grace Kelly. The best he could manage about the others was the mildly affirmative opinion that Sylvia Sydney (in *Sabotage*) 'had nice understatement' and that Shirley MacLaine (in *The Trouble With Harry*) 'was very good'. Otherwise, one finds only Hitchcock's indifferent references to his actresses; more to the point, he never once so much as uttered the names of those who contributed enormously to the success of some of his finest works - Madeleine Carroll (in *The 39 Steps* and *Secret Agent*), Nova Pilbeam (in *Young and Innocent*) and Margaret Lockwood (in *The Lady Vanishes*), for just a few examples.

In the summer of 1975, during the first of our many long interviews, I asked Hitchcock about the achievements of his actresses - just how *did* he work with them to evoke such magnificent performances? 'I think it has to do with the way in which one photographs them,' he replied, and that was that - not a word in favour of the women.

'As far as Hitchcock was concerned,' recalled Joseph Stefano, who wrote the screenplay for *Psycho*, 'if he decided to use you, that was compliment enough.' John Michael Hayes, who wrote *Rear Window*, *To Catch a Thief*, *The Trouble With Harry* and *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, elaborated: 'Hitch was an enigma - personally as well as professionally. He never once congratulated me or thanked me for anything I did. In his mind, if you did well, he thought it was just expected of you.' One had to learn of Hitchcock's satisfaction through others, as Hayes continued. 'Hitch's wife Alma came up to me once and said, "Don't breathe a word of this to anyone, but Hitch is *immensely* pleased with you.'" Doris Day interpreted

Hitchcock's stony silence as his disapproval of her performance during the shooting of *The Man Who Knew Too Much* in 1955. It took her offer to withdraw from the film to evoke Hitchcock's lukewarm response that if he did *not* like what she was doing, he would have said something. Some might consider such ungenerosity more than merely enigmatic.

These were matters I subsequently discussed in some detail with a number of his leading ladies - among them, Margaret Lockwood, Sylvia Sydney, Joan Fontaine, Teresa Wright, Ingrid Bergman, Alida Valli, Anne Baxter, Grace Kelly, Janet Leigh and Tippi Hedren. His male stars seemed, for the most part, to have little to say on the matter, although Michael Redgrave, Hume Cronyn, Joseph Cotten, Gregory Peck, Farley Granger, Reggie Nalder, Rod Taylor, Paul Newman, Jon Finch and Barry Foster were singularly perceptive in their observations.

In *Spellbound by Beauty*, I detail the fine points of the significant contributions leading ladies made to Hitchcock's films - contributions often made under difficult and even painful circumstances. To a person, none of them ever defended, praised or justified herself - that would not have done much good in any case, for he was the powerhouse, they the mere exponents, expendable and often doomed to the merciless scythe of transient popularity.

In addition, there have been many rumours about his treatment of women - not only in the films themselves, but also behind the scenes, during production. Stories have circulated about Hitchcock's sadistic behaviour and his occasional public humiliation of actresses. The fact is that these accounts turn out to be alarmingly true in a remarkable number of cases. There is no doubt that he was enormously helpful in the advancement of some careers. But he was, equally often, unhelpful to himself when he was unkind to people - especially to women, for whom he had a strange amalgam of adoration and contempt, and

whom he felt he could control in a way he dared not attempt with men. Hitchcock had many professional admirers among his actresses, but no true and lasting friends. Ingrid Bergman and Grace Kelly kept in contact with him over the years, but he was slow to reciprocate. The fact is that he had not the gift of friendship; there are few comparable sadnesses in any life.

Hitchcock was evidently attracted to women (to blondes especially), but he never spoke well of them, and most of them did not have the remotest idea of his reactions toward their work. To him, they were foolish, capriciously sensual and at the mercy of wildly improbable sexual urges. This attitude of stony indifference characterised his relationships with his male players, too, but he had few emotional requirements to make of men in his work, and for the most part, he neither challenged them nor showed much interest in them. No, it was the women who preoccupied him - 'Torture the women!' he said, repeating the advice of the nineteenth-century playwright Victorien Sardou about plot construction.

Hitchcock took that counsel to heart. In his first English movie, *The Lodger*, he put his star (known simply as June) in manacles, which caused her no little upset and discomfort. Madeleine Carroll was dragged around the sets of *The 39 Steps* for long periods over several days, handcuffed to her co-star Robert Donat until she showed painful bruises. Such incidents occurred at regular intervals during his career, but nothing compared with the physical torture inflicted on Tippi Hedren during the filming of *The Birds*, or the sexual harassment she endured during the production of *Marnie*.

* * *

But a potential objection must be faced at the outset.

Why does a biographer describe Hitchcock's strange psychology and even stranger conduct, however fastidiously and accurately one can document them? What does this sort of thing add to our knowledge or appreciation of a great film artist and perennial entertainer?

Alfred Hitchcock died in 1980, and in the intervening years, his legion of admirers have too often mythologised him out of all resemblance to reality. Indeed, he has become in the eyes of many a genius *tout court*, without much humanity to make him recognisable. More unrealistically, he is regarded by many as a warm and cuddly gentleman, adorably amusing, like an eccentric grandfather who tells bedtime stories - a man unworthy of what is sometimes called meretricious treatment at the hands of some writers. I have not escaped the occasional opprobrium of some Hitchcock partisans who will not hear a syllable against him and are shocked that such anecdotes are included in a biography.

But there can be a dangerous hypocrisy - and a fearful scholarly deficiency - at the root of such objections when they come from people who ought to know better about the links between art and life, and who ought to have a deeper appreciation of human longing and pain. In this regard, I was immensely gratified when Hitchcock's close collaborator, the playwright and screenwriter Samuel Taylor (who gave him the final script for *Vertigo*), proclaimed that *The Dark Side of Genius* was a sympathetic biography *not* of an angel or a demon, but of 'a human being in all his complexity'.

Writing or speaking anything other than the highest praise and promoting the most affectionate encomia for so august an icon as Alfred Hitchcock has become, in the eyes of many, equivalent to cultural sacrilege. But the craft of biography requires that the shadow side of subjects be set forth and comprehended - otherwise, their humanity is

diminished, their pain minimised, and those they hurt are ignored. Any serious appreciation of Hitchcock's art and life must take into account the enormity of his psychological, physical and social suffering, as well as that which he (perhaps unintentionally) caused others. From his suffering came the obsessively recurring themes and the constant sense of dread with which he continues to astonish, entertain and enlighten.

History provides a very long list of the names of great artists whose characters were not always sterling and whose lives were variations on misery. No one disputes either the genius of Richard Wagner or his enduring significance in the history of great music. But Wagner was also dishonest, untruthful, unfaithful, temperamental, rude and virulently anti-Semitic. He sacrificed everything for his art, even putting up and losing his mother's pension to pay his gambling debts. He was, to put it mildly, a person to be avoided except from a distance, in his work for the opera and concert halls. Similarly, Pablo Picasso was a deeply misogynistic man whose art was great but whose personality was profoundly flawed.

In the annals of filmmaking, it is well known that D. W. Griffith risked actors' lives for the sake of dramatic scenes; that Carl Dreyer contributed directly to the emotional collapse of his leading lady during the making of *The Passion of Joan of Arc*; that John Huston very nearly killed Gregory Peck during the production of *Moby Dick*; and that Otto Preminger routinely brought actors to tears and even the brink of nervous breakdown by his cruel public humiliation of them.

But Hitchcock was different. His particular, lifelong fantasies informed just about every one of his motion pictures - and alarmingly often, the frustration of his romantic fantasies or his harbouring violent ones sprang into life. His movies were consistently self-revealing in

ways that Griffith's, Dreyer's, Huston's and Preminger's were not.

When I began *The Art of Alfred Hitchcock* in 1974, I was committed to the idea that he was history's greatest filmmaker. This I maintained because so many of his films defy the passage of time and the inevitable changes of cinematic style. I also discovered that very many of his movies continue to entertain audiences worldwide even as they deal, remarkably often, with perennially significant issues of human life and destiny. Decades later, I have no reason to alter my high estimation of his genius.

The Dark Side of Genius, which appeared in 1983, was the first of my sixteen biographies (up to 2008). From it, I felt obliged to withhold some information, as several of my sources asked me to omit certain comments either for some years or until after their own deaths. I honoured those requests, but now an important element of Hitchcock's life story must supplement what has preceded.

Apart from his memorable achievements, his biography remains a cautionary tale of what can go wrong in any life. It is the story of a man so unhappy, so full of self-loathing, so lonely and friendless, that his satisfactions came as much from asserting power as from spinning fantasies and acquiring wealth. The fact is that some of his conduct can only be called sexual harassment, and I do not believe that there is ever any justification for that: no artistic goal justifies cruelty or exploitation. It is important to know this about Hitchcock, especially at a time when raising an artist to the pantheon leads to an injudicious minimising or even ignoring of episodes that cast light on the strange links that can bind confident genius to a domineering cruelty. He could not have got away with some of his conduct today; and no one should ever be permitted to act as he often did.

This book is not a revisionist biography, but in a sense, it is the life story of a sad motif - in the broadest sense, the

motif of a consuming selfishness. Sometimes he could not foresee the suffering his actions would cause; sometimes, he seemed to anticipate that suffering quite clearly. He never forgot Sardou's injunction to 'torture the women'.

All motifs or themes in our lives have bases and backgrounds, beginnings, developments, climaxes and conclusions. Therefore, I have considered it essential to treat the subject chronologically and to provide important contextual material on the matter of some films, for Hitchcock's relationships did not occur in a professional vacuum.

Spellbound by Beauty: Alfred Hitchcock and His Leading Ladies aims to explore the life of a brilliant, strange, tortured and essentially unhappy man, who left us a legacy of great art, perhaps in spite of himself. It also attempts to offer new insights into Hitchcock the filmmaker - in particular, how he understood the element of collaboration. Finally, this book is a tribute to a number of extraordinarily talented women, without whose courage, grace and patience we would almost certainly not have these enduring, moving, deeply rewarding motion pictures.

Love in Handcuffs (1920-1926)

FOR FIVE YEARS beginning in 1920, when he was twenty-one, Alfred Hitchcock worked in London for Famous Players-Lasky, the British production branch of Hollywood's Paramount Pictures. Most of the senior technical staff were Americans, imported to work on the two small stages, once a power station in the borough of Islington.

Hitchcock's first job, illustrating the title cards of silent movies, gave him access to various jobs on an ad hoc basis: designer for this picture, or art director, co-writer or production manager for that one. Unlike the job specialisation in the American movie industry, labourers hired by English studios were encouraged to perform multiple tasks, working wherever their talents could be exploited - hence the multi-talented young Hitch became a jack-of-all-work on at least eighteen British silent movies. 'All my early training¹ was by Americans,' he said years later, 'and it was far superior to the British.'

In 1924, he was still putting in long hours and learning new, up-to-date production methods. That year, producer Michael Balcon took over the studio when Paramount withdrew; Balcon's goal was to sponsor entertainment for an international (especially an American) audience. Accordingly, Balcon brought over Hollywood's Betty Compson to star in a picture called *Woman to Woman*, on which Hitchcock worked, as he said, as 'general factotum.'²

I wrote the script. I designed the sets, and I managed the production. It was the first film that I had really got my hands onto.'

It was also the first of five films on which he worked for the studio's leading director, Graham Cutts, with whom he had an increasingly hostile relationship. The trouble was caused, it seems, by Cutts's increasingly indiscreet sexual liaisons (which even interrupted production) and by Hitchcock's evident ambition to supplant him and to secure additional credits, the better to impress Balcon. 'I was quite dogmatic,'³ he said of this time. 'I would build a set and say to the director, "Here's where it's shot from!"'

Cutts resented Hitchcock's assertive style and said so, but Balcon was impressed with the younger man's talent and ambition - especially after Cutts returned to London in early 1925, after filming *The Blackguard* in Berlin. While in Germany, Hitchcock had expeditiously resolved many logistical problems caused by Cutts's ineffective balancing act of work, wife and women on the side. Soon after, Balcon asked Hitchcock to direct a motion picture.

'I had no intention⁴ of becoming a film director,' Hitchcock always said of this time in his career. 'I was very happy doing the scripts and the art direction. I hadn't thought of myself as a director' - which was obviously not the case. Working on productions six days weekly for almost five years, he was clearly eager for promotion: he was writing scripts, designing sets, working with editors, and was, to his chagrin, paid miserably in comparison with established directors. Eager to perform any task on a picture by dispatching quickly and effectively every challenging aspect of production, Hitchcock (according to Balcon) 'wanted to be a director,'⁵ but it was not easy to get a young man launched in so important a job' because financiers and distributors were wary of promoting an assistant.

And so Balcon turned to his foreign partners: 'I had to arrange to have [Hitchcock direct his first two pictures] in Germany because of the resistance to his becoming a director' in London. With the screenwriter Eliot Stannard; the assistant director Alma Reville; and the cinematographer Gaetano di Ventimiglia, Hitchcock headed for exterior location shooting in northern Italy and then for studio work in Munich, where they were joined by a crew of international technicians and co-producers. Hitch absorbed enough rudimentary German to communicate his wishes.

His assignment was *The Pleasure Garden*, based on an unexceptional but once popular novel about two London showgirls, their shifting fidelities to the difficult men in their lives, and their dangerous sojourn in the tropics - all of it wrapped up in a dénouement of madness and murder. The principal characters were portrayed by American stars acting in Germany and Italy as if the settings were London and the Far East. Hitchcock had the task of making all this appear realistic and emotionally credible, and for the most part, he succeeded admirably.

Balcon imported a pair of Hollywood's top glamour girls, Virginia Valli and Carmelita Geraghty. Virginia had already appeared in forty-seven pictures under the direction of John Ford, King Vidor and others. She wanted to hear what Hitchcock planned and how she would look in the finished film.

'I was in a cold sweat,'⁶ Hitchcock admitted later. 'I wanted to disguise the fact that this was my first directorial effort. I dreaded to think what she, an established Hollywood star, would say if she discovered that she had been brought all the way over to Europe to be directed by a beginner. I was terrified at giving her instructions. I've no idea how many times I asked my future wife [Alma Reville] if I was doing the right thing. She, sweet soul, gave me courage by swearing I was doing marvellously.'

So began an historic collaboration. Alma had a keen eye, she knew how stories should be structured and rendered visually, she had worked as an editor, and she was not hesitant to tell Hitchcock just what she thought. Tiny and titian-haired, she gave a first impression of shy gentility, but the real Alma Reville was an acutely intelligent, self-assured woman of steely resolve, quite different from the insecure Hitchcock, who was ever self-conscious about his appearance, his tastes and modest Cockney background. When a tough decision had to be made in business or private life, Alma acted fearlessly.

Hitchcock was uncomfortable around his two pretty American stars, but he knew how much he needed them. He also resented their enormous salaries, and his budget forestalled their expectations of Hollywood-style luxury they had enjoyed there. 'Valli was big stuff² and knew it,' according to Hitchcock. 'She expected a brass band. She expected the red carpet. But she didn't get them. Valli was peeved, but she turned out to be sweet enough.'

Filming began in June 1925 in northern Italy, before moving to the studio interiors in Munich, which were suffocatingly hot that summer, for the ceilings were glass and air-conditioning was unknown. Everything seemed to go wrong: there were numerous delays from uncooperative extra players, and then a trained dog simply wandered off, and his replacement insistently licked off the make-up designed to replicate his predecessor. After that, a woman hired to play a native girl arrived on the day for her swimming scene, but she promptly announced that her monthly period prevented her going into the water.

This bit of news, Hitchcock claimed, was an educational experience for him. He insisted that he had never heard of the menstrual cycle because it had not been included in his schoolboy education - nor, one might add, was production design or scriptwriting. But like his assertion that he had no thought of becoming a director, this statement of

ignorance simply cannot be taken at face value. He was twenty-six, had an older sister and brother, and had worked at a movie studio during the freewheeling 1920s - not generally a place and time of polite discourse. Sexually inexperienced though he claims to have been, he was not a backward, pre-adolescent country boy from an earlier century. Ordinary curiosity surely must have supplemented his formal education.

But word circulated that Hitch was an unsophisticated innocent, which (as he may have intended) evoked the benignly maternal, protective reactions of Valli and Geraghty and much improved the tone of the production and their pliancy in his hands. Thus, he won them over not by exhibiting his sophistication, but by feigning ignorance. He employed, in other words, whatever it took to achieve the desired effect - including his demand that Virginia Valli wear a blonde wig for her role.

When Balcon arrived in Munich to have a look at Hitchcock's first cut of the picture, he agreed with the director that rearrangements were called for, but, for his marketing purposes, he also said he liked the American look of the picture. *The Pleasure Garden* revealed, too, Hitchcock's skilful use of hallucinatory cinematic techniques (dissolves and double printing, for example) - and, for commercial appeal, the emphasis on fast-paced action alternating with scenes of violence and boudoir sex.

The final form of *The Pleasure Garden* contains several elements that would intrigue Hitchcock throughout his career: the theatrical setting, the motif of voyeurism, sudden emotional breakdown, and the psychological torture and physical pain inflicted on women by deceitful and violent men. The last element is not peculiar to his entertainments, of course: the damsel in distress is virtually an ancient archetype, long a staple of literature, poetry, theatre, opera and movies. Hitchcock showed the world, in stark close-up, that misogyny is part of a

pandemic social pathology. He was neither moralist nor preacher, but his work consistently reveals that the fine arts of human exploitation and cruelty are symptoms of a deep fissure in the human spirit.

The Pleasure Garden opens with a close shot of women's legs, hastening down a spiral staircase toward the stage of the eponymous theatre, where they dance with wild abandon typical of the Jazz Age; the movement is so animated that this silent film suddenly becomes a kind of vivid flip-book. Hitchcock then shows the men in the theatre audience, formally dressed but leering as they gaze at the dancers through their opera glasses. These will become mainstream themes and images for Hitchcock – characters in the world of theatre, drawn into bizarre real-life dramas; voyeurism; the camera observing an observer; the rapid transitions from the watcher to the watched; the dizzying staircase – and the mischievous humour. 'What every chorus girl knows,' announces a title card – and the movie then shows a woman washing her stockings in a basin. Hitchcock's bedroom scenes occur later in the movie, and there is nothing coy, bashful or boyish about them.

Life within and outside this pleasure garden, from London's Piccadilly to the tropics, is a perilous paradise – thus the ominous snake entwined round a tree, and on the title card designs Hitch devised, adding another layer of meaning to the film's title. The chase and nick-of-time rescue at the finale reveal his familiarity with filmmakers like D. W. Griffith, and he was certainly inspired by Charles Chaplin and Buster Keaton as much as by Germans like F. W. Murnau and Fritz Lang, whom he had met in Berlin. One conceit particularly marked the Hitchcock style from this year forward: characters often gaze directly at the camera, thus making the audience a corresponding player, a participant in the drama.

Hitchcock boldly added his initials (and sometimes his full signature) to the intertitle designs. In this regard, he was taking a page from Chaplin and Griffith, who were among the first to understand that the marketing of their own names was as critical as the selling of the properties or presenting an attractive leading lady. 'Actors come and go,' Hitchcock told his colleagues at London's Film Society that year, 'but the name of the director should stay clearly in the mind of the audiences.' That spirit would lead to his cameo appearances: he was the artist signing his canvas, reminding viewers that this was an Alfred J. Hitchcock production.

When Balcon screened the film in London for the press, they were enthusiastic - 'a powerful and interesting story [that] promises well for Hitchcock's future efforts', proclaimed the trade journal *Bioscope* on 25 March 1926. But the financiers working with Balcon would not distribute the picture, claiming that its content and style would alienate British audiences accustomed to more straightforward and less visually inventive movies. Hence Balcon decided to shelve *The Pleasure Garden* for a while - but he had not lost faith in Hitchcock, to whom he gave another crack at directing. (Later, American journalists were scathing, calling the picture 'sappy⁸' and 'a Wiener schnitzel⁹', and banishing it straightaway.)

As for Virginia Valli and Carmelita Geraghty, they apparently never spoke on the record about Hitchcock, even after his international fame was secure. That was perhaps due to the dramatic changes in their lives, which led them to reject all later requests for interviews about their days as movie stars. Carmelita worked in an additional fifty-three pictures during the next decade, but then, at thirty-four, she retired and became a successful professional artist whose paintings were sold at galleries across America; she died in 1966.

Virginia turned her back on Hollywood after appearing in eighteen more movies. Real-life romance then replaced the imaginary sort, when she met the dashing actor Charles Farrell, whom she married in 1931, when she was thirty-three. For the next thirty-seven years, until her death in 1968, she lived more happily than any heroine she portrayed. For her as for Carmelita, glamour-girl vanity was no longer important. Hitchcock referred to his first leading ladies only to cite the costs of their excess personal baggage and their refusal to eat food served on European trains.

Balcon told Hitchcock to remain in Germany, where the producer had lined up another movie with another American beauty, but this time the director was unflappable, even in the face of her frank and sassy sex appeal. After a spin with the Ziegfeld Follies, Brooklyn-born Anita Donna Dooley was brought to Hollywood by John Barrymore, with whom she co-starred in *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* in 1920. Theodosia Goodman had been renamed Theda Bara, and so a publicist changed Anita's name to Nita Naldi. With that, Nita was promoted as the daughter of a famous Italian diplomat and a descendant of Dante's Beatrice. In fact, her family background was far humbler, for she had left school to work as a model before joining Ziegfeld's chorus line. The highlight of her career had been acting opposite Rudolph Valentino in *Blood and Sand* and in De Mille's original *The Ten Commandments*. Incredible though it seems decades later, audiences in the silent movie era often confused the role with the actress, and Nita's notoriety as a vamp on-screen made her unwelcome in many restaurants, on public beaches and at polite social gatherings.

When she arrived in Munich, Nita at once put Hitchcock at ease with her tough humour and lack of guile. Travelling with an older gentleman she winkingly referred to as

'Daddy', she whisked Hitchcock and his assistant off for a visit to a famous brothel that was on her list of tourist attractions. Invited to participate in the customary recreations, Hitch and Alma demurred, while the activities of Nita and Daddy have not been documented. It may have been at this time, or in Berlin the previous year, that Hitchcock also rejected the advances at some pleasure palace of two young German girls who then shrugged indifferently and got into bed together. Hitchcock remained to observe at close range the lesbian encounter. 'It was a very *gemütlich*¹⁰ [cosy] family soirée,' he said.

But there was work to do with his cast that autumn of 1925. *The Mountain Eagle*, based on a story by Balcon's story editor, concerned (of all things) scandal among Kentucky hillbillies, which was not exactly familiar territory for Hitchcock or his writer, the prolific Eliot Stannard. Very quickly, the finished film, partly shot in the snowy Tyrol, vanished into oblivion, and only some still photographs survive - no loss, said Hitchcock, calling it 'a very bad movie'. But the trade review in London's *Kinematograph Weekly* for 7 October 1926 disagreed, praising the direction as 'thoroughly imaginative ... [despite the] slow tempo and a story too full of unconvincing twists.'

Nita Naldi came to the production with all sorts of suggestions as to how she might make the role of a doughty schoolmarm more alluring. 'She arrived¹¹ on the set with fingernails like a mandarin's,' Hitchcock recalled, 'and with four-inch heels and a black dog to match her black, swathed dress. She was dark, Latin, Junoesque and slinky, with slanting eyes, and her maid followed her - it was like the royalty Germany hadn't seen for years! I was thinking of a simple Kentucky Miss in a gingham gown and a cotton apron. I had to turn her into a strong woman of the Midwestern mountains who handled a gun instead of a lipstick.'