



WILEY-BLACKWELL COMPANIONS TO FILM DIRECTORS

**A Companion to
Alfred Hitchcock**

Edited by

Thomas Leitch and Leland Poague

 **WILEY-BLACKWELL**

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A Companion to Alfred Hitchcock

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A Companion to Alfred Hitchcock

Edited by

Thomas Leitch and Leland Poague

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In memoriam
Robin Wood
1931-2009

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Introduction

Thomas Leitch and Leland Poague

Our dedication of this volume to the late Robin Wood honors one of the founding practitioners of Hitchcock studies. In looking backward to a departing generation of Hitchcock scholars that now sadly includes Raymond Durgnat, Eric Rohmer, and Claude Chabrol, it seeks to root the present volume in a rich tradition of Hitchcock commentary that now numbers hundreds of books and essays. Alfred Hitchcock and his films have been the subject of biographies, thematic surveys of his entire career, scholarly monographs on aspects ranging from Hitchcock's Victorianism to his bi-textuality, case studies of individual films and even sequences from particular films, catalogues of Hitchcockian motifs, reference books, quiz books, and books for readers still too young to know what monster lurks in Norman Bates's fruit cellar.

In considering our place in this tradition of Hitchcockiana, we are especially mindful of other collections of essays on the Master of Suspense. If Hitchcock has commanded vastly more scholarly attention than any other filmmaker, he has also been incomparably well served by the anthologies that have done so much to set the course of Hitchcock studies. Albert J. LaValley's *Focus on Hitchcock* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1972), whose editor provided a masterful introduction to a potpourri of interviews, reviews, analyses, and polemics, went a long way toward consolidating Hitchcock's position in film studies. The two editions of Marshall Deutelbaum and Leland Poague's *A Hitchcock Reader* (Ames: Iowa State UP, 1986; Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), addressed alike to students in the university-level Hitchcock courses that LaValley's anthology

clearly anticipated, proposed the director's work and its reception as embodiments of cinema's leading traditions and developments. Walter Raubicheck and Walter Srebnick's *Hitchcock's Rereleased Films: From Rope to Vertigo* (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1991) made a case for the centrality of five Hitchcock films - *Rope* (1948), *Rear Window* (1954), *The Trouble with Harry* (1955), *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1956), and *Vertigo* (1958) - long kept from audiences by contractual negotiations that outlived the director himself. Slavoj Žižek's *Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Lacan (But Were Afraid to Ask Hitchcock)* (London: Verso, 1992) placed the director, who had already played a leading role in Žižek's shotgun wedding of Lacan and pop culture, front and center in debates about cultural signification. Later in the same decade, Jonathan Freedman and Richard Millington's *Hitchcock's America* (New York: Oxford UP, 1999) joined Žižek and company in shifting the grounds of Hitchcock studies from formal and thematic studies that focused on mining each film for meaning to a cultural-studies perspective that took each film, and Hitchcock in general, as symptoms of larger signifying patterns. The two anthologies with which Richard Allen and Sam Ishii-González bookended the 1999 Hitchcock centennial conference - *Alfred Hitchcock: Centenary Essays* (London: BFI, 1999) and *Hitchcock: Past and Future* (New York: Routledge, 2004) - sought to reclaim film studies from the flattening sterility of reception studies, which too often saw the films as value-neutral or even pathologically symptomatic, and reestablish them as works of art. The two volumes of essays reprinted from the *Hitchcock Annual - Framing Hitchcock: Selected Essays from the Hitchcock Annual*, edited by Sidney Gottlieb and Christopher Brookhouse (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 2002), and *The Hitchcock Annual Anthology: Selected Essays from Volumes 10-15*, edited by Gottlieb and Allen (London: Wallflower, 2009) - offered specific suggestions for the responsible care

and feeding of Hitchcock studies in light of the worrisome rise of “Big-Time Hitchcock” (*Framing* 15). And of course the venue in which the essays collected in these two volumes originally appeared, the *Hitchcock Annual*, is itself, like *The MacGuffin*, its sister publication edited by Ken Mogg, a constant source of new essays on Hitchcock.

Given such a long and varied tradition, not only of Hitchcock scholarship but of Hitchcock anthologies, why do we now extend the list with still another volume? Each of these earlier anthologies was organized more or less explicitly around a controversy. Was Hitchcock an artist or an entertainer? Did Hitchcock’s American films represent his crowning achievement or a falling-off from a series of faster-paced English films more immediately grounded in wit, brio, and social observation? How did the re-release of five long unavailable films reshape received wisdom about the shape of his career? What role did this most popular of genre filmmakers play in the commodification of meaning and the challenge to meaning-making systems? Could Hitchcock’s films more fruitfully be studied from aesthetic perspectives or when taken as symptomatic of the cultural pathologies of postmodern America or of global postmodernism more generally? How exactly was Big-Time Hitchcock to be managed?

Because Hitchcock always seems to be at the center of some controversy swirling around film studies or semiology or cultural studies, he has been incomparably useful in providing an accessible laboratory in which to test ideas about filmmakers, films, filmmaking, and popular culture. Even if there is always a Hitchcock controversy, however, the nature of the controversy is always shifting. In particular, each Hitchcock anthology has taken previous Hitchcock criticism as an indispensable part of its subject. Every one of these anthologies, even those that rely entirely on previously published material, uses the retrospective

force of its survey of Hitchcock scholarship as the basis for an argument about how Hitchcock studies can shape the disciplinary future of film studies or cultural studies or new media studies and so forth.

So part of our purpose here has been to provide a retrospective overview of some of the leading controversies that have shaped Hitchcock studies, establishing and confirming it as a discipline and marking the principal stages in its development. These controversies begin long before Robin Wood's pioneering interventions. They leave their traces in the extended 1950s debate in *Cahiers du cinéma* over Hitchcock's status as a film artist, and in Lindsay Anderson's even earlier dismissal of Hitchcock's American films as "heavy, tedious, glossed, at their best, ingenious, expert, synthetically entertaining" ("Alfred Hitchcock," in *Focus on Hitchcock*, LaValley, 1972, 48-59, at 59). But they are given their definitive articulation by the question with which Wood first called *Hitchcock's Films* to order in 1965: "Why should we take Hitchcock seriously?" (*Hitchcock's Films Revisited*. Rev. ed. New York: Columbia UP, 2002, 55) - a question that was enormously influential because it provided a primary impetus not only for Hitchcock studies but for cinema studies in general as it fought to establish its cultural and academic credentials by asserting that its subject, though originating as popular entertainment, could also have the power of art.

The present collection extends the tradition of anthologies that have sought to characterize Hitchcock studies by providing a retrospective snapshot, a time capsule of the debates that have shaped Hitchcock scholarship. But it differs from earlier collections in several important ways. The most obvious of these is its scope. Because we had the freedom to plan the collection on a generous scale, we sought to include as many approaches to Hitchcock, as many different Hitchcocks, as possible instead of focusing

on a single aspect of Hitchcock's work or a single definitive Hitchcock. Moreover, we planned the collection from the top down. Instead of asking potential contributors what they most wanted to write about, we approached them with specific topics in mind in hopes of producing a volume that would be at once comprehensive and integrated. We commissioned virtually every contribution expressly for this volume, and the few exceptions were extensively revised for their appearance here. Although James Vest and Jack Sullivan were obvious choices to write on the French reception of Hitchcock and on the director's use of music, their essays extend rather than simply recapitulating their earlier work.

Our abiding concern was to nurture and extend the kind of productive debate that has been the lifeblood of Hitchcock studies. From its beginnings, the field has been driven by a series of antinomies that have allowed notable critics to weigh in on either side of the question. *Cahiers* contributors debated Hitchcock's status as maker and artist, and Durgnat developed his reading of Hitchcock in direct response to Wood's question, "Why should we take Hitchcock seriously?" Hitchcock studies ever since has developed through a series of theses and antitheses that have led to syntheses capable of generating new antitheses. This collection continues this Hegelian pattern by emphasizing questions capable of generating a range of useful answers. Is Hitchcock inimitable, or is he everywhere imitated? Richard Allen contends that his influence has been extensive and multifarious, but by no means indiscriminate. Is Hitchcock fundamentally a creator of original works or the leading member of a production team? Leland Poague, Tania Modleski, and Susan White develop an impressively wide range of models for discussing Hitchcockian collaboration. Should Hitchcock's films be studied for their own virtues and values, or for what they can tell us about cultural currents,

industry practices, and the nature of narrative suspense? Half a dozen different contributors show that his films can be at once admired and pressed into serving larger intellectual or cultural programs. Indeed, even those essays most overtly concerned with Hitchcock's status as auteur director - those by James Vest, Janet Bergstrom, and Harry Oldmeadow - observe how thoroughly his reputation was constructed, by his detractors as well as his partisans, though they focus alike on the crucial role played by critics associated with *Cahiers du cinéma*, especially François Truffaut and Robin Wood.

In soliciting contributions, we have aimed for a balance between established and emerging scholars, notable Hitchcockians and contributors from outside Hitchcock studies who could bring a fresh perspective to familiar material. An earlier policy we set proved still more decisive. Because we had no desire to build our collection out of authorized readings of canonical films, we chose to organize our contributions in terms of topics and approaches instead of soliciting new readings of individual films. This decision had the effect of subordinating each contributor's departures from scholarly consensus - how many of the numberless essays on *Psycho* (1960) cite earlier commentators on the film only to mark the given essay's distance from them? - to potential disagreements among the present contributors, who felt free to range outside the individual preserve of *The 39 Steps* (1935) or *Rear Window* to which assignments to write on individual films might have safely confined them.

In lieu of essays devoted to individual films that offer interpretations explaining what the films mean, we sought contextual essays on the circumstances under which Hitchcock's films have been produced and received, especially essays on topics most likely to lend themselves to productive debate. Ken Mogg and Charles Barr investigate

the influence of earlier writers and filmmakers on a director notorious for the highly selective list of literary and cinematic influences he acknowledged. Thomas Hemmeter and Angelo Restivo consider Hitchcock's credentials as an exemplary modernist and postmodernist in a pair of essays whose relation to each other is far more complex than simple opposition.

Although we gave each contributor a specific topic, the inevitably serendipitous development of essays as they moved from topics through premises and examples to conclusions led to a wealth of unexpected results. We anticipated a good deal of emphasis on *Vertigo*, but not nearly so much on *Waltzes from Vienna* (1933) or *Under Capricorn* (1949). Imagine our surprise, then, when Richard Ness announced his intention to focus on both of these neglected films in his essay on Hitchcockian melodrama. We were equally surprised by the number of contributors who wrote at length about *Marnie* (1964). In view of the fascinating differences that emerge from the considerations of *Marnie* in the essays by Tania Modleski, Brigitte Peucker, William Rothman, and Florence Jacobowitz, however, we were happy to be surprised, and we trust that readers will share our pleasure.

Enterprising readers might well imagine a collection using alternative topics for section headings or individual essays. To an extent, so did we, in that our table of contents shifted considerably as essays began to arrive and we saw how different authors treated their assigned topics, sometimes in ways we could not have anticipated. Our one obligatory section, the longest of our nine sections and the central one in the structure of the volume, surveys the historical development of Hitchcock's career. But this section is more notable than any other for its variety of approaches. Sidney Gottlieb contends that Hitchcock's silent films establish themselves as Hitchcockian years before he became

identified with the thriller. Tom Ryall traces the relation between Hitchcock's films for Gaumont British and other contemporaneous English films. Ina Rae Hark, adopting a more thematic approach to Hitchcock's first American films, offers some highly original conclusions about Hitchcock and American masculine heroism. David Sterritt considers the ways in which Hitchcock's brief period as an independent producer laid the groundwork for his subsequent films. Joe McElhaney's emphasis on Hitchcock's distinctive *mise-en-scène* provides new insight into his years at Paramount. And William Rothman, emphasizing the disappointments of Hitchcock's last years at Universal, balances a sense of Hitchcock's compromises and missteps with his achievements in films from *The Birds* (1963) through *Family Plot* (1976). Since Gottlieb begins with an account of *The Blackguard* (Graham Cutts, 1925), on which Hitchcock worked as assistant director, art director, and screenwriter before he directed *The Pleasure Garden* (1925), and Rothman provides an extended consideration of *The Short Night*, Hitchcock's unproduced last project, this section on Hitchcock's development is as comprehensive as it is varied.

Both inside and outside this section on Hitchcock's development, there are many readings of individual films. McElhaney analyzes the ways *Psycho* marks a decisive turn in Hitchcock's *mise-en-scène*. Paula Marantz Cohen uses *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943) to anchor a notion of "conceptual suspense" that sheds new light on Hitchcock and narrative suspense generally. George Toles's meditation on the nature of moral experience in Hitchcock follows the affective itinerary of the cigarette lighter in *Strangers on a Train* (1951). In every case, the analysis of individual films illustrates a larger argument about Hitchcock, cinema, or storytelling.

Although we have not encouraged contributors to argue with each other directly, we must plead guilty as