the sign is the principal theme of the film. Morris's book, which draws on the work of Paul deMan and Jacques Derrida, is in many ways provocatively original. But by and large, it leaves "hanging" the question of history that is animating this essay.


16 This of course emphatically does not mean that television has no political dimension: rather, it suggests that television space operates synergistically with the public event, so that the event and the transmission become coextensive. Today, the media event and reality TV both exemplify this fact.


18 See Belton, "Technology and Innovation," p. 266.


22 See, for example, Miaden Dolar, "Hitchcock's Objects," in Žižek, _Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Lacan_, pp. 31–46; and Žižek's introduction to the same volume.


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_Chapter 11_

**THE MASTER, THE MANIAC, AND FRENZY**

Hitchcock's legacy of horror

*Adam Lowenstein*

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At one point during _The American Nightmare_ (Adam Simon, 2000), a recent documentary that examines the horror film's relation to U.S. social crises of the 1960s and 1970s, director John Landis invokes Alfred Hitchcock as a means of distinguishing horror from suspense:

When you're watching a Hitchcock movie and you are in suspense, you are in suspense as the direct result of being in the hands of a master — a master craftsman who is manipulating the image in a way to lead you where he wants you to go. And I think that's a kind of comfortable scary feeling, whereas in some of the films we're talking about ... when you look at a _Texas Chainsaw Massacre_ (Tobe Hooper, 1974) or a _The Last House on the Left_ (Wes Craven, 1972) ... the people making the movie are untrustworthy. You're watching it, and you're not in the hands of a master, you're in the hands of a maniac!

Landis voices a long-standing, familiar sentiment which this essay seeks to interrogate: Hitchcock, the reliable master of suspenseful audience manipulation, must not be confused with the untrustworthy "maniacs" responsible for the modern horror film's visceral assault on audiences. This insistence on demarcating Hitchcock's distance from the horror films that are so obviously indebted to him surfaces often in film criticism and trade press discourse, where distinction...
between “just a horror film” and “more of a psychological thriller” are remarkably
common. So common, in fact, that one of Hitchcock’s most enduring legacies
could be defined as the line dividing suggestive, tasteful suspense from graphic,
tasteless horror in the popular imagination. But what, then, do we make of Frenzy
(1972), the Hitchcock film that most directly challenges “Hitchcockian” discre-
tion?2

Responding to this question entails rethinking not only Hitchcock’s contribu-
tion to cinema as an affective medium, but also the stakes of film spectatorship as
audience confrontation and authorship’s role in mediating such confrontations.
By analyzing Frenzy as something closer to the culmination of Hitchcock’s project
of manipulating the very senses of his spectators, rather than a regrettable aberr-
ation from his signature style, I hope to suggest alternative possibilities for
imagining cinema’s capacity to confront the viewer. Blurring the boundaries
between the “master” and the “maniac” allows us to see the cultural and political
significance of cinematic spectatorship beyond the confines of tasteful suspense
and tasteless horror.

Showing and suggesting

As Robert Kapsis has noted, Frenzy’s critical reputation has fallen precipitously
since its initially enthusiastic reception in 1972.3 While Hitchcock’s previous
ventures into the horror genre, Psycho (1960) and The Birds (1963), have amassed
sequels, remakes, and cottage industries of criticism, Frenzy, by comparison, has
remained relatively forgotten or maligned. Kapsis attributes the film’s critical
downgrading to “the power of both feminist thought and critical attitudes
concerning cinematic stylization and restraint in shaping recent assessments of
Hitchcock’s work.”4 Tania Modleski has already written an eloquent response to
those who dismiss the film as nothing more than crude misogyny,5 so I will focus
here on the issue of stylization and restraint. Perhaps no one has stated this case
against Frenzy as boldly as Donald Spoto:

The act of murder in Alfred Hitchcock’s films had always been stylized by
the devices of editing and the photographic wizardry that conveyed a sense
of awfulness and of shock without languid attention to detail. But Frenzy was
designed differently, for Frenzy was at once a concession to modern audi-
ences’ expectations and a more personal self-disclosure of the director’s
angriest and most violent desires ... Hitchcock insisted on all the ugly
explicitness of this picture, and for all its cinematic inventiveness, it retains
one of the most repellant examples of a detailed murder in the history of film
... what finally appeared onscreen was unworthy of the ordinary Hitchcock

restraint and indirectness. The scene gives the impression of a filmmaker
eager to push to the limits his own fantasy and to join the ranks of the more
daring (but in fact less imaginative) directors, whose excuses were just
beginning to fill movie screens in 1971.6

Spoto’s characterization of Frenzy as a disappointing departure from Hitchcock’s
trademark approach and a shameful surrender to perversities both personal and
collective rests on the sharp distinction between showing and suggesting. For
Spoto, Hitchcock’s genius stems from his “restraint and indirectness,” his ability
to suggest without showing. Frenzy commits the sin of shocking its audience by
showing horror in all its “ugly explicitness.”

Yet a closer look at Frenzy reveals a complex performance of “showing” and
“suggesting” without mutual exclusivity, where neither category emerges as the
definitive answer to questions of how or why to shock an audience. Contrary to
Spoto’s account, Hitchcock very deliberately alternates between showing and
suggesting in order to highlight their interpenetration. For example, the notori-
ously graphic rape and murder of Brenda Blaney (Barbara Leigh-Hunt) is
followed by a scene where we only hear her secretary (Jean Marsh) scream as she
discovers the corpse. The spectator’s vision in this scene is limited to the nonde-
scribe exterior of Brenda’s office building, held stubbornly in a static shot.
Similarly, the demise of Babs Milligan (Anna Massey) begins as a reproduction of
Brenda’s murder, with the camera eagerly following along as Babs accompanies
the killer Bob Rusk (Barry Foster) to his apartment. But just as Rusk confesses to
Babs that she is his “type of woman,” the same line he spoke to Brenda earlier, the
camera retreats from the scene, descending the stairs and exiting the building in
a fluid tracking movement that again flamboyantly denies horrific visual spec-
tacle. Only this time, as we wait for the expected scream as confirmation of what
we cannot see, we are thrown instead into the clangorous bustle of the street
outside. Amidst the din of the crowded city street we cannot see or hear. But this
scene, too, has its graphic complement. Babs’s body returns later in all of its
materiality when Rusk must search her corpse for his lost signature tiepin.
Rusk’s struggle with the resolutely uncooperative cadaver is both hilarious and
harrowing in its insistently vivid display of the material fact of death, where stiff
limbs must be manipulated painstakingly and frozen fingers must be pried open
arduously, one cracking joint at a time.

These scenes demonstrate the sophisticated intertwining of showing and
suggesting in Frenzy, but they also intimate how the film refuses to define the
sensorium solely at the level of sight. I have already pointed to the crucial role of
sound in these scenes, but even sound interacts with senses other than the visual
during the course of the film. The noise of Babs’s crunching fingers returns later,
as Mrs. Oxford (Vivien Merchant) snaps breadsticks in front of her husband,
Inspector Oxford (Alec McCowen), while they discuss Rusk's murders. This pairing of body and food through sound ties the film's audio and visual economies to one of taste, a trajectory developed throughout the film with stark consistency. As if that were not enough, there are also scenes where smell is added to the inventory of prominently displayed senses, as the wrong man protagonist Richard Blaney (Jon Finch) must deal with a jacket that has become rank after an overnight stay in a Salvation Army shelter. And of course, the sense of touch haunts the entire film through the extremely tactile murder method of strangulation. In this manner, Frenzy emerges as a remarkably self-conscious meditation on the possibilities of sensory perception. The result of this theme's systematic, almost didactic implementation is a film that underlines the inadequacy of the showing/suggesting binary that continues to organize Hitchcock's critical reputation. Frenzy does not simply ask us to open our eyes; it asks us to reshape our idea of what "opening our eyes" could mean.

Dan Auier's recently published Hitchcock's Notebooks supports just such a re-reading of Frenzy as an ambitious, major work, rather than Spoto's depiction of the film as the misstep of a senile director at the mercy of private perversions and public hunger for more explicit cinematic spectacle. Auier reveals details concerning Frenzy's genesis in an aborted 1967 project alternatively titled either Frenzy or Kaleidoscope, a gruesome serial killer horror film that Hitchcock felt an extraordinary personal commitment towards — a project that moved the director, for the first time since The Paradine Case (1946), to pen his own screenplay. Universal's rejection of Kaleidoscope and mishandling of Topaz (1969) led Hitchcock not to despair, but to assertive action — he bought a controlling share in the company and moved Frenzy's production to London to minimize studio interference. In short, Frenzy must be acknowledged as a film Hitchcock very much wanted to make, not a mistake he succumbed to or was bullied into.

Revising authorship

Of course, Frenzy cannot be "saved" simply by conflating biography and work — this would merely repeat Spoto's condemnation in reverse. Such a move would also fall perilously close to what is usually recalled as the ideologically naive days of Cahiers du cinéma in the 1950s and 1960s — an era when a pantheon of auteurs could be constructed based on the more or less direct expression of their artistic personalities on film. But even as auteurism has been supplanted in film studies in favor of other theoretical methodologies, author-based Hitchcock criticism has persisted and even flourished. Thomas Leitch offers an instructive explanation for this phenomenon by remarking that Hitchcock's multidimensional persona (equal parts auteur, impresario, businessman, and legend) "suggests that revisi-
(and its absence) as a mode of communication between film and audience – a debate begun during *Frenzy*'s production, but continued during its reception.

In “The Unauthorized Auteur Today,” Dudley Andrew describes further the author’s existence as a relation between audience and director. Andrew (partly paraphrasing Timothy Corrigan) suggests that the author presents a “mode of identification” for the audience, a link to the process of creation. By tying the insights of Gilles Deleuze on temporality to his own suggestions, Andrew concludes, “the word ‘auteur,’ and the occasional signs left by whatever this word signals, can thicken a text with duration, with the past of its coming into being and with the future of our being with it.”14 The mode of identification offered to audiences by the figure of an author thus includes connections that span time, such as intertextual associations between a number of the director’s films. Tom Gunning boldly enacts this type of proposition in his recent book *The Films of Fritz Lang: Allegories of Vision and Modernity*, a massive study composed largely of close readings of Lang’s individual films. For Gunning, the author reemerges as a crucial aspect of interpretive practice for the audience, and for the critic. The author exists as “an invitation to reading ... precisely poised on the threshold of the work, evident in the film itself, but also standing outside it, absent except in the imprint left behind.”15 What anchors Gunning’s study is the firm belief that reading this imprint constitutes a valuable act of scholarship, one that allows audiences and critics to engage authorship by detecting interwoven patterns across a director’s œuvre – an encounter not with the biographical author, but with “the language of cinema” as negotiated between viewer and director. In other words, the author’s revenge is not reasserting absolute mastery over the meaning of his or her films, but suggesting a set of terms, a number of possible identifications, with which audiences make meaning from those films. To take these identifications seriously as a critic does not automatically denote ideological irresponsibility, where cinema’s inscription in larger discourses is simply ignored – instead, it attends to the complexity of acts of reading within such discourses, where cinema’s coming-into-being between director and viewer is a living negotiation rather than a predetermined certainty.

**Revising intertextuality**

*Frenzy*, as a late work from a highly idiosyncratic and well-known director, abounds with complicated intertextual references that invite certain acts of reading from the audience. As always with Hitchcock, these references function partly as a playful game of recognition with viewers, in the manner of his signature cameo appearances. But there is also a more contemplative and confrontational dimension to the intertextual moments of *Frenzy*. They generate the distinct sense that Hitchcock is not just inviting his audience to alter their expectations and responses to his work, but forcing them to.

Like the similarly titled *Psycho*, *Frenzy* features the graphic murder of a woman early on as its shocking centerpiece. But where *Psycho*’s shower scene assaults viewers with sound and speed – a flurry of rapid-fire cuts accompanied by Bernard Herrmann’s piercing violins – the demise of Brenda Blaney in *Frenzy* proceeds slowly, repetitively, and almost completely without nondiegetic sound. Marion Crane (Janet Leigh), like *Psycho*’s audience, has only a few seconds to realize what is happening to her. Brenda, along with *Frenzy*’s audience, must contemplate her fate through a long, painful struggle with Rusk. She is given time to rebuff, to plan, to plead, to fight, to surrender, to pray, and finally, to scream, when she realizes that rape will not be the end of her suffering. Even the murder method itself, strangulation, emphasizes slow death in contrast to *Psycho*’s lightning-fast stabbing.

The key to the significance of these differences seems embedded in the conclusions of the two murders. In *Psycho*, Hitchcock dissolves from the bloody water swirling down the shower drain to a graphically matched extreme close-up of Marion’s lifeless eye, rotating as if in imitation of the water’s movement in the previous shot. Brenda’s murder in *Frenzy* also ends with an extreme close-up on her face, but this time we see both of her eyes in the stillness of a freeze frame. This juxtaposition of *Psycho*’s single, moving eye with *Frenzy*’s two motionless eyes highlights how clearly Hitchcock demands that his audience see differently during *Frenzy*. We see things explicitly during Brenda’s rape and murder that were only suggested during Marion’s murder – most notably, the physical materiality of both the victim and killer’s bodies. Marion’s body stays partially obscured behind the literal and cinematic cuts of the shower scene, just as the identity of her killer remains hidden in shadow. *Frenzy*, by contrast, features well-lit close-ups of Brenda’s exposed breasts and grotesquely lolling tongue as well as intimate (nearly case history) details relating to Rusk – the streak of hapless dating, the need for love, the sexual psychopathology, the murder method (dispensing quickly with the “mystery” of the necktie murderer’s identity), and, perhaps most strikingly, his voice.16 Where *Psycho* merges Marion’s terrified scream and the violence of her killer’s stabbing into the high-pitched sound of repetitive violin shrieks, *Frenzy* opts to repeat Rusk’s low-pitched growl of “Lovely!” during the rape while Brenda prays softly. In short, Hitchcock presents jarring differences between the two murders in the very places that we brace ourselves for similarities — those places etched in our experience at the level of sensory perception, of sight and sound. The effect is a shocking breach of contract regarding Hitchcock’s role as “master of suspense.” If *Psycho* represents a watershed in Hitchcock’s project of manipulating the sensory responses of his audience,17 then *Frenzy* represents a stunning reevaluation of that watershed. The
line between showing and suggesting has been redrawn, and Hitchcock insures that the audience feels the shock of this change. Viewers, who count on Hitchcock for the discreet tingle of suspense, are suddenly betrayed into an encounter with the sensory mortification of horror.

Another major betrayal of audience expectations surrounding suspense and horror occurs much earlier in Hitchcock’s career and sheds light on Frenzy’s mode of audience address. Sabotage (1936) features an (in)famous sequence where the young boy Stevie (Desmond Tester) unwittingly carries a time bomb disguised with film reels across London. The audience is painfully aware of what Stevie cannot know—the ticking minutes before the bomb explodes. Suspense mounts as Stevie encounters numerous obstacles and distractions that prevent the safe completion of his errand. Since Stevie is a sympathetic character developed with affectionate care earlier in the film, the fretting audience still assumes that he will survive—that the contract of suspense will be upheld. Instead, Hitchcock kills Stevie and a busload of innocents when the bomb explodes.

This moment of audience betrayal in Sabotage was powerful enough for Hitchcock to reflect upon in writing several years later. In “The Enjoyment of Fear” (1949), Hitchcock invokes the language of the contract (as I have above) to describe the exchange between director and viewer necessary to produce pleasurable fear. The director assumes the audience that although they may identify with characters placed in perilous situations in order to feel vicarious fear, they will not “pay the price” for this identification—that once audience sympathy with a character is established, it is not “fair play” to violate it.18 Sabotage violates this agreement not only by killing Stevie, but by combining what Hitchcock refers to as “suspense” and “terror” (p. 121). “Suspense” depends on “foreshadowing,” on audience knowledge of impending threat. “Terror,” on the other hand, depends on “surprise,” on the abrupt revelation of threat without warning (in this sense, “terror” overlaps the visceral shocks associated with horror). For Hitchcock, terror and suspense “cannot coexist” simultaneously, but must be alternated (p. 119). Yet Stevie’s death, he admits, breaks his own rule—it combines forewarning with surprise. The result? “Thoroughly outraged” audiences and critics whose trust had been betrayed, who believed that Hitchcock himself “should have been riding in the seat next to the lad, preferably the seat he set the bomb on” (p. 121).

Frenzy celebrates the breach of contract that stung viewers so painfully in Sabotage. Other Hitchcock films ignore the taboo on violating audience sympathies (Psycho, of course, most famously), but Frenzy lays bare what had been present in Hitchcock’s work all along—the interdependence of horror and suspense rather than their mutual exclusivity. For Frenzy posits forewarning in terms of audience expectations gleaned from Hitchcock’s previous films as well as from his reputation as the master of suspense, and surprise in terms of the staccato rhythm of violation and reinstatement of these expectations. The film revisits Sabotage and the lessons learned there, but the goal is to unlearn these same lessons—to foreground outrage in viewer response, rather than evade it through upheld contracts; to blur suspense and horror, rather than alternate them; to fuse the “master” and the “maniac.”

Once again, intertextual resonance invites viewers to participate in this project of unlearning. The film Stevie transports in Sabotage bears the title Bartholomew the Strangler, suggesting that Frenzy’s own strangler may be prefigured in this deadly bomb masquerading as a film. The trope of film as bomb, capable of inflicting damage on its audience, provides a striking interface between Sabotage and Frenzy—the unseen Bartholomew the Strangler could be understood as realized not only as the shocking explosion but as Frenzy itself. When inspector Ted Spenser (John Loder) discovers the Bartholomew film in amidst the wreckage of the bus, a reporter asks him if the charred object is indeed a film tin. “No,” Spenser seethes, “sardines.” Spenser’s equation of film as food along an axis of destructive consumption is fully borne out by Frenzy, just as Spenser’s undercover identity as a greengrocer is ominously reversed by the greengrocer Rusk’s undercover identity as the necktie murderer. Even the unlikely notion of a film entitled Bartholomew (!) the Strangler has its dark echo in Frenzy—our laugh over Bartholomew’s absurdy title gets caught in our throat as we watch Spenser stare helplessly at the film tin as all that remains of Stevie, just as Frenzy’s many laughs maintain an uneasy proximity with real horror. Indeed, if Frenzy blurs horror and suspense as tools of audience confrontation, then humor overlays this chaotic cross-pollination as an equally vital mode of viewer self-reckoning.19 Over and over, Frenzy returns to Sabotage not to correct what Hitchcock referred to as the “grave error” of Stevie’s murder, but to inhabit that error in all its graveness.20

Revising the national

The language of the contract is not the only figurative discourse Hitchcock employs in “The Enjoyment of Fear” to discuss the betrayal of Sabotage. Another is the language of warfare. Hitchcock posits the difference between terror and suspense as “comparable to the difference between a buzz bomb and a V-2” (p. 118). Suspense, like the noisy buzz bomb, relies on the forewarning provided in the moments between the bomb’s release and its impact. Terror, like the silent V-2, generates only surprise when it detonates. “To anyone who has experienced attacks by both bombs,” Hitchcock explains, “the distinction will be clear” (p. 118).

Hitchcock draws attention here to apparently personal wartime experience in Britain. The autobiographical reference may seem somewhat odd at first glance,
but its presence recalls a significant 1940 incident that helped convince Hitchcock to leave Hollywood temporarily and return to his native soil. One of his former British producers, Michael Balcon, publicly accused Hitchcock of abandoning his country during her most urgent time of national need. Hitchcock felt compelled to reply publicly: “The British government has only to call upon me for my services. The manner in which I am helping my country is not Mr. Balcon’s business and has nothing to do with patriotic ideals.”21 In 1943–44, Hitchcock returned to Britain and contributed to three wartime propaganda projects supervised by the British Ministry of Information. He co-wrote and directed two short films about the French Resistance, Bon Voyage (1944) and Aventure Malgache (1944), and worked briefly as a “treatment advisor” on documentary footage of Nazi concentration camps. The unfinished documentary was known in its time only as “F3080,” but in 1985 it was polished and broadcast by PBS as Memory of the Camps.22 Despite these efforts, Hitchcock’s references to the war in “The Enjoyment of Fear” suggest that questions of “patriotic ideals” still linger – questions that Frenzy, as yet another return to Britain, will recast in terms of demythologized “Britishness” and redefined lines between “Hitchcockian” suspense and “non-Hitchcockian” horror.

Just as Frenzy revisits Hitchcock’s British film Sabotage, it also revisits the subject of Hitchcock’s wartime “patriotism.” Although claims have been made for Hitchcock’s World War II films as unambiguous valorizations of democracy, others have noted the more ambivalent nature of these films’ commitment to a democratic cause.23 Frenzy, filmed away from Hitchcock’s adopted homeland during the turbulent era of the Vietnam War, perhaps in the kind of savage critique of British national mythology that the independent horror film was simultaneously leveling against American national mythology. World War II may reside in the past, Hitchcock seems to suggest, but the mythology of national consensus that sustains war, just or unjust, thrives in the present.

Not surprisingly, several British critics attacked Frenzy for portraying Britain anachronistically, as a function of Hitchcock’s outdated state of mind rather than the current state of the nation.24 What these critics miss is Hitchcock’s concern with the national not so much as a matter of contemporary trends, but of deep-seated beliefs and images. This stereotypical archive of “Britishness” was readily available to Hitchcock – indeed, he had performed it for years in the guise of his trademark public persona. But as Thomas Elsaesser has noted, Hitchcock’s performance of arch Britishness encompasses the double-edged quality of a British “dandyism of sobriety,” where the values of “philistine Victorianism” come under fire precisely because Hitchcock ironically simulates these very mannerisms. Elsaesser argues that Hitchcock’s authorial persona as sober dandy represents a “protest against a specifically English concept of maturity” that approaches the “force of a moral stance.”25 In Frenzy, the moral implications of this protest extend to the interrogation of proper, “mature” Britishness as the repository of national identity.

The opening of Frenzy immediately establishes the terms of national critique the rest of the film will elaborate. A postcard-quality aerial shot of London along the Thames is literally postmarked with an official “City of London” emblem in the upper right of the frame and accompanied by Ron Goodwin’s robustly “royal” score. The camera tracks along the Thames as the credits roll, sailing beneath the majestically raised Tower Bridge. The shot is self-consciously picture-perfect, so it is somewhat jarring when it dissolves into the thick black smoke spewing from a passing boat. However, subsequent shots reveal this juxtaposition of ideal Britishness with an iconography of ugliness as the stylistic and thematic fabric of Frenzy as a whole. The first lines spoken in the film belong to the aristocratic dignitary Sir George (John Boxer), who addresses a crowd of reporters and onlookers beside the banks of the Thames. Sir George refers to Wordsworth as he promises the return of “ravishing sights” of natural beauty along the river, the restoration of a “clear” habitat that has been polluted by “the waste products of our society.” In the very moment that he describes these “waste products” as “foreign,” the crowd discovers a strangled female corpse floating in the river. The illusions of purity collapse alongside fantasies of pollution as “foreign” – Sir George worries that the corpse may be wearing his own “club tie.”

The crowd of onlookers includes a portly man whose traditional British air mirrors Sir George’s. He is dressed in a conspicuously conservative black suit and Victorian-style bowler hat, and although he gives his polite attention to Sir George’s speech, he seems much more fascinated by the sight of the corpse and the comments about the grisly doings of Jack the Ripper from fellow observers in the crowd. Could such a man, the very image of upstanding Britishness, prove to harbor unsavory tastes and untrustworthy impulses? He is, of course, Alfred Hitchcock.

Hitchcock’s cameo foregrounds Frenzy’s challenge to traditional conceptions of British national identity. The film’s protagonist, Richard Blaney, is a former Royal Air Force pilot. But instead of the expected noble military hero, Blaney is abrasive, spiteful, and violent. This is a very different “wrong man” than those from Hitchcock’s past – when Blaney is placed alongside a character like Roger Thornhill (Cary Grant) from North by Northwest (1959), the difference between “wrong man” and simply “wrong” becomes glaring. Similarly, the vibrant English local color associated with Covent Garden does not receive the warmly nostalgic treatment one might expect (especially given the line of greengrocers in Hitchcock’s own family background). This is not the Covent Garden celebrated for its working-class rituals, as presented in Lindsay Anderson’s documentary Every Day Except Christmas (1957) and adapted for other “authentically British” working-class locales in the related films of the British New Wave.26 Instead,
Hitchcock’s Covent Garden mixes the everyday labor of the market with the fantastic labor of murder. This interchange reaches its most literal extremes when Bab’s dead body becomes part of a potato truck’s cargo. But the greengrocer/killer Rusk embodies Covent Garden’s Englishness most thoroughly, and most disturbingly. His rape and murder of Brenda Blaney is bookended by bites he takes from an apple. When he first takes the apple from Brenda he comments, “English, isn’t it? Yeah, of course it is.” Rusk, like Frenzy itself, encourages us to ask, “Is horror understandable as ‘English’?” Of course it is.

Conclusion

When we consider Hitchcock’s authorship in light of Frenzy, rather than divorced from it, the image and legacy of the “master” shifts significantly. A project of suspense becomes imbricated with a project of horror, resulting in a demythologized representation of “Britishness” itself. The very term “Hitchcockian” radiates a different meaning, moving from precisely measured manipulation (with its connotations of “British” restraint) to shocking confrontation. On the eve of Frenzy’s screening at Cannes, François Truffaut asked Hitchcock “how a director of suspense and espionage films can compete with everyday life in 1972?”[2] This essay ultimately claims that Frenzy answers this question by situating the relation between film and everyday life not in terms of competition, but of modes of perception. Frenzy demands that viewers redefine their ways of seeing Hitchcock, of perceiving his films between showing and suggesting, between suspense and horror. If the “master” is the “maniac,” then Hitchcock’s name can no longer divide the trustworthy “thriller” from the untrustworthy “horror film.” “Untrustworthy,” in this sense, might finally translate as “alive to the anguish of history.”

Notes

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1 Witness, for example, the recent critical scandal surrounding Ridley Scott’s Hannibal (2000), when expectations for a “thriller” could not be reconciled with unsettling cinematic elements deemed worthy only of “horror.” For a thoughtful examination of the thriller at the crossroads of several genres, see Martin Rubin, Thrillers, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

2 Director David Cronenberg responds with a similar question when asked why his visceral horror films refuse to be more discreetly “Hitchcockian” in their presentation of graphic violence: “Have you seen Frenzy?” Quoted in Chris Rodley (ed.) Cronenberg on Cronenberg, London: Faber & Faber, 1997, p. 41.


4 Kapis, Hitchcock, p. 147.


9 See John Caughie (ed.) Theories of Authorship, London: Routledge, 1993, for a compendium of important writings relevant to film authorship, including those of Cahiers du cinéma. For a valuable thinking of the conventional account of authorship associated with Cahiers, see James Naremore, “Authorship and the Cultural Politics of Film Criticism,” Film Quarterly 44.1, Fall 1990, pp. 14–23.


13 See Shaffer’s commentary in The Story of Frenzy (Laurent Bouteau, 2000), a documentary included on the DVD release of Frenzy (Universal, 2000).


16 One might include the physical presence of Rusk’s smiling mother (Rita Webb) during the film as a knowingly humorous addition to this list — her sweet (and silent) visage seems calculated to be everything Mrs. Bates was not.


Chapter 12

HITCHCOCK'S IRELAND
the performance of Irish identity
in Juno and the Paycock and Under Capricorn

James Morrison

Alfred Hitchcock's work, by many accounts, is notoriously apolitical. Especially given Hitchcock's avowals of allegiance to "pure" cinema, it has always been easier for critics to view his work in the context of formalist-aestheticism than to examine the political ramifications his work may substantiate, even despite those avowals. Moreover, when Hitchcock's work has been treated in terms of political or social issues, it has usually been conformed to a traditional modernist template that aligns experimental form with "progressive" ideologies, even in the face of apparently reactionary content. To be sure, if Hitchcock's work has been treated politically at all, it has been seen either as a manifestation of the modernist self-reflexivity that evidently, in these accounts, exceeds politics as such; or else, on the one hand, as a reinforcement of British imperialism or, on the other, as complicit with the institutions of post-World War II America's national security state.¹

For a filmmaker so apparently committed to shoring up the British or American Empires, however, Hitchcock is notably attentive, in his films, to issues of xenophobia, nationalist insularity, and colonialist domination. Indeed, at times when the prevalent portrayal of Empire in British cinema typically fostered the legitimacy of British domination, Hitchcock's work repeatedly appeared sympathetic to the self-determination of nations under British dominion. The treatment of the Canadian Hannay in The Thirty-Nine Steps is a striking example, but the only two of Hitchcock's films to treat Irish themes in a sustained way challenge most