

Excerpts from Reviews & Brief Comments:Hitchcock's *Rear Window*

Glenn Lovell, *San Jose Mercury News*:

Don't resist the urge -- steal a peek at it now, and be reminded why Hitchcock is still without equal in the clammy thrills department.

Jeff Millar, *Houston Chronicle*:

The deliciousness of watching the film as it's intended to be seen is that the big screen gives *Rear Window* back its claustrophobia

Dennis Schwartz , *Ozuz's World Movie Reviews*:

Alfred Hitchcock's answer to why he makes films and perhaps his darkest one, both as a romance and as a thriller. It plays as the ultimate guilty pleasure treat (comparing the viewer to a voyeur who sits in the dark judging what he sees while being unobserved) and an allegory to the dreamlike workings of the cinema. Hitch makes the most of his artificial Greenwich Village setting to stage an innovative, suspenseful and entertaining but morally questionable voyeuristic murder mystery story.

Dan Jardine, *Cinemania*

In keeping with the focus of this essay upon *Vertigo* and *Rear Window*, look at the similarities between the female leads in both films. The icy blonde. Cool. Distant. Detached. Aloof. Unattainable. Troubled. Sexy without being necessarily sexual. Further, add to this how both films provide evidence of Hitchcock's familiar obsessions with voyeurism (*Rear Window*, *Psycho*) and the male gaze as well as the attendant (Catholic) guilt and drive to violence and/or control that attends the resultant arousal.... [and the] dual nature of men and women (can Grace Kelly's Lisa, a bon vivant New York sophisticate, be at home in the rough and tumble world of photographer L.B. "Jeff" Jeffries?)

Both films also consider the impossibility of the male-female relationship, though *Rear Window* is considerably lighter in that regard, ending as it does on an ambiguously optimistic note. People, and women in particular, are not who they seem to be, and all that mask wearing makes permanent happiness between the sexes extremely unlikely. Further, the leads in both films are seen as emasculated in this brave new world. Jeff (broken leg) and Scotty (vertigo) are damaged goods, reliant upon and yet intimidated and confused by women. Here Hitch seems to be tapping into a familiar theme of the day, one which runs throughout most of the best noir of the period, gender confusion surrounding the role of men and women in this post-war era, which helped to create one of noir's most distinctive attributes, the femme fatale. The similarities between the treatment of women in these two films ends there, however, as *Rear Window*'s Lisa finds a way to bridge the gap between genders as the film aims towards happy ending...

John Morrone, *Chelsea Clinton News*, Oct. 20, 1983, p. 18

Seamlessly witty and with water-tight suspense, *Rear Window* reminded us that films must be composed, that they create entire worlds for us to enter in which our emotions can be thrillingly tampered with.

James Stewart's voyeur-detective, discovering a murder across a Greenwich Village court, violates lives as he exposes an evil and "sets things right." But Raymond Burr's trapped killer finally asks, "What do you want from me?" It's a question only the audience can answer, and Hitchcock strikes us dumb by our prurient, 2D interest in our unpredictably 3D neighbors. *Rear Window* is the window into the viewer's own eye, and Hitchcock's film is so observant, it feels like *it* watches *us*. Every inch is a masterpiece.

Rex Reed, "Rear Window": Still Wonderful," *New York Post*, sept. 30, 1983

Hitchcock not only shows an immobilized man looking out. But he also shows the world he sees and how he reacts. Stewart is the camera. We see everything through his binoculars. We discover each club the same time he does.

The cutting, the rhythm, and the direction of the action in the various windows across the courtyard command the audience's undivided attention until you are shaking with suspense and terror. This is an audience-participation picture in the keenest sense. In the end it is also a film of great tenderness and humanity.

Andrew Sarris, "Return of the 'Missing' Hitchcocks," *The Village Voice*, Aug. 23, 1983, p. 41

Village types, for example, may still complain that Hitch's view of bohemia is strictly Middle America. There is the matter of a door that is left conveniently unlocked, and the more substantial complaint that the crucial relationship between the pathetic murderer (Raymond Burr) and the snoopy witness (James Stewart) is insufficiently developed.

On the overwhelmingly positive side is the deliciously perverted relationship between the morbidly voyeuristic "hero" and the elegantly masochistic heroine (the late Grace Kelly at her most Vogue coverish), the director's profound insight into the morbidly voyeuristic attraction that is at the heart, if not in the soul, of all movie making and movie watching, the sterling contributions of Wendell Corey and Thelma Ritter in support, and the interesting tension between the sound film in the foreground and the silent film across the courtyard with its very broad pantomimes.

Otis T. Guernsey, Jr. "Hitchcock's Old Touch in New Film," clipping, *Rear Window* (Cinema 1954) at Performing Arts Library

What was, and is, "The Hitchcock touch"? The director himself would be the first to admit that relentless logic has never been one of its aiming points. Pacing, surely, was an important factor in it, with the speed and rhythm to carry over weak spots in the story and cancel the necessity for tiresome explanation and reasoning.

Another important factor—possibly the most important—was a keen sense of humor. Many of his pictures looked as if they had been made by a jolly undertaker. There were memorable laughs all the way through, with chills tacked on to the end to remind you that Hitchcock's stories were only half-kidding.

John McCarten, "Hitchcock Confined Again," *New Yorker*

... "Rear Window" struggles heavily to make the point that an ounce of intuition on the part of a photographer is worth a pound of grammatism on the part of a copy.

The author of this claptrap is Cornell Woolrich, a popular drugstore author, and Hollywood's affinity for him is easily understandable. What isn't understandable, however, is Alfred Hitchcock's association with this enterprise. He is billed as the director, and I fear that "rear Window" must be taken as another example of his footless ambition to make a movie that stands absolutely still. In "Rope" and "Diam M for Murder," He worked, to all intents and purposes, in one room, and in the current foolishness, he is confined to an implausible back yard.

Irene B. Nicholas, "No Hitches in Hitch's Masterful 'Rear Window,'" *Chelsea Clinton News*. Nov. 3, 1993

In contrast to today's slice 'n' dicers, *Rear Window* is bloodless, but it's so full of Hitchcock terror, that is often more effective. The fear doesn't explode on the screen, it creeps up slowly: in the glint of the knife and saw the salesman wipes so carefully; the trips in the dead of night with suspicious looking suitcases; the strangulation of a small dog that sniffs in the wrong places. And always, Hitchcock plays on every man's nightmare: the immobilized man in the wheelchair, trapped and helpless, if, and when, he must confront the killer.

David Sterritt, "Hitchcock's Genius on View in 'Window,'" *Christian Science Monitor*, January 21, 2000

This is an ingenious plot, adapted by John Michael Hayes from a Cornell Woolrich story. But what makes "Rear Window" a masterful movie is the way Hitchcock uses its suspenseful narrative to examine areas of human experience that preoccupied him throughout his life. Chief among these is the power of vision - it provides us with our most vivid knowledge of the world, yet is capable of leading us astray by throwing illusion, confusion, and misperception into our paths.

"Rear Window" also played to Hitchcock's fondness for exploring bold stylistic and technical ideas. He relished the challenge of turning traditional cinema on its head - limiting an entire movie to a single room and the view from its window, and filming nearly all the suspense scenes in long-distance shots with a minimum of comprehensible sound.

Jay Daniel Thompson, "The Complexities of Spectatorship: Reviewing *Rear Window*, *Screen Education*, Spring 2009, Issue 55, pp. 101-5

Rear Window (Alfred Hitchcock, 1954) is best understood as a film about spectatorship—a theme that appears in other Hitchcock films such as *Vertigo* (1958) and *Psycho* (1960). As numerous film theorists have pointed out, viewers of *Rear Window* are encouraged to participate in the voyeuristic activities of the chief protagonist, L.B. Jeffries (James Stewart). Everything he sees, the viewer sees, and his binoculars become a stand-in for the movie camera....

Jeffries casts his binoculars around the neighbouring apartments, and it is significant that much of what he sees involves a conflation of sex and violence. 'Miss Lonelyhearts' (Judith Evelyn) spends most of the film despairing over the fact that she cannot get a date, and fights off unwanted sexual advances from one of the few men she does bring home. 'Miss Torso' (Georgine Darcy) may appear to have an idyllic existence, with her pin-up-girl good looks and bevy of male admirers. However, Jeffries' erstwhile girlfirend Lisa (Grace Kelly) suggests that there may be darkness behind this young woman's sunny facade, pointing out that 'Torso' 'is doing a woman's hardest job—juggling wolves.' The word 'torso,' referring to the trunk of the body, is particularly ominous given that the crime at the centre of the narrative involves dismemberment.

The conflation of sex and violence becomes overt in the events that take place in the Thorwald apartment in an early scene. Jeffries witnesses Lars Thorwald (Raymond Burr) and his wife Anna (Irene Winston) arguing in their bedroom. The scantily clad Mrs. Thorwald laughs at and scolds her husband, while he stomps around in barely concealed frustration. In these shots, there is the suggestion of a sexual tension that is also evident in the nearby apartment of a newlywed couple, as well as in Jeffries' relationship with Lisa. The sexual tension in the Thorwald marriage reaches a crescendo with Mrs. Thorwald's murder.

... There is no doubt that Jeffries obtains considerable pleasure from spying on his neighbours. His binocular-wielding activities quite literally make him smile and keep him awake until the early hours of the morning. Jeffries' voyeurism is understandable: early in the film he boasts about having been a photographer who became accustomed to 'getting shot at' and 'run over' in exotic locations across the globe. Denied the opportunity to partake in these activities due to a broken leg, Jeffries looks for danger and excitement in the world outside his apartment window.