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Hitchcock

Dr. Sullivan

17 February 2016

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Excellent analysis both in
broad generalizations and
small details — both important
in Hitchcock

Revolutionary Camera Work in Hitchcock

Having not had much experience with British Hitchcock, I did not know what to expect. I had been told that British Hitchcock differs greatly from Hollywood Hitchcock but I did not exactly know what that meant, so having the opportunity to watch *The 39 Steps* as well as *The Lady Vanishes* and analyze them in a classroom setting helped me to grasp a deeper understanding and appreciation for the extreme attention to detail that Alfred Hitchcock so obsessively possessed. Every detail of his films was planned ahead of time, storyboarded to extreme precision and this has an immense benefit on the quality of the films he created. An aspect to this technical astuteness that I both noted and enjoyed are the innovative ways in which he manipulated the camera to make the audience feel included in the drama and action.

The 39 Steps and *The Lady Vanishes* are films that enchanted audiences immediately. While Hitchcock did not have a large budget to work with when making films in the United Kingdom, he still managed to leave his everlasting mark on cinematography. He utilized the equipment he already had and tweaked it to create a unique, never-before-seen facet of camera angles and adding more levels to the quality of the films, which turned out to be a huge success. He coined the "point of view" shot, in which the camera follows the main character almost as if another character in the film, in the case of *The 39 Steps*, Richard Hannay and in the case of

The Lady Vanishes Iris Henderson, so that it feels as though we as spectators are literally in the action of the scene. *The 39 Steps* opens with Hannay buying a ticket and walking into a theatre, and "the camera follows so that we move down the aisle with him to a seat," (Spoto 43). In *The Lady Vanishes*, nearly everything is seen from the perspective of Iris, which is of vital importance because she begins to question her sanity, and the audience does as well because we only see the action through her eyes.

This use of the camera also allows for the plot of the films to continue moving forward because it is a very limited view of the action. While we see the action unfolding, we see a biased form of it. Iris sees Mrs. Froy's name written in the condensation on the window, but that conveniently disappears when she attempts to show it to Gilbert; we saw that Hannay did not in fact murder Mrs. Smith, but to everyone else, he looks guilty. Hitchcock was very intentional with utilizing these camera angles because as spectators we feel the same anxieties that the characters feel. We begin to question our own sanity as well as that of Iris because how could a woman disappear on a train without so little as a trace? Surely we must have missed something, but it becomes evident that we didn't; the villains on the train simply didn't want us to believe Iris.

The motif of "seeing is believing" becomes extremely relevant in both these Hitchcock films. In *The 39 Steps*, Hannay's love interest Pamela simply refuses to believe his insistent story about his being framed, until a "Shakespearean overheard conversation" confirms the story he'd told, at which point she completely changes her mind about Hannay and even begins to act affectionately toward him, despite

the fact that he had kidnapped her (Sullivan, 42). Similarly in *The Lady Vanishes*, even the handsome Gilbert simply humors Iris in her search for Mrs. Froy until he himself sees the tea wrapper on the window that Iris had described before. Both of these moments are turning points in the films, moments in which we realize that the main characters are reliable narrators and we are not, in fact, going crazy. Without Hitchcock's revolutionary manipulation of the camera, this kind of cinema would not have had the opportunity to win over the hearts of viewers everywhere, transcending "the particularities of its own era" (Spoto, 46).

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Hitchcock had a wonderful point when he suggested that people see his films, "at least three times, in order to pick out all the details and the intention behind them, and in order to get deeper into things," (Spoto, 46). Each time I rewatch a Hitchcock film, I notice details or catch comedic lines that I'd missed previously. There are so many layers to Hitchcock's films and every single detail was intentional. His extremely precise storyboarding and high expectations from everyone, actors and crew alike, allowed him to create the cinematic masterpieces that withstand the tests of time. It has been 81 years since *The 39 Steps* was released and 78 since *The Lady Vanishes*, yet they both still somehow seem relevant and modern in their own way. Hitchcock was never satisfied with doing things the same way over and over again; he was always looking for the next best thing, the next new toy to tinker with and this constant desire to improve and try new things is what propelled him to unforgettable fame and will allow him and his films to be revered for centuries to come.