

Marty Jonas on Alfred Hitchcock's decline

9 January 1999

Dear Editor:

I thought David Walsh's piece on Alfred Hitchcock and the remake of *Psycho* was on the mark. I had dated Hitchcock's decline from *The Birds* (1963), but Walsh might be right in moving it back to *Psycho* (1960). There was often a cheesiness factor in Hitchcock's earlier films--the gun turning toward the viewer in *Spellbound* (1945), Doris Day singing "Que Sera" in the remake of *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1956)--but the cheap effect and the simple approach began appearing more frequently later on.

I remember being appalled by the pecked-out eyes in *The Birds* and the strangled woman with hanging tongue and bulging eyes in *Frenzy* (1972). (Let's not even get into *Topaz* (1969) and *Torn Curtain* (1966).) I recently rented *Marnie* (1964)--I hadn't seen it since it was first released--and had the same reaction as I did back then: a simple-minded, schematic approach to psychology with wooden writing and cardboard acting (and in many ways a retread of *Spellbound*). Hitchcock seemed to not care in his later films--perhaps he felt out of fashion and tried to compensate with gaudy effects, perhaps he was spoiled by the fame brought him by his very popular TV series (he was probably the only film director other than Cecil B. de Mille known to the public by face and name).

As for the new *Psycho*, when I first heard of it I assumed it was done by Gus Van Sant as an exercise in the spirit of Pierre Menard, a character in a Jorge Luis Borges story who rewrites *Don Quixote* word for word, resulting in a completely new work, different from Cervantes' original--because it is done in the present, it thereby acquires new meaning and becomes a fresh work. But Van Sant's *Psycho* seems like merely an uninteresting stunt with some good moments--not worth two hours of my short life.

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See Also:

A review by David Walsh - *Psycho*, *Vertigo* and *Gus*

Van Sant's passive resistance

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