

Film Analysis: Hitchcock's *North by Northwest*

North by Northwest, directed by Alfred Hitchcock, is considered one of the most prominent films in cinematography. This spy thriller combines darkness and light typical for Hitchcock movies: witty humor, love story, suspense, and mortal danger harmoniously merge in this thriller (Longacre 75). Starring Cary Grant and Eva Marie Saint, *North by Northwest* contains memorable acting performances, accentuating the director's dexterity in creating suspense. *North by Northwest* is representative of Hitchcock's entertaining talent, as it allows readers to escape into a world of international espionage thriving during the Cold War Era.

Similar to more well-known *Psycho* or *Vertigo*, *North by Northwest* is considered Hitchcock's stroke of genius. Unlike *Vertigo*, both critics and audience received this classic highly when it was released in 1959 (Jiang 1). The thriller demonstrates the director's mastery in tension building, suspense, and plot twists. The film follows the story of Roger O. Thornhill, whom an espionage organization mistakes for a secret agent. Consequently, Thornhill, with his love interest Eve Kendall has to escape the mortal danger. Despite being slightly violent, *North by Northwest* is intended for a broad and varied audience, as the movie is suitable even for younger spectators. Yet, those who are fascinated with spy thrillers would enjoy this classic the most. First of all, the movie's purpose is to entertain: it serves a purely escapist function, letting its viewers be engrossed in Hitchcock's cinematic world of intrigue and international spy conspiracy. Hitchcock's thesis here is the disruption of an ordinary man's life (Thornhill's life) caused by accidental circumstances and a third party leading to life-altering events.

The director's credibility is as well-established as it can be. Throughout his career, Hitchcock received a number of awards celebrating his talent, among which are BAFTA and

Golden Globe. In *North by Northwest*, Hitchcock's arguments and principal claims regarding filmmaking can be felt. The director claimed the importance of individual style, which can be traced in his use of cinematic means (Chapman 214). In the thriller under consideration, this Hitchcock's claim is evidenced by the presence of elements typical for this English director. For instance, in *North by Northwest*, the director employs motifs, camera movements, and editing techniques present in his other films but distinguishing Hitchcock from any other filmmaker. Most extensively, the director uses a psychological method, allowing him to effectively manipulate the audience, directing the emotions they feel, raising, and alleviating tension (Longacre 99). In the case of *North by Northwest*, Hitchcock achieves this effect by intentionally leaving out information regarding the character's true motives, identities, and intentions. The character of Eve Kendall is exemplary in this regard: her accidental appearance in Thornhill's life proves to be far from such, and her intentions not as clear.

By the end of the film, Hitchcock achieves his goal and demonstrates how an average person can be forced to undergo the dangerous and traumatizing experience and ultimately preserve their life and humanity. The movie is convincing in establishing and developing Hitchcock's premise. Thornhill seems rather representative of an average person of his era: he is not distinguished by any characteristic that would complicate for the spectators the process of identification with him (Chapman 215). *North by Northwest's* audience seems to be sufficiently wide as Hitchcock's talent is acknowledged globally. Nevertheless, with the progression of time, the film seemingly becomes perceived as less and less pertinent in the current cultural climate. Finding its relevance to contemporary viewers could assist in attracting a wider audience.

The use of evidence and information in *North by Northwest* is dexterous, as the director controls the audience's access to it. Notably, Hitchcock uses distortion and exaggeration of how the characters perceive each other and the movie's world. For example,

after analyzing the relationships between history (Cold War, particularly) and the film, Nadel suggests that "the film is more about misalignment than alignment" (167) of historical events. However, this structure and misalignment of ideas are appropriate as it accentuates the atmosphere of distrust and the espionage motif (Nadel 167). Overall, *North by Northwest* is abundant with strengths, including the suspenseful plot, the somewhat untraditional use of camerawork, and an eccentric perspective on the historical events that serve as the film's background. On the other hand, *North by Northwest*'s primary weakness could be its length (two and a half hours) combined with the scenes considerably decelerating the momentum. Ultimately, the film should be watched by those interested in spy thrillers and the history of cinematography.

Conclusively, *North by Northwest* is one of Hitchcock's most exemplary works, highlighting the peculiarity of the director's style and his ability to manipulate the audience. The movie is appropriate for almost all types of viewers, offering a likable protagonist, intense plot, and plot twists. This Hitchcock's work could also be of particular interest from the historical perspective as it takes place during the Cold War Era and deliberately exploits its impact on the society of that time. *North by Northwest* is a classic that should be watched at least once to gain a deeper insight into Hitchcock's work.

Works Cited

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