05/30/18
Larry Dachslager
The Films of Alfred Hitchcock
Professor Tom Gunning
Tien-Tien Jong

Learning the Hard Way:
The Education of Young Children in Alfred Hitchcock's American Films

In Alfred Hitchcock's films which contain an element of mystery, the key to the resolution is sometimes found by tracing the clues back to incidents from the characters' youth. Whether explained outright or shown via flashback, whether conscious or deeply suppressed, these life-altering childhood issues and events, are exemplified in films such as *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943), *Spellbound* (1945) *Strangers on a Train* (1951), *Frenzy* (1972), *The Birds* (1963), *Psycho* (1960), and *Marnie* (1964). They include, individually or in tandem, traumatic accidents, dysfunctional parenting, early abandonment, and violent death. Though these story revelations were occasionally labeled by critics as the contrived machinations of the director and his screenwriters, Hitchcock's films achieved a unique level of universality by examining characters' behavior within the context of their life history.

The most oft-recounted anecdote about Alfred Hitchcock's early childhood has to do with a parental punishment and the resulting mis-learned moral. Whether related first-hand by Hitchcock himself in one of countless interviews, or indirectly by family members, the details of the story vary from telling to telling. (There are some who suggest the story is apocryphal or, at the very least, wildly exaggerated.) To teach his son a punitive lesson, Hitchcock's father instructed a policeman to lock the five-or-six-year-old boy in a cell and leave him alone for five-to-ten minutes, with no knowledge of what his crime was, or when or even *if* he was going to be

let go. Upon releasing the traumatized child, the officer reportedly said some variation of the warning, “This is what we do to naughty boys.”

Regardless of the version being shared, two elements of the story are consistent: One, nobody can recall the specifics of the indiscretion for which young Alfred was being punished or the exact lesson his father was trying to impart. Second, rather than learning how not to be naughty, the experience taught the impressionable lad that the police and other such authority figures are to be feared and mistrusted — a lesson that lasted his entire life and became a frequent motif throughout his directing career. Hitchcock’s film and television work is filled with scenarios, dialogue, and imagery that hearken back to various aspects of this formative childhood event. It is often seen in the depiction of law enforcement as a danger or, at the very least, a hinderance to the protagonists, as well as tapping into the universal fear of being wrongly accused, mis-identified, or ignored by those in positions of power and/or authority and being unable to stand in one’s own defense.

In interviews, Hitchcock often stressed the importance of his keen insight and ability to manipulate his characters’ and audience’s level of knowledge as a key factor in forging his reputation as the “master of suspense.” This focus on knowledge (or lack thereof) applies not only to the leading characters, but to the young children in his films who, though typically seen in supporting or cameo roles, provide a uniquely innocent, yet relatable point of view. It is in children, especially, that we can see most plainly how the gain of knowledge often equates directly with the loss of innocence, sometimes at the expense of the child’s sense of make-believe. The profound way in which the director’s own palpable, albeit misinterpreted childhood lesson so dramatically informed his life and art is also evident when we examine how the children in his films directly and indirectly gain knowledge and awareness, from the adults in

their lives (including parents and school teachers), from their own experiences, from fantasy gleaned from popular culture and media, and from the assumptions and conclusions they are forced to arrive at all by themselves.

In *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943), the primary story focus is on how teenaged Charlotte "Charlie" Newton (Teresa Wright) slowly uncovers the truth about her beloved Uncle Charlie's (Joseph Cotton) murderous past. Young Charlie, we are told, is "the smartest girl in her class" and master debater in her high school. However, as the story unfolds, she discovers that there are severe limits to her knowledge of human nature and the goings on outside provincial Santa Rosa, California. Part of her education includes an uncomfortable visit to a local bar, during which she learns that one of her peers, Louise (Janet Shaw), though perhaps Charlie's academic inferior, possesses experience and a much worldlier outlook when it comes to working life, economics, men, alcohol, and the authenticity of jewelry.

However, while we watch Charlie's breadth of knowledge widen, hers is not the only education taking place inside the Newton household during Uncle Charlie's visit. Her younger siblings, nine-year-old Ann (Edna May Wonacott) and seven-year-old Roger (Charles Bates) are both eager to exercise what they know, Ann through her extensive reading, Roger through math and statistics. Additionally, both of the younger Newton children parrot ideas they have heard from adults, but do not necessarily fully comprehend. When Uncle Charlie mentions the amount of his bank roll, Roger pipes up, "He won't have it long. The government'll get it! The government gets everything!" to which Ann responds, "You're not to talk against the government, Roger." Though their interjections such as these are typically ignored, probably due to the family's adherence to long-held philosophies about children's being seen and not heard, Hitchcock finds the thoughts the children express, especially Ann's, worthy of consideration.

Hitchcock refuses to allow Ann Newton to serve merely as generic precocious child comic relief in *Shadow of a Doubt*. Unlike her family, who often treats her and her brother dismissively, Hitchcock respects the fact that Ann is a child with important things to say, which he demonstrates by filming her with the camera at her height, often causing adult characters to have to stoop down to share the frame with her. In one of the director's explorations of the notion of "women's intuition," it is Ann, not young Charlie, who first senses that their uncle might be a suspicious character, though she never expresses it outright and never (within the film's story arc) learns the gruesome details. From the moment of his arrival, Ann is the only Newton not taken in by Uncle Charlie's charm. "I remember you… sort of. You look different," she says, eyeing him cautiously. His attempt at an affectionate chuckle and pat on the cheek is met with a subtle glare. Likewise, Ann is resentful of Uncle Charlie's gift of a stuffed elephant and his newspaper house trick, regarding these overtures as insulting and condescending with a corrective, "I'm not a baby anymore." (Similarly, in the opening scenes of Hitchcock's 1934 version of *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, young Betty Lawrence (Nova Pilbeam) bluntly informs Abbott (Peter Lorre) that she is not a baby, and expresses intuitive dislike for Ramon Levine (Frank Vosper), both of whom turn out to be villains.)

The theme of reading, prevalent throughout *Shadow of a Doubt*, is introduced by Ann who is first seen voraciously devouring *Ivanhoe*. With her nose still in the book, she tells the telephone operator she is unable to take a message because, "I'm trying to keep my mind free of things that don't matter. Because I have so much to keep on my mind. Innumerable things." Ann is extremely aware of the advanced level of her intellectual maturity. She considers herself too savvy to actually believe in fairy tales, yet still sees value in reading fiction for the purpose of gleaning real-life lessons. When Charlie says she wants no gift from Uncle Charlie, Ann

explains, “She’s putting on. Like girls in books. The ones who say they don’t want anything always get more in the end. That’s what she’s hoping.” Still, Ann is a discriminating reader. When she spots the copy of “Unsolved Crimes” magazine under her father’s arm, she takes the opportunity to comment on her comparatively advanced level of literacy. She states that she would never read the stories in her father’s “Unsolved Crimes” magazine, not for fear of bad dreams, as her father assumes, but because they are for the “average mind.” After all, Ann is more than willing to, upon request, relate the story of Dracula. (One wonders what Ann would think of the popular series of mystery books and record album of ghost stories, designed specifically for a pre-teen audience, that Alfred Hitchcock would eventually lend his name and likeness to.)

Additionally, Ann has little tolerance the reading habits of those with pedestrian taste, such as her father, or those who do not read enough, as when she chides her older sister with, “If you’d read as much as you should, you’d know (the library) closes at nine.” The indication that Young Charlie, though intelligent, is not well-read marks another possible similarity between herself and Uncle Charlie who, we are told, was always reading before he fractured his skull as a child, but “didn’t do much reading after that.” Perhaps Uncle Charlie’s disinterest in reading is further cause for Ann’s mistrust in him.

Though no longer a baby, there is plenty of indication that Ann is still very much, as she puts it, “practically a child.” Despite the warning that too much reading will ruin her eyes, her resolve to read two books a week comes from her devotion to a “sacred oath” to do so. Her evening ritual involves piggy back rides from her father, and a prayer which include requests to bless “Captain Midnight, Veronica Lake, and the President of the United States,” indications that Ann’s world view extends slightly beyond books to include radio, movies, and her country.

Ann's childhood status causes her genuine concerns, such as her request not to sit next to Uncle Charlie at dinner, to be dismissed by her mother as one of her "foolish ideas." Perhaps Ann feels uncomfortable at being called "my little girl" by a man other than her father. Regardless, the parental inclination is not to inquire *why* Ann wants to switch seats, but to worry that the adult's feelings might be hurt. Even Uncle Charlie sees no reason to view Ann's youthful suspicion as cause for alarm. After all, a preteen girl who gets reprimanded for correcting her elders hardly poses a threat to an adult. This puts Ann in the familiar Hitchcock protagonist position of having her protests fall on the deaf ears of authority figures, including those who are supposed to be familial allies. Interestingly, even Young Charlie, though she understands and supports Ann's wish to change dinner seats, seems neither concerned with Ann's reservations nor interested in pursuing the topic with her little sister any further.

Unlike her attitude toward Uncle Charlie, Ann trusts the two detectives, Graham and Saunders (Macdonald Carey and Wallace Ford) because they are the film's only adults who appear sincerely interested and appreciative of what she has to say. In the guise of reporter and photographer, Graham and Saunders use the naïve, but knowledgeable Ann as a go-between and source of information. "I ask questions," says Saunders, "Ann knows all the answers." Hiding ugly truths from children and allowing them to figure out life's harsh realities on their own is a frequent Hitchcock occurrence. Unlike the equally intuitive Betty in the early version of *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, Ann is spared learning the ugly truth about the close proximity of villainy. In *Shadow of a Doubt*, perhaps the very thing that saves Ann from finding herself in her sister's dangerous predicament or even realizing Uncle Charlie's secret is her youthful, innocent insistence that everything that truly matters in life is found in books.

Although Ann is visibly disappointed with her stuffed animal present from Uncle Charlie, her brother Roger seems delighted with his gift, a toy pistol and holster. Throughout his career, Alfred Hitchcock never directed a western. However, at the height of his renown in America during the 1940s and 50s, the western genre was ubiquitous on radio, the movies, and television. Westerns were particularly popular with young boys whose education on the concepts of good, bad, right, and wrong was largely based on characters' white or black hats and who displayed the fastest draw and quickest trigger finger. Advertising during those decades took full advantage of boys' penchant for playing cowboys and Indians and encouraged immersive role play by providing toy guns, costumes, and various other western accoutrements, all in the name of showing the way a "real cowboy" dresses, talks, and behaves. Hitchcock made effective use of boys' western obsession on several occasions, using it to teach his young buckaroos surprising and sobering lessons, big and small, about understanding the separation between fantasy and reality.

The fairground in *Strangers on a Train* (1951), seedy as it may be, is oddly devoid of children. There are two prominent exceptions, however, both emulating western archetypes. As Bruno Walter (Robert Walker) intently and menacingly follows Miriam Haines (Kasey Rogers, credited as Laura Elliot), he is suddenly accosted by a small boy (Louis Lettieri) wearing a black cowboy hat, western shirt, and a bandana, and brandishing a pistol in one hand and a helium balloon in the other. "Stick 'em up!" the boy says, as the two face each other in a long shot. The startled Bruno looks down to see the tiny boy, in a POV shot, aiming the gun directly at his face, proclaiming, "Bang! Bang!" Bruno, clearly disturbed by the child's violent behavior, vengefully bursts the boy's balloon (and his fantasy) with his cigarette. Bang! Before Bruno calmly continues on his mission, Hitchcock places the camera at the eye level of the startled boy as he

gives the big varmint an incredulous look — only a grownup who is a true villain would do such a thing to a child.

Later in the same film comes one of Hitchcock's greatest set pieces, the fight scene on the out-of-control merry-go-round. The scene features Bruno and Guy Haines (Farley Granger) grappling over Guy's cigarette lighter beneath pounding plastic hooves in the midst of a dizzying sequence of multi-angled shots of wind-blown, screaming riders, snarling horses, frantic bystanders, and an ancient carney slowly inching his way to the ride's control lever in the center. Using his well-honed skill at showing the close-knit relationship between humor and terror, Hitchcock interjects a joke into the frenzy in the form of a jubilant young boy, oblivious to the danger and galloping happily in his western reverie. As Guy and Bruno, now standing, move close to the boy's horse, the child, whose movie matinee education has clearly taught him how to identify the bad guy, starts punching Bruno. As we revel in the comic relief, the laughter, both from the boy and the audience, suddenly ceases when Bruno violently shoves the boy off the horse, sending him flying toward the edge of the spinning ride. In this harrowing instant, Hitchcock abruptly returns the audience (and the little boy) back into the hazardous reality of the situation, just before Guy dives to the boy's last-second rescue and deposits him safely in a carousel bench.

Hitchcock continued his exploration of diminutive cowboys in a memorable 1961 episode of *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* called "Bang! You're Dead," the last of the seventeen installments that he personally directed. The deceptively simple premise involves a lonely six-year-old named Jackie Chester (Billy Mumy) who, with cowboy hat and cap pistol, cannot find anyone to join him in his western play. His parents, though patient, are eager for their boy to leave behind "this western kick." Jackie's visiting Uncle Rick (Stephen Dunne), just back from

Africa, tells the boy to anticipate a surprise gift. Rick, a self-titled "storytelling uncle," gives Jackie money when threatened at cap gunpoint and, when Jackie inquires, reports that he never encountered Tarzan while in Africa.

When left alone, enlisted to unpack Rick's suitcase, Jackie finds a revolver and bullets, which he mistakes for his present. After loading a single bullet and spinning the gun barrel (a skill he, no doubt, learned from television), Jackie spends the remainder of the episode going about his house and the neighborhood aiming his new "toy" at people and pulling the trigger. Once Rick and Jackie's parents grasp the situation, as Jackie continues to add bullets to the chamber, Hitchcock tightens the suspense he has constructed so expertly as the frantic adults try to find the boy and avert tragedy.

For Jackie, a gun with metal bullets instead of the paper caps derided as "cheesy" by a larger kid, is a credence-lending status symbol that carries with it an air of gravity that turns the boy's physical and vocal demeanor from one of innocent play into one of flint-eyed deadly seriousness. In his mind, he is no longer playing, but *being* a desperado. The adults Jackie encounters in the neighborhood, like his Uncle Rick, have the well-intentioned aim of bolstering the boy's western fantasy, and play along willfully and nostalgically. They call him "pardner" and "Wild Bill," pretend to beg for their lives, and dutifully put their hands in the air when instructed to do so. At the episode's climax, in a trick shot borrowed from the director's own *Spellbound* (1945), Jackie points the loaded pistol at the harried maid Cleo (Juanita Moore) who, with her back to the child, responds to his sincerely delivered threat to shoot her with a resigned, "It's all right with me. I made my peace with the Almighty. Go on. Blaze away." At the moment Jackie pulls the trigger, his father (Biff Elliot) shouts his name and the bullet hits and shatters a mirror, narrowly missing Cleo. Worth noting is the vocal sound made by Jackie and the

neighborhood kids as they “shoot” their victims throughout the episode. Young children typically fear loud noises, so rather than shouting an explosive, onomatopoeic “bang!” or “pow!” their oral gun sound is a softer “p-shhhhhhh—p-shhhhhh.” Shaken and startled by the authentic gun sound at the episode’s climax, Jackie is instantly transformed from a tough cowboy back into a six-year-old and runs crying to his mother (Lucy Prentis).

In his closing remarks on “Bang! You’re Dead,” Hitchcock eschews his customary gallows humor in favor of a cautionary message about the importance of keeping firearms out of reach of children. However, the episode also provides a thought-provoking reminder to adults that the line that that separates a child’s make-believe and real-life worlds is blurry and, like a loaded pistol, should be handled with extreme care.

On a related note, arguably the most famous blooper in a Hitchcock film occurs in *North by Northwest* (1959) when a young boy among the extras, not watching the action, but aware of the cue line, anticipates a gunshot and puts his fingers in his ears. For unsuspecting viewers, the scene involves Eva Marie Saint shooting Cary Grant. For those in the know, however, the background boy always upstages the scene. The *North by Northwest* “extra who knew too much” is a prime example of how much audience, character and, in this case, actor knowledge affects a Hitchcock scene.

The main titles for *The Trouble with Harry* (1955) are set against Saul Steinberg’s simple, child-like drawings of trees, flowers, houses, birds…and finally, a corpse. In a pattern that echoes the title sequence, the film opens with establishing shots of gorgeous autumnal Vermont scenery, into which strolls six-year-old Arnie Rogers, complete with customary faux firearms, and played by a pre-*Leave it to Beaver* Jerry Mathers. Arnie walks with a hunter’s stance, wearing a loaded holster and carrying a rifle of sorts, his finger readied on the trigger.

His guns are more along the lines of the ray guns seen in science fiction comics, movies, and TV shows that rivaled westerns in popularity with young viewers. Arnie's ray gun is the only item in the movie that looks like it belongs in the 1950s.

At the sound of a real gunshot, Arnie, his imagination already in full cowboy/space ranger/soldier mode, instinctively drops to the ground, glancing around for the unseen enemy. Only when he hears an adult voice say, "Okay, I know how to handle your type," does Arnie shift from play to reality and look apprehensive. With Hitchcock's camera hunkered down to capture Arnie's point of view the boy continues to investigate until he encounters the deceased title character. In the movie's most famous shot, the one that informs the audience that they are watching a dark comedy as opposed to a thriller, Arnie gapes in childhood wonder as Harry's enormous shoes loom in the foreground.

In his chapter on *The Birds*, Robin Wood describes a conversation between Melanie Daniels (Tippi Hedren) and young Cathy Brenner (Veronica Cartright) by writing, "Where the adults are circuitous and evasive, the child is direct." Wood's observation can easily apply to nearly every conversation between children and adults in Hitchcock's films, and *The Trouble with Harry* is no exception. In the droll world of this film, everyday goings on and out-of-the-ordinary happenings garner an equal response. Like many children his age, little Arnie is inquisitive and has many probing questions for the adults in his life, but while the grownups always respond willingly and without hesitation, they are never honest or direct. When the boy shares his dead discovery with his delighted mother Jennifer (Shirley MacLaine), her blithe responses to his queries offer little in the way of clarification:

Arnie: Why don't he get up and do something?

Jennifer: He's asleep. He's in a deep sleep. A deep wonderful sleep.

Arnie: How'd he hurt his head?

Jennifer: Putting it where it wasn't wanted would be my guess.

Arnie: Will it get better?

Jennifer: Not if we're lucky. Let's run home and I'll make you some lemonade.

Arnie: Will lemonade put me in a wonderful deep deep sleep, Mommy?

Jennifer: No Arnie, but it's better than no lemonade.

Arnie: I don't understand that.

Jennifer: Never mind. You just forget you ever saw this man.

In Arnie's next appearance, where he proudly shows off his new find, a rabbit which he bluntly describes as "dead," we wonder why Jennifer censored her explanation of Harry's static behavior. As he gently strokes the prone creature, already in the throes of rigor mortis, Arnie philosophizes with a sympathetic blend of harsh reality and superstition, "Four rabbit's feet and he got killed. He should have carried a four-leaf clover, too." Like many children in Hitchcock films, Arnie is left, intellectually speaking, on his own. For example, when he asks Sam Marlowe (John Forsythe) how rabbits are born, the answer he gets is, "Same way elephants are." However, despite the total absence of coherent logic from adults, Arnie's dealings with them help him to self-discover a valuable pragmatic talent for entrepreneurship, learning that, under the right circumstances, a dead rabbit is more valuable than a live frog or even two blueberry muffins.

Whether depicted through the droll whimsy of *The Trouble with Harry* or in the starkly realistic pseudo-documentary style of *The Wrong Man* (1956), the children in Hitchcock's films are thirsty for knowledge. *The Wrong Man* recounts the based-on-fact story of jazz musician Manny Balestrero (Henry Fonda) who is mistakenly identified and eventually jailed as a criminal. Early in the film, Manny intervenes in an argument between his two sons, seven-year-old Robert (Kippy Campbell) and five-year-old Gregory (Robert Essen) regarding their respective piano and harmonica skills. After attentively addressing both boys' individual concerns, Manny promises each of them a fifteen-minute music lesson that evening. When he then affirms the scheduled lessons on the phone with his mother, the boys share a grin suggesting, perhaps, that the squabble was a ploy to gain some precious time (and education) with their father.

Following Manny's arrest, the young boys are not included in any family discussions regarding his trial and have to obtain information about their father's whereabouts by eavesdropping. Once his bail is paid and he is released, an exhausted Manny returns home. As he lies down for much-needed rest, Robert enters the room and the two share this brief exchange — perhaps the single most honest, open dialogue between an adult and a child in all of Hitchcock's films:

> Manny: Did your mother tell you what happened to me?
>
> Robert: No, she didn't.
>
> Manny: I got arrested for something I didn't do.
>
> Robert: You don't have to tell me. I heard what they said on the phone. Dad, you're the best dad in the world.

Manny: I do the best I can, Bob. Thanks for telling me.

Robert: You're the best.

Manny: I hope you never have to go through anything like I did. If you ever do, I hope you've got a son that's like mine to come back to. (with a look of epiphany) I never knew what my boys meant to me 'til right now. (Robert cries and the two hug.)

Robert's agency in seeking the information about his father's ordeal and, upon Manny's frank admission, the boy's insightful knowledge that his father *needs* to hear that he is still held in high esteem brings Manny to the realization that his children are more than mere offspring to be clothed and fed. As they pull apart from their hug, they acknowledge their newfound level of mutual respect with a momentary, but meaningful exchange of roles:

Robert: You oughta get some sleep now.

Manny: Yeah.

The dim view Hitchcock took of adults' (including teachers) ability to adequately educate children was matched by his admiration for kids who use their experiences and talents to learn on their own. In *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1956), on a family vacation to North Africa, young Hank McKenna (Christopher Olsen) looks out a tour bus window and demonstrates his inept formal instruction with the observation, "In school they call this 'the dark continent.' This is twice as bright as Indianapolis." Typically, his parents do not bother to correct Hank's misconception of the phrase. That night, as he prepares for bed in their hotel room, his mother Jo (Doris Day) teaches him the song, "Que Sera Sera." Shortly thereafter, Hank is kidnapped. In

the end, it is not the song's cheerily fatalistic message that proves valuable. Rather, it is the boy's ability to loudly whistle the familiar song, alerting his father (James Stewart) to his whereabouts. By drawing on recognition of his past experience and resources, Hank plays an essential role in his own salvation.

Another instance of children being taught a song in a Hitchcock film is in *The Birds,* where the only actual lesson we see being taught at the Bodega Bay School is "Risselty-Rosselty." Aside from the amusing thought that the somewhat cynical Annie Hayworth (Suzanne Pleshette) is enjoying teaching her students a song about a marriage gone sour, one might wonder about the song's inherent educational value. Unlike "Que Sera Sera," however, "Risselty-Rosselty" does not come in handy when the situation gets dire.

In the first part of *The Birds*, Cathy Brenner is portrayed much like other Hitchcock children. The town postal clerks, though aware of her presence, are unsure of her name. Talking to Melanie, Cathy passes on a notion that she had heard expressed by Mitch (Rod Taylor) that his clients are, without exception, "hoods." When Lydia (Jessica Tandy) attempts to correct Cathy's lack of discrimination by talking about legal impartiality, Cathy counters with, "Aww, Mom please. I know all about that democracy jazz. They're still hoods." Clearly, Cathy prefers Mitch's real-life assessment to what she learns in her schoolroom, where the American flag and portrait of George Washington are prominently displayed. However, as Samantha Lay points out, the events that unfold in *The Birds* cause both Cathy's and Lydia's opinions to evolve, specifically regarding the pair of love birds, whom Cathy defends as not having caused any harm, and Lydia maligns with a sharp, "They're *birds*, aren't they?"

Once Bodega Bay is under siege, adults and children are, for the first time in Hitchcock's films, on equal educational and experiential footing. When children ask questions, the adults

have no answers or real-world knowhow to adequately respond. Mitch’s legal training, Annie’s scholastic knowledge, Melanie’s surprising prowess with motorboats and playing Debussey, and even Mrs. Bundy’s (Ethel Griffies) ornithological expertise are as useless as Cathy’s grade-school education. In the end, regardless of age, they are all left to cope using only their resourcefulness.

In recent interviews, actors who had worked with Alfred Hitchcock as children, including Edna May Wonacott, Jerry Mathers, and Veronica Cartright, speak of their experiences and the director with great affection. One exception was Bill Mumy, who recalls a specific moment in the filming of “Bang! You’re Dead” when Hitchcock threatened to nail his feet to his mark, “and the blood will come pouring out like milk.” As with Hithcock’s childhood police encounter, the long-term effect on the young boy was profound. According to Mumy, the event traumatized him to the point where, even as an adult actor, working on the Universal Studio lot, he could never bring himself to walk near the building where Hitchcock’s office was. Mumy claims that, had the director followed the threat with a reassuring word, it would not have mattered beyond that point. It appears that, in that rare instance, Alfred Hitchcock neglected to provide the one piece of vital information and reassurance that he otherwise repeatedly gave his co-workers, interviewers, and audiences throughout his career. “It’s only a movie.”

Works Cited

"Bill Mumy Discusses Working with Hitchcock on *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*." 2014. YouTube. www.youtube.com/watch?v=518ii9yUyzg.

Lay, Samantha. "The Child Hero in Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds*" in *Children in the Films of Alfred Hitchcock*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

Wood, Robin. *Hitchcocks Films Revisited*. Columbia U.P., 2002.