

Comparative Literature 271
Great Directors: Alfred Hitchcock
First Midterm Review

Part I: Short Essay (approximately 50%)

In this section your response should focus on the factual, "who," "what," "where," "why," and "when" details as precisely as possible. A complete answer should supplement information provided in the lectures with examples from the films and additional material learned from the course reading. Please note that the categories listed below are not distinct and overlap in significant ways (e.g., one way of discussing the authorship of a Hitchcock film is to analyze characteristic stylistic and thematic elements that appear in many of his films, across his career, so the first and last categories are intimately connected to each other). Reviewing this information will also be helpful as you analyze the film clips in the second section of the exam.

Possible Short Essay Topics

Authorship of Hitchcock's films

- Beyond the obvious markers ("Directed by Alfred Hitchcock"), how do we know that we're watching a Hitchcock film?
- Which other people and institutions were important factors in the production of films that Hitchcock directed?
- How do we identify their contributions and influences?
- What do we mean when we speak of the "author" of a film, and how does the case of Alfred Hitchcock help us understand and complicate that question? (Think in particular about his relationship with various collaborators: screenwriters, producers like David O. Selznick, actors, etc.)

Industrial conditions in Britain and Hollywood

- What was the condition of the British film industry when Hitchcock began working in it?
- How did that environment affect the films he made in the 1920s in Britain?
- What changes occurred in the 1930s, when Hitchcock was working on his "classic thriller sextet"?
- Under what circumstances did he make his transition to Hollywood?
- How did that change affect the films he made early in his U.S. career?
- What is the Production Code and how did it affect Hitchcock's films?
- What impact did WWII have on his life and work?

Influences

- Which filmmakers and film movements had the most profound effect on Hitchcock's career? At which stages were these influences most pronounced?
- Which national cinematic traditions were most important in his development? (Think especially about German Expressionism, British film traditions, and, of course, Hollywood.)

Hitchcock's process (there's some variability from film to film, so a question on this could focus on either broad trends over the course of a career or a particular production)

- What was unusual or idiosyncratic about Hitchcock's approach to filmmaking?
- What was conventional?
- Is there anything remarkable about his approach to the visual image, to sound, and to the links and conflicts between image and sound?
- Based on the films and the production histories that we've encountered, how would you describe Hitch's relationship with his collaborators (actors, writers, producers, etc.)?

Common strategies and themes in Hitchcock's films

- The MacGuffin and Hitchcock's approach to narrative
- Theatricality, stages, and role-playing
- Characteristic cinematography and mise-en-scene (dramatic high or low angles, Expressionist lighting, shifting POV, etc.)
- Doubles, fragmented identity
- Hitchcock's heroes and heroines (the citizen-amateur)
- Hitchcock's use of film genres
- Feminist interpretations of Hitchcock
- Suspense
- Family plots and oedipal scenarios
- Hitchcock's "murderous gays"
- Hitchcock's "murderous gaze" and its female victims
- Self-reflexive films (or films that allude to filmmaking or forms of art and entertainment)
- Dark comedy

Part II: Sequence Analysis (approximately 50%)

This section will consist of two or three clips from films listed on the syllabus (i.e., from films that were screened in their entirety, not from films that were only introduced through excerpts in class). First, you'll be asked to identify the film's title and the year it was released. Second, you will be asked to analyze the important formal and stylistic aspects of the sequence (what you see and hear in the clip). Which elements of the cinematography, mise-en-scène, and editing are particularly remarkable? Third, you'll be asked to discuss the relationship between this sequence and the film as a whole. Which formal or thematic features are introduced, developed, or resolved at this moment in the film? Fourth, which aspects of this sequence help us understand the relationship between this film and others introduced in the class and the reading? Is the style or narrative consistent with broader trends in Hitchcock's work?