



EDGAR WRIGHT'S LONDON AFTER DARK

Frenzy

No film represents the curdling of 60s fab into early-70s drab like Hitchcock's last great shocker. While this bracingly dark thriller with the blackest of laughs represents Hitch at his most gleefully misanthropic, it's still a fearsomely entertaining proposition.

Edgar Wright

SPOILER WARNING The following notes give away some of the plot.

A contemporary review

Once a Londoner, always a Londoner. Hitchcock's return to home ground, 22 years after *Stage Fright*, is a remarkable performance in most senses of the word; and not least because the journey from California has in effect been made through time as well as space. Hitchcock's London in *Frenzy* remains the same old city in which Sylvia Sidney did for Oscar Homolka with the knife that had been carving the joint, and Peter Lorre held Nova Pilbeam hostage. It's almost a shock when the man on the run finds shelter in the Hilton Hotel, which clearly has no right to be there at all; and it's a shrewd Hitchcockian move, for other than essential plot purposes, to make the main setting Covent Garden, one of the few areas still awaiting the developer.

At the start of the film, a smooth, spruce gentleman is addressing a gathering on the Embankment (Hitchcock, decorously attentive, is in the crowd) on the new cleanliness of the river. A girl's naked body, a piece of all too solid pollution, drifts in with the tide; another victim, as the onlookers obligingly exclaim, of 'the necktie murderer', one of those Ripperish slaughterers who provide instant London folklore. To sustain the antiquated mood, a uniformed bobby is soon telling us (and the murderer) that 'this necktie fellow is giving them a bit of a headache', and two gentlemen in a pub are overheard in a stagey conversation about the odd ways of sexual psychopaths. Skulking in a corner is the obvious, innocent suspect, Blaney (Jon Finch), a bad-tempered ex-RAF officer now fallen on hard times, wearing a tie as ostentatious as a cutlet frill.

It must, presumably, have given Hitchcock a good deal of quiet fun to begin the picture on a note that can only be described as archaic. He's back home, and nothing has changed, including the clichés which pile up like Covent Garden Brussels sprouts at most points in Anthony Shaffer's distinctly laboured screenplay. By any standards, including those of parody, the early scenes of *Frenzy* are over-stuffed with heavily explanatory dialogue.

Part of the wry Hitchcockian charm, however, is the way the shooting tactic acts as a guide to the director's own areas of interest in the picture. On the face of it, *Frenzy* (which started life as Arthur La Bern's novel *Goodbye Piccadilly, Farewell Leicester Square*) is pretty familiar stuff. Perversely, the necktie killer, a Covent Garden fruiterer named Rusk (Barry Foster), selects his old friend Blaney's divorced wife as his next victim. Blaney, under heavy suspicion, takes to his heels with his barmaid girlfriend (Anna Massey), who injudiciously returns to the Market just in time to be snapped up by the busy Rusk. Blaney is innocent but boringly sullen; the more interesting Rusk a

smiling, brassy-haired sadist. Even the two men's friendship and its multiple betrayals, which Hitchcockians such as Chabrol or Truffaut would possibly have seen as the true centre of the film, is here allowed to amount to little more than a device to bring the two ends of the plot together.

What attracted Hitchcock would hardly seem to have been the old 'transference' theme, although Blaney does end up hunting Rusk with a piece of lead piping, or the variation on the notion of the wronged and wrong man. One would guess that he made the picture for the sake of one murder scene, one extraordinary postscript to a murder, and a couple of waywardly comical episodes from the home life of his detective. The cement that holds the bricks in place is provided by the return trip to his lost London of the 1930s; and perhaps by that Hitchcockian trait, more marked now that he is no longer using star players, of casting a cold eye on all his characters. Babs the barmaid is at least as innocent a victim as the schoolteacher in *The Birds*, but her essential role in the film is that of corpse, a slice of very cold meat. Little sympathy is spent on her alive; and Anna Massey, who is well capable of softer things, was presumably directed to play as though she were anticipating her chilly end.

The first killing, of Blaney's ex-wife, is a bizarre affair, a montage murder like something out of *Blackmail*, all cuts and strangling fragments. At the outset, the murderer's hand inevitably comes down on the telephone as the victim feebly tries to dial; and at the end the killer walks out of the shot, casually chewing an apple, as Mrs Blaney's secretary trips up the street from the other direction. Once she has gone into the building, Hitchcock holds the camera impassively on the quiet street corner, a countdown shot to show just how long he can keep his public waiting for a scream.

But if this is a wink-tipping trick, the steady Hitchcock hand turns it to rarer effect later in the picture. The barmaid's murder must take place off-screen, to make its sequel tolerable, and the scene in which she's lured inside the killer's flat (the premises of Duckworth, the publishers, have been borrowed for the purpose) ends with the camera moving slowly, smoothly, irrevocably, back and back, out and across the street. This shot is simply superb; and also very Hitchcockian – a kind of built-in criticism of the earlier, easy trick of the long wait, and our own gullibility in falling for it.

Hitchcock has always known that his public can be made to identify with anyone: killer or victim, detective or suspect, audience allegiances are conditioned by the angle of vision and the impersonal forces of suspense. The grotesque central sequence in *Frenzy* finds the murderer riding in the back of a moving lorry, wrestling with the lumpish potato sack in which he has stowed his victim, in a demented effort to recover the betraying piece of evidence still clutched in the dead hand. Surrealistically, the girl's naked foot peeps out from among the potatoes, like some obscene vegetable growth; appallingly, he smashes the stiffened fingers to rescue his trophy. One has very little real doubt that it was essentially for this sequence that Hitchcock decided to film *Frenzy*; and to demonstrate that during this struggle with rolling potatoes and frozen limbs, the audience must positively side not with the corpse, the innocent lorry-driver, or even the potatoes, but with the obsessed creature at his ludicrously ghoulish task.

The killer gets away: the sequence ends impudently, with the corpse rolling out of the jolting lorry right in front of a police car. That, Hitchcock might be saying, is that: the body, having served his turn, now belongs to the law. And

the third element in *Frenzy*’s triangular construction is in fact provided by the law, in the person of Inspector Oxford (Alec McCowen) and his wife. Mrs Oxford – the superb Vivien Merchant – flows between kitchen and dining-room, serving up alarming Cordon Bleu dishes and chatting breathlessly about her husband’s case. The snapping of a finger is echoed with insolent precision in the snapping of a breadstick; the dead stare of a murdered girl in the fish eye glooming among the debris in the Inspector’s soup plate. One of *Frenzy*’s main topics is the difficulty of disposing of dead matter – food and corpses and clues. And at the end, the undertaker is still making jokes. Rusk is trapped with another dead girl on his premises; and enters hauling a vast trunk, of a kind rarely seen these days anywhere. Presumably, true to the manner of the 1930s murderer, he had intended to leave his problem in the hands of the railways.

Penelope Houston, *Sight and Sound*, Summer 1972

FRENZY

Directed by: Alfred Hitchcock
©: Universal Pictures Limited
Presented by: Universal
Associate Producer: William Hill
Production Manager: Brian Burgess
Assistant to Mr Hitchcock: Peggy Robertson
Assistant Director: Colin M. Brewer
Continuity: Angela Martelli
Casting: Sally Nicholl
Screenplay by: Anthony Shaffer
Based on the novel Goodbye Piccadilly, Farewell Leicester Square *by:* Arthur La Bern
Director of Photography: Gil Taylor
Camera Operator: Paul Wilson
Special Photographic Effects: Albert Whitlock
Film Editor: John Jympson
Production Designed by: Syd Cain
Art Director: Bob Laing
Set Dresser: Simon Wakefield
Wardrobe Supervisor: Dulcie Midwinter
Make-up: Harry Frampton
Hairdresser: Pat McDermott
Prints by: Technicolor
Music Composed and Conducted by: Ron Goodwin
Sound Recordist: Gordon K. McCallum
Sound Mixer: Peter Handford
Sound Editor: Rusty Coppleman
Made at: Pinewood Studios

uncredited
Producer: Alfred Hitchcock
Production Accountant: Ron Allday
Location Manager: Ian Goddard
2nd Assistant Director: Ben Harrison
3rd Assistant Director: Howard Grigsby
Focus Puller: Peter Taylor
Clapper/Loader: Socrates Pelendrides
Assistant Editor: Alan Strachan
Construction Manager: Leon Davis
Costume Designer: Julie Harris
Wardrobe Master: Charles Guerin
Original Score (replaced): Henry Mancini
Boom Operator: David Stephenson
Sound Camera Operator: Michael Hickey
Publicity: Dan Slater

Cast

Jon Finch (*Richard Ian Blaney*)
Alec McCowen (*Chief Inspector Tim Oxford*)
Barry Foster (*Robert ‘Bob’ Rusk*)
Billie Whitelaw (*Hetty Porter*)
Anna Massey (*Barbara ‘Babs’ Jane Milligan*)
Barbara Leigh-Hunt (*Brenda Margaret Blaney*)
Bernard Cribbins (*Felix Forsythe*)
Vivien Merchant (*Mrs Oxford*)
Michael Bates (*Sergeant Spearman*)
Jean Marsh (*Monica Barley, Brenda’s secretary*)
Clive Swift (*Johnny Porter*)
John Boxer (*Sir George*)
Madge Ryan (*Mrs Davison*)
George Tovey (*Neville Salt*)
Elsie Randolph (*‘Glad’, the porter’s wife at the Coburg Hotel*)
Jimmy Gardner (*Berties, porter at the Coburg Hotel*)
Gerald Sim (*Mr Usher, pub customer*)
Noel Johnson (*doctor, pub customer*)

uncredited
Rita Webb (*Mrs Rusk*)
June Ellis (*Maisie, barmaid*)
Bunny May (*barman*)
Robert Keegan (*hospital patient*)
Alfred Hitchcock
(*man in bowler hat listening to speech*)
Richard Wyler (*truck driver*)

UK/USA 1972©
116 mins

EDGAR WRIGHT’S LONDON AFTER DARK

Passport to Shame (AKA Room 43)

Mon 18 Oct 20:50; Sat 13 Nov 18:10

Peeping Tom

Tue 19 Oct 20:30; Sat 6 Nov 18:20

Beat Girl

Fri 22 Oct 20:40; Sun 31 Oct 16:20

West End Jungle + Look at Life: Market Place

+ Look at Life: Rising to High Office

Sat 23 Oct 20:40; Sat 20 Nov 14:40

The Pleasure Girls + Look at Life: Members Only

Mon 25 Oct 20:50; Mon 29 Nov 18:20

Frenzy

Wed 27 Oct 20:45; Fri 19 Nov 18:30

Darling

Thu 28 Oct 20:30; Sat 20 Nov 13:20

Bitter Harvest + Look at Life: Coffee Bar

Fri 29 Oct 18:00; Tue 9 Nov 20:45

The Small World of Sammy Lee + Look at Life: In Gear

Sat 30 Oct 20:30; Sat 6 Nov 20:45;

Tue 23 Nov 14:30

Primitive London + Look at Life: Goodbye Piccadilly

Mon 1 Nov 20:50; Thu 25 Nov 20:50

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