

## Chapter Five—Notorious (Hitchcock 1946)



Fig. 1 "I love you!"

Here She Comes!

Split POV

Relax, hard-boiled, and listen

Devlin's Angle

The Sleeping Beauty Global Image

Stylized Drinks

The Freudian scenario

The Stairs Fatale

### Here She Comes!

The film begins with a self-referential close-up of a newspaper photographer's camera and flash attachment. The film's camera begins to pull back as it simultaneously pans right and slowly tilts up revealing several cameras held by men in suits and hats with the camera ending on a close-up of the "United States District Court Southern District of Florida" sign above the door. A cut to a man peering through the courtroom door is replaced by his pov shot of the inside of the courtroom with Mr. John Huberman (Fred Nurney) internally framed and flanked by his attorneys as he threatens the United States and is then sentenced to twenty years.

The peering man then announces, “Here *she* comes,” rather than the expected “here he comes,” and the reporters and photographers prepare to snap several shots of Alicia Huberman (Ingrid Bergman) as she exits the courtroom, interrogated by reporters who hound her with questions regarding her father’s treason. With her face cast in a femme fatale shadow by her fashionably large hat, the over-exposing light of the flashbulbs and the pestering questions soon startle her. Alicia tells Devlin during their first meeting: “I’m a *marked* woman you know.” It is not until the next morning when Devlin (Cary Grant) reveals a secret recording of her patriotic denouncing of her father (“We’ve had your bungalow wired for six months”) that we learn she is not the untrustworthy femme fatale traitor we are encouraged to suspect at the beginning of the film. Alicia as object of the gaze (and of the hearing) of many men is announced here at the beginning of the film and it contributes to her status as spectacle for both Devlin, the audience, and later, Alex Sebastian (Claude Rains). While Alicia is soon cleared of femme fatale suspicions regarding the film’s audience, (not unlike Mildred Pierce), she is about to become a deadly one for Alex.



Fig. 2 Cameras and peering men announce Alicia as spectacle/A femme fatale shadow is soon over-exposed by flashbulbs.



Fig. 3 A femme fatale shadow is soon over-exposed by flashbulbs

Splitting pov shots between Alicia and Alex encourages this femme fatale perspective. Alicia's first pov shot occurs when her hair is blown in her face while driving, we see through her eyes via an obscured lens. Sebastian's first privileged view is how he sees her, face hidden by her hat, as she rides on a horse next to him at the club. Then later another Alex pov shot when he sees Devlin and Alicia while moving through the crowded party, kissing outside of the wine cellar, etc.

## Split POV

Beyond questions of Alicia's trustworthiness, why does Hitchcock split pov shots with both Alicia and Alex?



Fig. 4

Alicia's 1<sup>st</sup> pov shot



Fig. 5 Alex's first pov shot spying on the mysterious feminine spectacle offered up to him by Devlin

As discussed in the next chapter when analyzing *Vertigo*, Hitchcock is fond of splitting pov and does so for varying reasons. Just as *Vertigo* clearly refers to Scotty and his condition and the action is mostly seen through his eyes making it his movie, so Alicia is the *notorious* woman for whom both Devlin and Alex fall, with Devlin putting on a hardboiled façade of resistance and Alex jumping in head first. *Maltese Falcon* rehearses a similar narrative trajectory with Spade resisting and his partner, Archer, jumping and

Alex and Archer suffer similar fates. However in both *Notorious* and *Vertigo* pov is split in that we observe *both* Scotty's *and* false Madeleine's povs, as we share both Alicia's and Sebastian's here. And just as *Maltese Falcon* is not truly about that pricey *rara avis*, but the love dance Spade and O'Shaughnessy perform as prelude to Spade's business concerns, so *Notorious* (Hitchcock 1946) is less about the uranium ore the Nazis are experimenting with—what Hitchcock liked to call the Maguffin—and more about the hardboiled love dance between Alicia and Devlin.

### **Relax, hard-boiled, and listen**

In fact, the entire film concerns itself with Alicia's attempts to get Devlin to say "I love you," a quest even reflected in her conversations with others: "Do you love me, Commodore?" It is not until the plucky Mata Hari is bed ridden and near death that Devlin as Prince Charming is able to overcome his "fathead" pride and utter the magic words that keep her alive. When Alicia protests hearing the surreptitious recording of her patriotic denunciation of her father, Devlin says: "Relax, hard-boiled, and listen," diagnosing her hardboiled affliction similar to his. It takes one to know one.



Fig. 4 "Relax, hard-boiled, and listen."

During the first meeting between Alicia and Devlin in her Miami bungalow, the two future lovers, in true hardboiled fashion, cynically discuss a love song (Roy Webb) Alicia has been obsessing over, replaying it all evening. Devlin asks her: "Why do you like that song?" After giggling, Alicia retorts: "Because it's a lot of hooey," followed by an attempt at seriousness, but the next line is delivered as if by rote: "There's nothing like a love song to give you a good laugh." Not to be out hard-boiled, Devlin agrees: "That's right." Alicia dismisses the entire evening with "It has been a perfectly hideous party!"

### **Devlin's Angle**

Throughout the party scene Devlin is off center left with his back to the camera and in deep shadow, even when Alicia addresses him. Frustrating for the audience whose curiosity is piqued and alienated in a Brechtian fashion about this devilishly-named

stranger, his authentic feelings remain a mystery to both Alicia and the audience for most of the film.



Fig. 6 Devlin in shadow mystifies and invites the audience to share Alicia's mistrust and frustration.

It is not until the end of this party scene that the camera pans left to a soft focus close-up of the back of Devlin's head then fades to black and lap dissolves to a brief time after all ambulatory guests have left to reveal the face of Devlin. The camera, beginning in nearly

the same position as the previous shot, circles around Devlin to present both Devlin and Alicia in a medium two shot with Alicia's love song now playing.

After an adventurous joy ride whereby Alicia unsuccessfully attempts to "wipe that grin off" Devlin's face, she discovers he's a "copper" and receives a brutal knockout punch by Devlin with his back again to the audience. Alicia is then discovered in the first of several distinct poses throughout the film reclining in bed, weak and vulnerable.

Hitchcock continues the inventive and liberated use of camera in this morning after scene with a near 180-degree sweep of the camera depicting Alicia's point of view as she tries to wrestle with who this tall (reportedly 6'2"), dark stranger might be. His image begins leaning in the doorway of her bedroom cast in shadow, which calls up his introduction at the party, and then rotates upside down as he towers over her. At this point he has secret information about her and the full authority of the American government behind him.

Alicia attempts to figure out his "angle," which Director of Photography Ted Tetzlaff's camera so aptly embodies. Several times in the film, the dialogue coyly articulates the visual imagery.



Fig. 6 “What’s your angle?” “What angle?”

Before analyzing further the drinking element at the heart of this film, let us look at one other stylized set piece as witnessed from Alicia’s point of view: the famous merging of Mother and Son shadows. The Sebastians rehearse an outburst of emotion similar to Emil Hupka’s when they insist Dr. Anderson has picked up the wrong coffee cup, signaling to Alicia their dastardly poisonous plan. Following a series of pov zooms in on both Mother and Son accompanied by Roy Webb’s spine-tingling music, Alicia in a fit of vertigo-inducing recognition attempts to escape her chair and her assassins. Alex and Madame’s voices take on the eerie echo of Alicia’s drug-induced haze as their images flutter, weave, and become darkened shadows. As she makes her way toward the door she views their shadows cast there and then they begin to uncannily merge. Does this merging suggest Alicia’s understanding that she is up against an inseparable team of Nazi ghouls? She passes through the door to the hallway and looks upon the intimidating, and now undulating, stairway, and faints upon the chessboard floor, filling

that pawn-like space earlier marked out by Alex when he discovers he has married an American agent.



Fig. 7 An inseparable Mother/Son team of Nazi ghouls

Hitchcock's stunning visual language abounds in this film, and serves as an ideal film to closely study in order to understand the extent to which style can contribute to meaning.

### **The Sleeping Beauty Global Image**

Devlin first orders the hung-over Alicia to drink the remedy he has concocted to revive her and later in the film she is encouraged by Alex to drink her poison-laced coffee

to slowly kill her. As Alex confesses to his rejoicing Mother (who lights a cigarette in celebration that she has won her son back) that he has married an American agent, there is an insert shot of a graphic match from the early Florida “morning after” shot of Alicia recumbent in bed followed by another shot of Madame Sebastian joyfully smoking. It is not until Prince Charming Devlin arrives and awakens Sleeping Beauty Alicia from her poisonous slumber that the recumbent damsel is fully rescued and ready to hear his love song. The script must first render the previously tough and stubborn Alicia completely vulnerable on her deathbed before Alex can confidently profess his love.



Fig. 8                    A global image pattern reclining in bed, weak and vulnerable

### **Stylized Drinks**

Hitchcock stylizes props in this film, and in particular he concerns himself with drinking. One of the knocks against Alicia, in addition to her alleged loose sexual morality, is her binge drinking of alcohol, which we witness first at her Miami bungalow party. The image of her lying in bed the morning after is replaced, via lap dissolve, with a choker close up of her head on the pillow, with Devlin's tall glass of remedy impinging on and dominating her face. The camera lingers significantly on the forgotten bottle of wine, left by Devlin, who has become distracted by the news of Alicia's dangerous/amorous assignment. Emile will panic over the wrong bottle of wine being served, and in keeping with the film's hard-boiled rules, because he openly displays emotion, he dies. In order to deflect attention from the outburst, Ben Hecht's script has Alex tease the deadly Eric Mathis with lines overdetermined with irony: "You know, Eric loves to go to the movies to cry. He's very sentimental." Later during the poisoning, there is a famous shot of the demitasse cup of lethal coffee placed in the foreground of a shot of Alicia. The prop cup used is reportedly enormous according to Hitchcock's specifications in order that it visually read as significant in the tableau.



Fig. 9 “You’d better drink that. Go on, drink it. Finish it.”/“Drink your coffee darling, it’s getting cold.”  
Notice how several shots of the poisonous witch Madame Sebastian show her armed with her deadly silver service in front of her.



Fig. 10 Madame Sebastian securely positioned behind her weaponry

There are other moments where beverages visually loom large, such as the soft focus, low angle shot of Joseph (Alex Minotis), Sebastian's butler, pouring champagne with an array of empty glasses in the foreground, and even Hitchcock's cameo has him draining a glass, depleting the supply which will hasten Sebastian down to the wine cellar to discover Devlin and Alicia poking around. Even the Maguffin, the uranium ore, is kept in wine bottles.



Fig. 11 Liquid death dominates the film, endorsed by its auteur

### **The Freudian scenario**

The Freudian scenario played out in the wine cellar has the intruding other man breaking the seal (or hymen) of the coveted wine and hastily trying to reseal it. The cuckolded husband first discovers wet spots in the sink and on the floor and then soon, the broken wax cap of the Pommard 1934. His rival has bested him, and worse, his wife's betrayal means certain death for the husband: "Look what they did to Emil

Hupka!” Some students are unsure of this connection I forge between wine bottle and hymen. One student in particular articulated his complaint this way: “I just didn’t really see how the two were connected. I know they’re both like breaking a seal or whatever, but that doesn’t mean that there’s some kind of secret connection between the two. Sometimes things just are the way they are in films just because that’s the way it happened. Not everything has a secret meaning associated with it, in my opinion.” Fair enough and I understand skepticism. My argument is based on the evidence that the film is steeped in Freudian iconography and logic, from the Oedipal relationship between Alex and Madame Sebastian to Hitchcock’s (and Hollywood’s) love of Freud to the analogy made in the first Chapter between dream interpretation and film interpretation. The history of marriage revolves around just such an anxiety over property and insuring the virginity of wives so the husband can be assured her children are his so the first-born male can inherit the property (primogeniture). I agree that not “everything has a secret meaning associated with it,” and those moments are categorized as functional, however, stylized moments like these, like every Chekhovian gun on the wall (see the *Blue Velvet* Chapter), are significant.



Fig. 12

The betrayed husband discovers his cuckoldry

In a lap dissolve from Alex holding the evidentiary resealed bottle the image faded in is a god shot of Alex making him look tiny and impotent. Here Hitchcock borrows a stylized gesture from a film (*Shadow of a Doubt*) he made three years before. As discussed in Chapter One, once Young Charlie learns the truth about her murderous Uncle, Hitchcock zooms out from an ascending crane shot to depict the now initiated girl "falling from grace due to knowledge gained and paradise lost" as did Adam and Eve in Genesis. As we look upon this tiny Alex, we see him walk in a daze across the chessboard patterned floor, effectively casting him as a pawn in this espionage chess match. And then he must climb the stairs that lead to knowledge, Mother, murder.





Fig. 13 The pawn discovers his place on the chessboard and must climb the stairs to inform his Queen

### **The Stairs Fatale**

It is clear that Madame Sebastian is firmly associated with the great stairs in the Sebastian mansion when we first enter it and see through Alicia's eyes for the first time Madame Sebastian at the top of the stairs.



Fig. 14 Madame Sebastian spatially associated with the power at the top of the stairs

The Freudian family romance is continued once Alex, the former middle-aged bachelor, gathers the courage to confess his weakness to his domineering Mother. As he sits at the foot of her bed, he forms a telling tableau that features his image replicated in both the mirror to his left and in the photo portrait on the table to his right. Alex remains in Lacan's "mirror stage."



Fig. 15

Mother?



Fig. 16

Another fatheaded guy full of pain

Steeped in his narcissism, he submits to his mother's will and is gladly instructed by her. In the earlier scene after the wedding where he demands the keys and defies his mother in favor of Alicia, we see the bed pole separating them, but now in his defeat her bed pole contains him with her. As she circles round the bed and joins him in this containment, she lectures him with an ironic verbal description of the tableau we witness: "You barred me from that episode. Let me arrange this one."



Fig. 17 Alex's brief independence expressed by a distancing bedpost is dashed by its later claustrophobic inclusion

It is significant that each time we witness the newlyweds ascend the stairs, their journey to the top is always edited out, stylistically cut short. The stairs are fetishized to a certain extent with the virtuoso descending shot from the top down to the zoom reveal of Alicia holding the wine cellar key, perhaps expressing Alicia's temporary upper hand over the former holder of keys, Madame Sebastian.



Fig. 18

The virtuosic descending shot fetishizes the stairs

That spectacular shot is mimicked in the wine cellar when Alex walks with Joseph right into a choreographed tight close up of Alex' hand revealing the absence of the key. The final chilling montage of Devlin rescuing Alicia as they descend the stairs with the Sebastians in tow represents Devlin's triumph of the stairs (he decides to climb up uninvited in order to discover his distressed damsel), and is echoed at the film's end when Alex is forced to ascend the outdoor steps of the mansion to answer Eric's beckoning to certain death.



Fig. 18

Alex?