Hitchcock & the Presence of Portraits

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What is an “auteur”?

➢ A term in film theory to describe “authorship”
➢ Much like the originality expressed by authors of literature, the style, content, and themes in film can be recognizably unique to one filmmaker
  ○ Like the creative distinctions between Mark Twain and Charles Dickens

Examples of auteurs:

Quentin Tarantino

“Pulp Fiction” (1994)
“Reservoir Dogs” (1992)
Tim Burton

"Edward Scissorhands" (1990)  
"Alice in Wonderland" (2010)  
"Sweeney Todd" (2007)

Wes Anderson

"The Life Aquatic" (2004)  
"Moonrise Kingdom" (2012)  
"The Darjeeling Limited" (2007)
➢ Hitchcock, perhaps unknowingly most of his career, was a pioneer of auteurism, with stylistic repetitions across his filmography.

➢ Notable tropes are plot narratives (espionage), suspenseful tones (Bernard Herrmann, scene pacing), psychological themes (phobias, fetishes), and Hitchcock cameos.
German Expressionism
“The Lodger” (1927)
“These enigmatic images in Hitchcock’s films—Spellbound’s savaged eyes, Blackmail’s jester, The Trouble with Harry’s portrait of a dead man, Torn Curtain’s silent museum architecture and artifacts, and I Confess’s guilt-inducing courtroom Christ—function like omniscient observers, staring eyes, as it were, dispassionately framing the action, gazing on it and at us while provoking our own individual reactions and interpretations”

- Marc Strauss

Painted Jester: Notes on the Visual Arts in Hitchcock’s Films
“Once it is understood that the paradigms for reading evidence, the critical schools for discerning truth, may be overturned, one necessarily admits the possibility that an interpretation may not only be made, but also fabricated or otherwise wrong.”

- Jeremy Strong
  *Reconstructing the Rose*
“Rebecca” (1940)
“It becomes difficult of move of dispose of these talismanic objects... these objects must live in these spaces, immovable and heavy with memories and psychological attachments, as weights around the psyches of the living”

-Aaron Rich
“The Dark Galleries”
Her body became “the site of a bizarre fort/da game”

Attempt by Mrs. Danvers to rid of “her problems with ‘overidentification’ with another woman”

-Tania Modleski

The Women Who Knew Too Much
“Vertigo” (1958)

“Once their subjects have died, these [portraits] remain for the survivors, being almost more present than the living people were previously.

-Aaron Rich
“The Dark Galleries”

Portrait of Carlotta
“For more significant films, the authors present production details of individual paintings as well as valuable citations from cinematic literature relating to the given portrait. Thematic links emerge across films relating to social class, unfulfilled desire, how portraits either depict the deceased or foretell death, and how they represent an uncanny liminal space between life and death.”

-Aaron Rich

“The Dark Galleries”
There is a “dynamic comparative interaction” between Madeleine and the Portrait of Carlotta that evokes “a discourse” and “a system of producing knowledge”

-Blanco, “Conceptualizing Spectralities”
“Once it is understood that the paradigms for reading evidence, the critical schools for discerning truth, may be overturned, one necessarily admits the possibility that an interpretation may not only be made, but also fabricated or otherwise wrong”

- Jeremy Strong
  Reconstructing the Rose
"Artworks with plot import[ance]... reveal a sensitivity to the visual arts that richly complement the director’s signature concerns for mistaken identity, ambiguous morality, romantic drama, and objects-as-subjects.”

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