**Why I wasn’t interested in Hitchcock until I turned 40: Valuing films as entertainment**

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This book is concerned with how we decide what is good entertainment. In this chapter I offer an answer to that question in aesthetic terms. The academic discipline of Film Studies has a developed over many decades a series of methods for studying films as art. But entertainment and art are different cultural forms with different aesthetic systems ([McKee, 2012](#_ENREF_16)). As academics we know how to judge a film’s success or failure as a work of art: but how would we judge a film’s success or failure – its value - as a piece of entertainment?

This question holds a particular place in my heart, and the example of Alfred Hitchcock helps to explain why. I somehow managed to miss Hitchcock’s films growing up. Born in 1970 I was too late to see his films in the cinema. I’m not sure how I managed to miss them on the television, but my first significant exposure to his work came when I went to the University of Glasgow to study Film and Television. In the course of these studies I was introduced to the work of Alfred Hitchcock, the artist. John Caughie was one of my lecturers, and we studied his germinal reader *Theories of Authorshi*p ([Caughie, 1981b](#_ENREF_5)). This provided my introduction to the *cinema d’auteurs* and its theory of the value of cinema:

Auteurism shares certain basic assumptions: notably, that a film, although produced collectively, is most likely to be valuable when the director dominates the proceedings; that in the presence of a director who is genuinely an artist, a film is more than likely to be the expression of his [sic] individual personality; and that this personality can be traced in a thematic and/or stylistic consistency over all (or almost all) the director’s films ([Caughie, 1981a, p. 9](#_ENREF_4))

I learned that for André Bazin, Hitchcock was ‘a true auteur’ ([Buscombe, 1981 [1973], p. 23](#_ENREF_3)) and that his films were placed into longer artistic traditions, analysed as a ‘formalist’, this being ‘the very essence of his art’ ([Rohmer, 1981 [1954], p. 40](#_ENREF_19)). I learned that Hitchcock demanded extensive study, that there were ‘many chains of meaning to follow’ in the ‘provocative and complicated’ body of Hitchcock studies ([Flitterman, 1981[1978], p. 248](#_ENREF_10)); probably for this reason, I learned, we needed ‘not two or three books on Hitchcock … but many, many more. We need comparisons with authors in the other arts’ ([Wollen, 1981[1969], p. 145](#_ENREF_22)). Developing from the analysis of the art of Hitchcock the *auteur* were a series of close textual analyses, feminist and psychoanalytic interpretations of the meanings of these texts:

This modulation of the three ‘complementary codic systems’ [the audience’s look, the camera’s look, and the character’s look] is condensed in the single initial shot of Marnie, as the camera stops following her, detaches itself and remains stationary while she continues to recede into the distance. In this action, the spectator’s double identification with the camera and with the object is foregrounded: by the same movement of separation the ‘two processes of identification which transfix the spectator’ – identification with the camera (in which Marnie is designated as the object of our gaze) and identification with the object (in which the image of Marnie is constitute as a whole body) – coalesce ([Flitterman, 1981[1978], p. 247](#_ENREF_10))

All this I dutifully learned as the necessary knowledge for gaining my MA(Hons) in Film and Television (first class). But it certainly did not inspire me to watch Hitchcock’s films. It made them sound like art, and I’m not really interested in art. My passion is for entertainment. Reading these accounts of his films, they didn’t sound like much *fun*.

*Valuing Hitchcock as entertainment*

In 2009 I met the man who would go on to become my husband. He was a huge Hitchcock fan. And I watched the films he loved with him, even though I had no interest in them myself – as one does when one is in love. We watched Hitchcock films together – *Rope. Rear Window. Lifeboat*. And I discovered – much to my surprise – that Hitchcock films are not (just) art. Hitchcock films are (also) great entertainment.

Rediscovering Hitchcock led me to look back over my Film Studies training, and I realize that I can find nothing there that engaged with Hitchcock’s films as entertainment. We read no articles that judged whether or not they succeeded as entertainment, and certainly none that valued his success as an entertainer. In fact, the tradition of ‘Hitchcock studies’ ([Leitch & Poague, 2011a, p. 1](#_ENREF_13)) makes explicit that to study Hitchcock’s films seriously is the *opposite* of seeing them as entertainment. Leitch and Poague’s *Companion to Alfred Hitchcock* ([Leitch & Poague, 2011b](#_ENREF_14)) starts with a key question: ‘was Hitchcock an artist or an entertainer?’ ([Leitch & Poague, 2011a, p. 2](#_ENREF_13)). Their summary of these debates makes clear the unimportance of these films’ work as entertainment:

These controversies [about Hitchcock] … are given their definitive articulate by the question with which Wood first called Hitchcock’s Films to order in 1965: ‘Why should we take Hitchcock seriously?’ – a question that was enormously influential because it provided impetus not only for Hitchcock studies but for cinema studies in general as it fought to establish its cultural and academic credentials by asserting that its subject, though originating as popular entertainment, could also have the power of art ([Leitch & Poague, 2011a, p. 3](#_ENREF_13))

In establishing ‘Hitchcock Studies’ it was necessary to begin by dismissing the status of his films as entertainment. But his films *are* entertainment, and I’m not convinced that in order to take them seriously we have to ignore that fact. Rather we can ask: how would we take Hitchcock’s films seriously - *as pieces of entertainment*? If we wanted to judge their value as entertainment, what approaches would we employ and what criteria would we assess?

It’s surprising that thinking about this question is so little developed. Academic study of culture has changed since the emergence of auteur theory in the 1950s: although perhaps not as much as we might hope. It is true Entertainment Industries is emerging as an academic discipline in its own right ([McKee, Collis, & Hamley, 2012](#_ENREF_17)). But, even now, few humanities academics have built their careers around studying the cultural category of entertainment (as opposed to other, quite distinct categories like ‘mass culture’, ‘folk culture’ or ‘popular culture’). Richard Dyer is one of the few who has. Dyer’s exemplary work explores the functioning of entertainment forms including musicals ([Dyer, 2002](#_ENREF_8)), game shows ([Dyer, 1973](#_ENREF_6)) and pornography ([Dyer, 1994](#_ENREF_7)) – but even he does not attend much to entertainment *as a system* – what characteristics bind these different genres together? What makes them all entertainment rather than, for example, education, or art? In his work on musicals, for example, he proposes that entertainment might be characterized by offering a utopian vision of the world – but as Sue Turnbull has recently pointed while out that may be true of musicals, it is not so obviously the case of Scandinavian crime dramas – among other forms of entertainment that consistently fail to be utopian but remain very entertaining nonetheless ([Turnbull, 2012](#_ENREF_21)). There remains much work to be done in developing an approach to studying films – and other entertainment objects – in a way that treats them as entertainment on its own terms.

*The aesthetic system of entertainment*

I have previously sketched the central elements of an aesthetic system that can be used to judge the value of the products of the Entertainment Industries as they have been produced, circulated and consumed in Western countries for the past one hundred and fifty years ([McKee, 2012](#_ENREF_16)). Of these elements four are particularly useful for discussing the films of Hitchcock: successful entertainment is centrally about story, it favours satisfying endings, it promotes an emotional response from the audience, and it is fun. These characteristics provide us with a series of questions which can be applied to the films of Hitchcock – or to any film – to decide its value as a piece of entertainment: does it have a good story? Does it have a satisfying ending? Do I respond emotionally to it? And Is it fun? As I was thinking about this chapter my husband introduced me to *Dial M for Murder* – a Hitchcock film that delighted and entertained me in many ways – and for the remainder of this chapter I take this film as my case study as I explore its success as a great piece of entertainment.

*Dial M for Murder* is a 1954 thriller about an adulterous wife (Grace Kelly) and her husband’s attempt to have her killed. The film has not been the focus of much study as a piece of art. As Hall puts it, the film ‘remains of minor interest’ ([Hall, 2004, p. 243](#_ENREF_12)) and

[m]ost critics have accepted … *Dial M for Murder* [as] a safe, conventional, film of the play about which little need be said one way or the other ([Hall, 2004, p. 243](#_ENREF_12))

When the film has been studied under traditional modes of Hitchcockian analysis it has been revealed primarily as a source of themes, consistent across Hitchcock’s oeuvre, that allow us to make psychoanalytical arguments about the director as auteur. Gordon, for example, finds that *Dial M for Murder* – like other films in Hitchcock’s oeuvre – exhibits a psychoanalytic ‘mother complex’ illustrated through recurring themes in plots, characters and visual motifs ([Gordon, 2008, p. 216](#_ENREF_11)). Explaining why in this film the lead character’s adulterous affair is not condemned, ‘but actually becomes virtuous when compared to the husband’s desire to kill Margot’, Gordon argues that this is because of ‘Oedipal fear of the “respectability” that cannot, for Hitchcock, be reconciled with sexual desire’ ([Gordon, 2008, p. 216](#_ENREF_11)). Gordon ties this conflicted attitude towards sexuality back to Hitchcock’s Jesuit education:

[l]ove in Hitchcock … has a peculiar way of recognizing innocence even when nothing or no one else does …. *The Lodger, Rebecca, The Wrong Man, Dial M for Murder* and *North by Northwest* all offer … evidence of this pattern ([Gordon, 2008, p. 190](#_ENREF_11))

*Dial M for Murder* – when it is even regarded as worth studying – becomes as a source of themes, and an illustration of psychoanalytic precepts, that are tied into the biography of the auteur who created it.

But what does that have to do with entertainment?

*Does it have a good story?*

At the centre of most good entertainment, in whatever medium or genre, is the story – a series of events in a cause-and-effect order linked by characters driven by plausible psychologies. Academic analysis has surprisingly little tradition, and not much in the way of vocabulary, for celebrating great storytelling (narrative analysis, the closest academic form, has been more interested in how narrative creates meaning, rather than in understanding how to make aesthetic judgments about good and bad storytelling). Luckily there does exist such a vocabulary – the Entertainment Industries themselves have been developing it for many decades. Two central terms for such analysis are beats and twists.

Before I go on to discuss the story of *Dial M for Murder*, a disclaimer: there are spoilers ahead. A central part of the pleasure of entertainment is surprise at the course of the story – to know too much in advance ‘spoils’ the experience. Because this is an academic analysis of a well-known film, rather than a review of a recently released one, it is replete with spoilers. At its simplest, this is the story of a cuckolded husband, Tony, who plots to have his wife, Margot, killed because she has been having an affair with a crime writer, Mark. Tony blackmails an old acquaintance, Swann, to do the deed for him. A complex web of tricks and countertricks ensues …

A ‘beat’ is industry language for a story point; in the course of a scene, a character performs an action, finds something out, reveals something, or reacts in a particular way. In the aesthetics of entertainment a good story includes plenty of beats, preferably ones that are unusual or interesting, and that lead to more events – more beats – in logical but unexpected ways. In storytelling it’s important that all the beats that a viewer will expect to see are included, so no big character moments are glossed over. So in *Dial M for Murder*, for example, after a man finds out his wife is having an affair (or even, pretends that he has just found out, even if he in truth already knew) there has to be an acknowledgement in the story that this has happened – ‘That’s fine coming from you Mark! Her life wouldn’t be in danger if it hadn’t been for you! It’s because of her … association with you that she lost the sympathy of the jury’. Each point where the audience would expect a reaction – according to their cultural context – should be addressed.

The best kind of story beat in entertainment is the twist – an unexpected beat that pushes the plot in new directions and perhaps even causes us to reevaluate what we’ve seen up to this point. *Dial M for Murder* is a twistathon. We start with a happy upper-class couple – Margot and Mark – talking. But then – twist! – we quickly find out they are not in fact married, but lovers. Then the husband, Tony, arrives and treats them in a friendly manner. It appears that all is fine – he doesn’t know about their affair. Left alone, Tony arranges to buy a car – but when the seller turns up we discover that Tony isn’t buying the car after all – rather he’s blackmailing the seller, his old acquaintance Swann, into committing murder for him – twist! Because Tony secretly knows about his wife’s affair – twist! In fact, he’s been secretly blackmailing her for some time – twist! And so the film continues, piling story points onto story points, and constantly shifting the viewer’s perspective. The murder plot begins – but it goes wrong – twist! Margot manages to kill the murderer in self-defence. But then Tony turns this to his own advantage – twist! And before we know it, Margot has been tried with the murder and sentenced to execution – twist! But then the police Inspector, it turns out, has been hiding something – he knows more than he’s letting on – TWIST!

There’s plenty of story in *Dial M for Murder*. Just as importantly, the film is structured so that the story is the most important thing about it. As in all good classical Hollywood narratives ([Bordwell, Staiger, & Thompson, 1988](#_ENREF_2)) every element of the film – character points, framing of shots, lighting, music, performances – ‘serve the story’ (to use industry language). Hitchcock had little interest in character moments, including them in his films only so far as they ‘propelled the resolution of the mystery’ ([Rebello, 1998, p. 46](#_ENREF_18)). For example, Margot talks early in the film about Tony’s newspaper clippings – it’s a character point that reveals his celebrity. And when he insists that she spends the evening at home along archiving them, it gives us a glimpse into the dynamic of their relationship … but really, the clippings are only in the film so that Margot can tell Tony to give her the scissors from her sewing bag to use in organizing the clippings – so that she can then use them to fight off her murderous attacker. The scissors are placed on the desk in front of us, and their presence is spelled out, but their use for a secondary plot point – the clippings – means their convenient appearance means that when they later become the instrument of self-defence, and of derailing Tony’s murder plot, they don’t feel gratutious. Or, to take another example, when Tony explains to Swann how he blackmailed his wife, it isn’t dead exposition – it’s also part of the story, as he persuades Swann to become part of his murderous plot.

As well as the full narrative running through its one hour and forty-five minutes the story also sets up little mysteries – examples of Barthes’ ‘hermeneutic code’ ([Barthes, 1974](#_ENREF_1)) – that are quickly resolved, keeping us interested and rewarded throughout the running time. For example, the Inspector pretends to find a key on the floor – why? We find out later – it’s so he can get Tony to show him where Tony’s key is, so the Inspector knows that when he swaps their coats later on he will have Tony’s key. Twist! *Dial M for Murder* passes the story test for good entertainment.

*Do I have an emotional reaction to it?*

In one sense emotions are intensely solipsistic. Each of us has individual triggers from our experiences that make us react emotionally to events in our own particular ways. This makes the success of the Entertainment Industries in triggering consistent emotional reactions across large and diverse audiences a particularly impressive feat.

*Dial M for Murder* engages me emotionally. I think it’s important to express my response in this way because cultural critics can have a terrible habit of writing that ‘one feels this’ or ‘we think of that’ – a form of generalization implying that those viewers who fail to feel in the ‘correct’ way are not worth considering. The Entertainment Industries do a great job in reaching large, differentiated audiences with common emotional reactions, but I will not presume this in advance.

My emotional experience of the film consists of a constantly shifting series of three key emotional states. The first is suspense – knowing that something bad is about to happen and holding my breath until the situation is resolved. When Swann breaks into the apartment, music, lighting and narrative structure combine to mark him as the bad guy, and Margot as the heroine. The camera tracks around Margot as she answers the phone, moving into the darkness and showing her back. The music swells, and my tension rises: ‘Look out!’. This form of suspense is common in Hitchcock’s films.

The second emotional reaction when watching *Dial M for Murder* is an odd mixture of indignation and despair. Tony wants to have his wife murdered. Although she’s not blameless (she has been having an affair, after all) we still know that he’s the bad guy – not least because Grace Kelly is so very beautiful, her hair and makeup so perfectly done, her skin so flawless and her acting so demure. So every time a bit of Tony’s plan succeeds – he manages to trick her into staying home on Saturday night; he gets her key out of her bag without her knowledge; he sets up the crime scene to frame her; he tricks her into lying to the police; the police believe she is guilty; she is condemned to execution; Tony manages to talk himself out of every situation – I get a visceral reaction that is both despairing: ‘Oh no!’ – and indignant – ‘That’s just not fair!’. The use of Grace Kelly’s face throughout the film contributes to this emotional response – as she suffers we get plenty of medium close-ups of her face: silent, radiant but broken, and profoundly moving.

At the same time the film repeatedly offers me moments of elation, my third emotional reaction – such as when it appears that the murder plot is going awry and that Margot may be OK. With each moment where Margot refuses to give in to Tony’s plan – she won’t give him her latch key, she won’t stay in and listen to the thrillers, when she manages to fight off her would-be murderer and stab him in the back, when the Inspector returns to grill Tony about his financial affairs, or when Mark discovers the hidden money – I feel a jump of hope and happiness: ‘Yes!’.

The structure of the story is set up so that I’m constantly bouncing between these last two emotional states. The Inspector grills Tony about his financial affairs (elation); but then he says ‘Well that answers everything doesn’t it?’ and goes to leave (despair); but then – in another classic entertainment trope – the Inspector turns around in the doorway – ‘Although - there’s just one other thing sir’ (elation! Once again).

*Does it have a satisfying ending?*

The ending of entertainment must pay off both on the story that has been told, and the emotions that have been raised. In terms of the story, a satisfying ending answers all the questions that have been posed, or at least leaves the intelligent viewer with all the necessary information to work out the answers for herself. In terms of emotions, the ending should reach a climax that acknowledges and builds on the emotions that have come before. Entertainment’s endings are also typically happy – often literally. Entertainment does not tend towards misanthropism – it’s a rare piece of entertainment that suggests that the world is hopeless and desperate, empty of the possibility of love or kindness. (1970s horror films are one such exception, but serve more as the exception that proves the rule – this is what makes them so horrifying).

The ending of *Dial M for Murder* is deeply satisfying[[1]](#endnote-1); it gives the audience what we want, in a way we didn’t expect, but which has been clearly foreshadowed throughout the film. These three characteristics are the epitome of a satisfying ending for entertainment.

The film gives us what we want – the bad guy is caught out, and the heroine is saved: a perfect happy ending. The resolution occurs in a way that we didn’t see coming (at least the first time we watched it). Tony has made a mistake – taking the wrong key out of the murdered man’s pocket. The Inspector has found this out, and from this fact has induced the events that led up to the murder. This is satisfying because, although it isn’t predictable, it has been strongly foreshadowed through the film. In an earlier scene Mark, a crime author, argues that the perfect murder is possible ‘on paper’ but not in real life – ‘because in stories things usually turn out the way the author wants them to, and in real life they don’t’. Later, as we watch the Inspector pretend to find a latchkey on the floor of the apartment he says explicitly ‘that’s the trouble with these latchkeys – they’re all alike’. Everything has been put in place to lead up to this ending, but we didn’t notice it the first time round.

And then everything is clearly explained in the last ten minutes. Throughout the film Hitchcock has not always spelled things out for the audience. For example, during the meeting when Tony blackmails Swann, Tony wipes down everything that Swann has touched at their meeting. This happens in the background of their conversation without close ups or commentary. Tony does this so that the police will never know that he and Swann have met before – but this is never said explicitly. During the course of the film it’s possible for the audience, swept along with the story, not to mind that they don’t understand everything that happens as it’s happening. But for the end of the film to be satisfying the rules change – now everything will be explained. And so the last ten minutes of *Dial M for Murder* are spent explaining what has gone before. Not for Hitchcock the ambivalent ending. He does not force the audience to work it out for themselves. Everything is explained in a neat and satisfying way: ‘The first clue came quite by accident. We discovered that your husband had been spending a large number of pound notes all over the place …’… ‘and the key Wendice took out of Swann’s pocket and returned to her handbag was …’ ‘Swann’s own latchkey’. Yes, it was. It all makes sense now. There’s no ambiguity in this ending – the point where the story stops is clearly signaled. If Tony knows where the hidden key is, then we know he is guilty: ‘Once he opens that door we shall know everything’. Unlike Schrödinger's cat there’s no room for ambiguity here – the door will either open or it will not. At the moment that it does open, everything is resolved.

The ending is also satisfying emotionally. The Inspector plays the whole second half of the film as though he doesn’t suspect Tony. He has grilled Margot and reduced her to tears, taken her to court and had her convicted of murder. But then, with fifteen minutes to go, the Inspector swaps his coat with Tony’s. At the time we don’t understand immediately what’s going on – but one thing is clear: the Inspector knows more than he’s letting on. He suspects Tony after all. Once again, it’s a classic entertainment trope. Everything seems darkest before the dawn – the heroine, radiant and broken, is wrongly convicted, locked up, her appeals failed, with less than twenty four hours until she’s executed. The villain, has danced close to capture, but has consistently evaded the police and he’s going to get away with it … until the final, retrospective, twist (my favourite kind) that forces us to reevaluate everything that’s gone before (the Inspector was just pretending to be taken in by Tony; he’s not really off the case; it’s not true that there’s nothing he can do …). The dialectic of despair and elation that structures my emotional response to the film suddenly gets pushed up a notch – more elation, and a strong undercurrent of hope. And then, that final moment, when Tony opens the door (story over), enters the room and sees Margot, Mark and the Inspector, realizes he’s been caught, turns to escape and finds another policeman waiting for him – this raises elation to a new level. I’m genuinely thrilled by this ending.

I love this film.

*Is it fun?*

If you read reviews and discussion of entertainment films looking for the word ‘fun’, you’ll soon see that this is a central criterion in discussing the form outside of the academy. Certainly reviews of *Dial M for Murder* are keen to emphasise its fun-ness: in particular the final thirty minutes are ‘fun’ ([Erikson, undated](#_ENREF_9)), perhaps because ‘things don't work out as Tony planned and therein lies the fun’ ([Stafford, 2014](#_ENREF_20)). And indeed, Hitchcock presented himself as a maker of ‘*fun* pictures’ ([Rebello, 1998, p. 173, italics in the original](#_ENREF_18) ). Fun means not taking yourself too seriously; it means pleasure without purpose. This is a film about a husband who tries to have his wife killed, a killing in self-defence, a woman wrongfully convicted, locked up and sentenced to execution … and yet here, as is typical in Hitchcock’s films, he offers ‘the very worst of humanity... displayed in a light that makes it seem somehow fun’ ([Mackie, 2012](#_ENREF_15)).

The central elements of the fun in the film, for me, are Grace Kelly’s hair and makeup and the performance of John Williams as Chief Inspector Hubbard. Kelly retains her impeccable hair and make-up throughout – only slightly, gorgeously, tousled after the murderous attack on her – even as she is ground through the worst possible situations. She may crack with despair, but she does so beautifully and in the most restrained way. There is tension in the film, the suspense for which Hitchcock is so famous, but no real threat – the pleasure of watching comes from knowing that you can also relax – there will be a satisfying ending (and probably, a happy one).

And the performance of Williams throughout the second half of the film injects continual moments of delicate comedy. As he tries to look at Tony’s chequebook and Mark grabs it out of his hands the Inspector rolls his eyes slightly with perfectly judged comic timing. As he explains the story to Mark, he mutters ‘May the saints preserve us from the gifted amateur!’, and the way he raises his hands to the heavens is delicious. Telling Mark and Margot what really happened with the latchkey he notes ‘Mind you, even I didn’t guess that at once. Extraordinary’, giving us, just for a moment, the comic hubris of a Sherlock Holmes who is too busy working at a higher cerebral level to notice petty human concerns such as humility. And, emphasizing its nature as fun, the film doesn’t end with Tony’s reaction to being caught, nor with Margot’s tears at his betrayal – it rather ends with the Inspector fastidiously combing his moustache while jaunty music plays.

*Conclusion: Rescuing Hitchcock the entertainer.*

Hitchcock is a master storyteller, with films full of satisfying beats and twists, reaching satisfying endings, offering viewers the opportunity for strong emotional engagement – and they’re a lot of fun. All of these aesthetic features can be explained through one meta-feature. Entertainment is audience-centred culture – it gives audiences what they want – and it’s no surprise that Hitchcock often spoke about the audience when explaining the decisions in his filmmaking process.‘I’ve never dealt with whodunnits’, Hitchcock said:

They’re simply clever puzzles aren’t they? They’re intellectual rather than emotional and emotional is the only thing that keeps my audience interested ([Alfred Hitchcock, quoted in Rebello, 1998, p. 19](#_ENREF_18))

Indeed Rebello notes that when:

Penelope Houston, author of *The Figure in the Carpet*, a major assessment of Hitchcock in *Sight and Sound*, asked Hitchcock, ‘What is the deepest logic of your films?’ and he answered: ‘To put the audience through it’ ([Rebello, 1998, p. 174](#_ENREF_18))

Entertainment consistently places the audience at the heart of cultural production. In seeking to give viewers what they will want, entertainment producers focus on story, emotion, satisfying endings, and fun. It is a sign of the power of audiences in entertainment as a cultural system that these become its key aesthetic features.

This book is concerned with how we decide what makes for good entertainment. In this chapter I offer an answer to that question in aesthetic terms. As I noted above, Hitchcock studies has valued Hitchcock’s films only to the extent that they have ‘the power of art’ ([Leitch & Poague, 2011a, p. 3](#_ENREF_13)). Their status as entertainment has been seen as unimportant, something to be left to one side as we study their themes and relate them to the biography of the artist. We do not have a well-developed tradition for understanding how to value these films as entertainment. As I suggest in this chapter, on at least four important criteria for valuing good entertainment, *Dial M for Murder* soars. It has lots of story, with plenty of twists, including the retrospective twist that forces the audience to reevaluate everything they’ve seen up to that point. I get strongly emotional reactions to watching it, the suspense and feeling of indignation building up so that the moments of joy and relief are so much sweeter – and the release at the end when, just as everything appears lost everything is saved, is exhilarating. The film’s ending is satisfying and happy, explaining everything clearly for the audience and tying up all the loose ends neatly. And it’s fun – playful and funny and offering pleasure without purpose, even as it deals with murder and wrongful imprisonment and sentences of execution.

Francois Truffaut argued persuasively for taking Hitchcock seriously as an artist ([Rebello, 1998, p. 169](#_ENREF_18)). We must also remember to take him seriously as an entertainer, as someone who thought more about the audience than about his own muse. Films like *Dial M for Murder* can be valued as outstanding pieces of entertainment. It is shocking to think that as a result of Film and TV Studies at University, I lost Hitchcock from my life for twenty years. Thanks to the love of my husband I now have him back. What a satisfying – and entertaining – conclusion.

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1. Paul Gordon argues that no Hitchcock films really have happy endings, even ‘when they do seem to occur’, ‘because the mother complex which underlies these films is never – indeed, can never be – really resolved’ ([Gordon, 2008, p. 20](#_ENREF_11)). That doesn’t match my experience of watching the films. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)