Remaking The 39 Steps
Hitchcock’s Screenwriting and Identification

Will Bligh

May 2018

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences,
University of Technology Sydney.

This thesis is presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.
Certificate of Original Authorship

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Signature of Student:

Date: 18\textsuperscript{th} May 2018
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my principal supervisor, Dr Alex Munt, for his on-going support and commitment to the completion of my research. His passion for film was a constant presence throughout an extended process of developing my academic and creative work. Thanks also to my associate supervisor, Margot Nash, with whom I began this journey when she supervised the first six months of my candidature and helped provide a clear direction for the project. This research is supported by an Australian Government Research Training Program Scholarship. Thanks to Dr Inez Templeton, who edited the dissertation with attention to detail. Lastly, but certainly not least, my wife Esther was a shining light during a process with many ups and downs and provided a turning point in my journey when she helped me find the structure for this thesis.
Table of Contents

List of Illustrations vii
Abstract viii

Chapter 1: Introduction 1
  1.1 Hitchcock’s Audiences 1
  1.2 Screenwriting Practice 8
    Remaking The 39 Steps 12
    The 39 Steps Genre 14
    Character-types of The 39 Steps Genre 20
  1.3 Research Questions 23

PART ONE: Theoretical 32
Chapter 2: Hitchcock’s Narrative Techniques for Emotion 33
  2.1 Suspense 35
    Two Types of Suspense 36
  2.2 Mystery 39
  2.3 Suppression Suspense 39
  2.4 Surprise and Shock 40
  2.5 Narrative Patterns 41
    Humour 44
  2.6 Narrative Questions 45

Chapter 3: Recognition of Character 47
  3.1 Character Intentionality 49
  3.2 Changing Characters 51
  3.3 Communicating Character Intentions 53
  3.4 Analysis 62
### Chapter 4: Alignment with Characters

4.1 Structure of Alignment  
4.2 Character-based Context  
4.3 Aligning with the Protagonist  
4.4 Analysis  

### Chapter 5: Fiction Identification

5.1 Identification and other Processes  
5.2 Moral Evaluation  
5.3 Empathy and Sympathy  
5.4 Character Schema  
5.5 Identification as Conflict  

### PART TWO: Empirical

### Chapter 6: Hitchcock and his Screenplays

6.1 Pre-planning  
6.2 Designing a Hitchcock Film  
6.3 Collaboration  
6.4 Collective Vision  

### Chapter 7: Case Studies

7.1 Genetic Criticism  
7.2 *The 39 Steps*  
7.3 *Saboteur*  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Genetic Criticism</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Character Development</strong></td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The 39 Steps</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timeline</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Screenplay</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saboteur</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timeline</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Screenplay</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**List of illustrations**

| **Figure 1:** Introduction of Mr Memory in *The 39 Steps.* | 60 |
| **Figure 2:** Gunshot in the Music Hall in *The 39 Steps.* | 61 |
| **Figure 3:** Hitchcock perusing his sketches during the shooting of *I Confess* (1953). | 115 |
| **Figure 4:** Storyboard painting for *The 39 Steps* in graphite and watercolour on paper. | 140 |
| **Figure 5:** Selznick’s letter addressing Hitchcock’s initial treatment, dated 1 August, 1941. | 143 |
| **Figure 6:** First page of screenplay dated 30 October 1941. | 148 |
| **Figure 7:** Storyboard by John De Cuir for *Saboteur* (Photographic reproduction of graphite on paper, 8 x 10 inches). | 151 |
| **Figure 8:** List of interior shots for *Saboteur* dated 18 October 1941. | 153 |
| **Figure 9:** Lehman’s description of the car chase sequence from *North by Northwest.* | 160 |
| **Figure 10:** Camera angle diagram for *North by Northwest* (Graphite on paper, 8.5 x 11 inch). | 162 |
Abstract

This research analyses Hitchcock’s *The 39 Steps* (1935) and his two remakes (i.e. *Saboteur*, 1942, and *North by Northwest*, 1959) as exemplars for my screenplay, ‘The Southern Cross Conspiracy’. A research-led practice methodology is applied to investigate relevant screenwriting techniques that are used in the screenplay to develop an emotional journey synonymous with *The 39 Steps*. The thesis is divided into three parts: theoretical, empirical, and practice. Part One applies a cognitive approach to explain how a spectator logically constructs particular character-types from *The 39 Steps* and its two remakes leading to identification and emotion. Murray Smith’s “structure of sympathy” (i.e. recognition, alignment and allegiance) is extended explaining the global appeal of Hitchcock’s films. To understand the process used in each film’s development, Part Two examines the practice of screenwriting from a historical perspective by applying genetic criticism to screenplays and other notations (drawn from archives at British Film Institute, London, and Meredith Herrick Library, Los Angeles) produced during the writing of *The 39 Steps*, *Saboteur* and *North by Northwest*. The aim of understanding these processes presented in the first two parts is to guide my pursuit of writing a remake of *The 39 Steps* so that my screenplay can potentially elicit similar emotions. Part Three acts as a proof of concept by applying the findings from Parts One and Two to remake *The 39 Steps* as a period drama set in 1950s Australia during the British nuclear testing programme. Two processes emerged from this research: a process of ‘fiction identification’ located at the points of character conflict (internal and external) in Hitchcock’s films; and a ‘writer-director approach’ to screenwriting.