



Spellbound by Beauty: Alfred Hitchcock and His Leading Ladies

Donald Spoto

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“The trouble today is that we don’t torture women enough.”

—Alfred Hitchcock

It is remarkable how infrequently, over a period of more than fifty years, Alfred Hitchcock spoke about the beautiful, legendary and talented actresses he directed. And when he did, his remarks were mostly indifferent and often hostile. But his leading ladies greatly enriched his films, even as many of them achieved international stardom precisely because of their work for Hitchcock—among the dozens of women were Madeleine Carroll, Joan Fontaine, Grace Kelly and Tippi Hedren. Yet he maintained a stony, insistent silence about the quality of their performances and their contributions to his art.

Spellbound by Beauty—the final volume in master biographer Donald Spoto’s Hitchcock trilogy that began with *The Art of Alfred Hitchcock* and continued with *The Dark Side of Genius: The Life of Alfred Hitchcock*—is the fascinating, complex and finally tragic story of the great moviemaker and his female stars, the unusual ideas of sex and romance that inform his films and the Hollywood dreams that often became nightmares.

Rich with fresh revelations based on previously undisclosed tapes, new interviews, private correspondence and personal papers made available only to the author, this thoughtful, compassionate yet explosive portrait details Hitchcock’s outbursts of cruelty, the shocking humor and the odd amalgam of adoration and contempt that time and again characterized Hitchcock’s obsessive relationships with women—and that also, paradoxically, fed his genius.

He insisted, for example, that Madeleine Carroll submit herself to painful physical demands during the making of *The 39 Steps*. He harbored a poignantly unrequited love for Ingrid Bergman. He meticulously and deliberately constructed Grace Kelly’s image. Finally, he stalked, harassed and abused Tippi Hedren. His treatment of his daughter, Pat, was certainly unusual, while his strange marriage to his sometime collaborator Alma Reville was a union that (according to Hitchcock himself) was forever chaste after one incident.

Spellbound by Beauty offers important insights into the life of a brilliant, powerful, eccentric and tortured artist, and it corrects a major gap in movie history by paying tribute at last to those extraordinarily talented actresses who gave so much to his films.

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