

THE DAY OF THE JACKAL (1973)

"I will always think of myself as a Hollywood director, not only because I grew up in the American film industry, but also because I believe in making films that will please a mass audience, not just in making films that will express my own personality or ideas. I have always tried to offer an audience something positive in a film, to leave them looking up rather than looking down."

--Fred Zinnemann

Major Credits:

director: Fred Zinnemann; screenplay: Kenneth Ross, based on the novel by Frederick Forsyth; cinematographer: Jean Tournier; music: Georges Delerue

cast: Edward Fox ("The Jackal"); Michel Lonsdale (Lebel); Delphine Seyrig (Colette); Cyril Cusack (the gunsmith)

Background:

Fred Zinnemann has had a long and distinguished career as a Hollywood contract director (**The Men, High Noon, From Here to Eternity, The Nun's Story, A Man For All Seasons, Julia**). Born in Vienna in 1907, Zinnemann attended film school in Paris and became an assistant cameraman at one of the studios in Berlin. Like many other German filmmakers at the time, he migrated to Hollywood in 1930, where he was quickly contracted to make shorts for M-G-M. The influence of this work may be felt in the extraordinary economy of **The Day of the Jackal**. The other major influence on his later work was the brilliant documentarist Robert Flaherty (**Nanook of the North, Man of Aran**), whose eye for detail and creative independence proved an enduring inspiration.

Zinnemann has long been considered in the first rank of realist directors. His films are often concerned with the individual's quest for and preservation of self-identity in an institutionalized context (a veterans' hospital in **The Men**, the army in **From Here to Eternity**, the missionary in **A Nun's Story**, monarchy and church in **A Man for All Seasons**). The theme is continued in **The Day of the Jackal**, where the interest lies in the isolated individual's attempt to overcome the forces of the entire French government and the international intelligence community.

Zinnemann's commitment to realism is reflected in the many shooting locations used in the film (even for brief scenes): Vienna, Rome, Genoa, England, the Riviera, Paris; in his reconstructing the facade of an enormous public building that had been torn down after the period the film depicts; in the actual production of a working rifle to meet the assassin's specifications. While the American audience was certainly aware of the fact that DeGaulle had died of natural causes two years before the movie was made, their response may have been affected by recent memory of numerous political assassinations, particularly the Zapruder home movie of the Kennedy motorcade.

Cinematic Style:

Zinnemann utilizes the basic technique of **cross cutting** to maintain suspense and concentrate attention on the methods of the conspirators and investigators. As in his earlier success, **High Noon**, he also employs numerous images of calendars and clocks to keep us aware of the urgency of time. In addition, the use of telephoto lenses throughout the film subtly reminds the spectator of the sniper's hidden presence. Like many Hitchcock movies, **The Day of the Jackal** is very much a film about **looking**.

Topics for Discussion:

1. Analyze the film's depiction of violence. Why is the sequence in which the Jackal takes target practice on a melon such a disturbing, threatening moment?

2. Discuss the characterization of the Jackal. Is it possible to draw any conclusions about his personal identity. Why does he decide to drive on to Paris rather than return to Italy after his cover is blown?

3. The affair with Colette seems a digression in the plot. What does it add to the substance of the film or our understanding of the protagonist?

4. The film is not merely mimetic but also prophetic, insofar as it anticipates an era of international terrorism. Is it also in any way didactic? That is, does it express a consistent political or ideological perspective?