

REBECCA

Rebecca

rose husband and the forbidding Mrs. Danvers, Rebecca's devoted housekeeper.

The second Mrs. de Winter feels ill at ease at Manderley. Her halfhearted attempts to assume her position in the house merely accent the differences between her and Manderley's former chatelaine, whose suite Danvers maintains as a shrine. A costume ball promises to cheer de Winter. Guided by the insidious Danvers, the new bride chooses a gown previously worn by her predecessor. When de Winter angers, she attributes his distress to his profound love of his first wife and momentarily considers Mrs. Danvers's suggestion that she throw herself from the second-story window into the stormy night below. Cries from outside divert her. A wind-tossed sea has produced the unexpected: the body of Rebecca, recovered from the boat in which she perished. De Winter finally confesses to his second wife that he in fact detested Rebecca, a wicked woman, and killed her, opening the sea cocks in her boat and sending her and the craft out to sink in the bay. Despite the attempt of Jack Favell, Rebecca's cousin and lover, to have de Winter convicted as Rebecca's murderer, a second inquest clears him. The distraught, avenging Mrs. Danvers burns down Manderley, yet its flames seem at last to release the de Winters from the ghost of the charming but deadly Rebecca.

Hitchcock, a voracious reader, skimmed the galley proofs of *Rebecca* while filming du Maurier's *Jamaica Inn* at Elstree Studios in spring 1938. Not yet under contract to Selznick, the director began negotiating for the screen rights, not only as an investment but as leverage in securing employment abroad: if the novel swept America, Hitchcock would control *Rebecca*'s future and possibly his own. For Selznick, who read a synopsis of the manuscript in late spring 1938, the story of the novel's awkward and shy heroine seemed ideal. Selznick's most impressive discoveries tended to be young women, including Ingrid Bergman, Vivien Leigh, and Joan Fontaine; furthermore, he had long been associated with the industry's premier "women's director," George Cukor. In certain respects a "women's producer," attuned to the sensibilities and psychology of the American female (at least as purveyed by the era's mass-circulation magazines), Selznick agreed with story editor Val Lewton that the second Mrs. de Winter "probably exemplifies the feeling that most young women have about themselves." On the commercial side, a couple's filmgoing decisions generally rested

Among the hundreds of manuscripts, galley proofs, and published novels that poured into the East Coast offices of Selznick International every month, Kay Brown read only a few that she could enthusiastically recommend. Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca* became one of them. *Rebecca* is "the most fascinating story I have read in ages," Brown wired Hollywood, a certain best-seller. In the novel, a plain and innocent young woman (the first-person narrator, whose name du Maurier never reveals) serves as paid companion to a crass American dowager visiting the Riviera. Gossip has it that the aristocratic Maxim de Winter has fled England to Monte Carlo in order to elude painful memories of his recently deceased, much-beloved wife, the fabulously beautiful Rebecca; yet almost inexplicably he proposes marriage to the unglamorous paid companion. Following a honeymoon in Venice, the newlyweds return to Manderley, de Winter's mansion. Here, the young bride confronts not only the memory of Rebecca—which seems to permeate the estate and to preoccupy and torment its owner—but also her mo-

with the woman, and more than any other producer, Selznick considered himself capable of making the kind of film that would favorably influence a woman's choice.

Despite some concern about the title ("obviously a terrible one"), Selznick asked Kay Brown to begin negotiations for *Rebecca*. Sparked by towering sales predictions, the price of the novel's motion picture rights quickly escalated and eliminated undercapitalized bidders like Hitchcock. Nothing new there. "The Americans have left us very few stories to film," Hitchcock publicly complained as early as 1927, suggesting one reason for his pursuing work in Hollywood. The director, under contract to Selznick International by summer 1938, nonetheless was still interested in *Rebecca*. When Jenia Reissar suggested that his personal contacts with du Maurier might benefit his new employer, Hitchcock offered to help. Reissar believed that du Maurier, though "mercenary," might accept less from Hitchcock than from Selznick International; Kay Brown endorsed the strategy of Hitchcock as under-cover agent and prodded Selznick to accede. Though preoccupied with the scripting of *Gone With the Wind*, which Brown had also prompted him to buy, Selznick paused long enough to authorize Hitchcock to pay up to \$40,000 for *Rebecca*. Ultimately, Hitchcock deferred to a professional agent, Selznick tracked upward with the bidding, and du Maurier finally sold *Rebecca* to Selznick International for \$50,000, a figure identical to that paid for Margaret Mitchell's Civil War epic just over two years before. Informed of the sale, Hitchcock was "vastly amazed at the price!"

Rebecca justified Kay Brown's opinion. It enjoyed wide exposure, not only as novel but also as story, radio drama, and (written by du Maurier herself) play. Shortly after its publication, the book was serialized in the London *Daily Express* and the *New York Daily Mirror*, which emblazoned the side panels of its delivery trucks with the word REBECCA. These syndicated digests—as Selznick knew—brought the story of *Rebecca* to a new readership; more important, they helped to keep the work's name before the public and created a vast potential audience for the film. Selznick, who owned the American radio rights to the novel, sold them for \$1,000 to Orson Welles. The arrangement represented a bargain for the Mercury Theatre, but Selznick hoped to redouble his price in publicity. The media lionized the theatrical boy wonder, less than twenty-four years old and too young, if hardly too

modest, to play de Winter. "Welles' generally unattractive physical appearance is not known to radio audiences," Selznick felt, so "he is probably the best bet for this broadcast outside of [Ronald] Colman." Welles hastily assembled ten or fifteen episodes from the book and aired them in late 1938. "A clever showman," Selznick observed, "he didn't waste time and effort creating anything new but simply gave them the original." That original proved a sturdy commodity in the marketplace.

In early September 1938, Selznick officially assigned Hitchcock to direct *Rebecca*; at the same time, he ordered a staff writer to draft a detailed outline of the novel. Should the studio encounter cash flow problems and wish to liquidate the property (always a real possibility for independents like Selznick), it could use the synopsis as a kind of prospectus. More to the point, Selznick intended to give the screenwriter a guide to use in faithfully adapting the novel. According to Selznick,

the only sure and safe way of aiming at a successful transcription of the original into the motion-picture form is to try as far as possible to retain the original. . . . I don't mind letting my own creative instincts run wild either on an original, as in the case of *A Star Is Born*, or in the adaptation of an unsuccessful work, as in *Made for Each Other*. But my ego is not so great that it cannot be held in check on the adaptation of a successful work.

Selznick first offered the script assignment of *Rebecca* to du Maurier, the screenwriter most likely to protect the novel's character, but like Margaret Mitchell on *Gone With the Wind*, du Maurier declined. By transatlantic cable and letter, Selznick began conferring with Hitchcock on other possibilities. The first of their many differences soon became apparent.

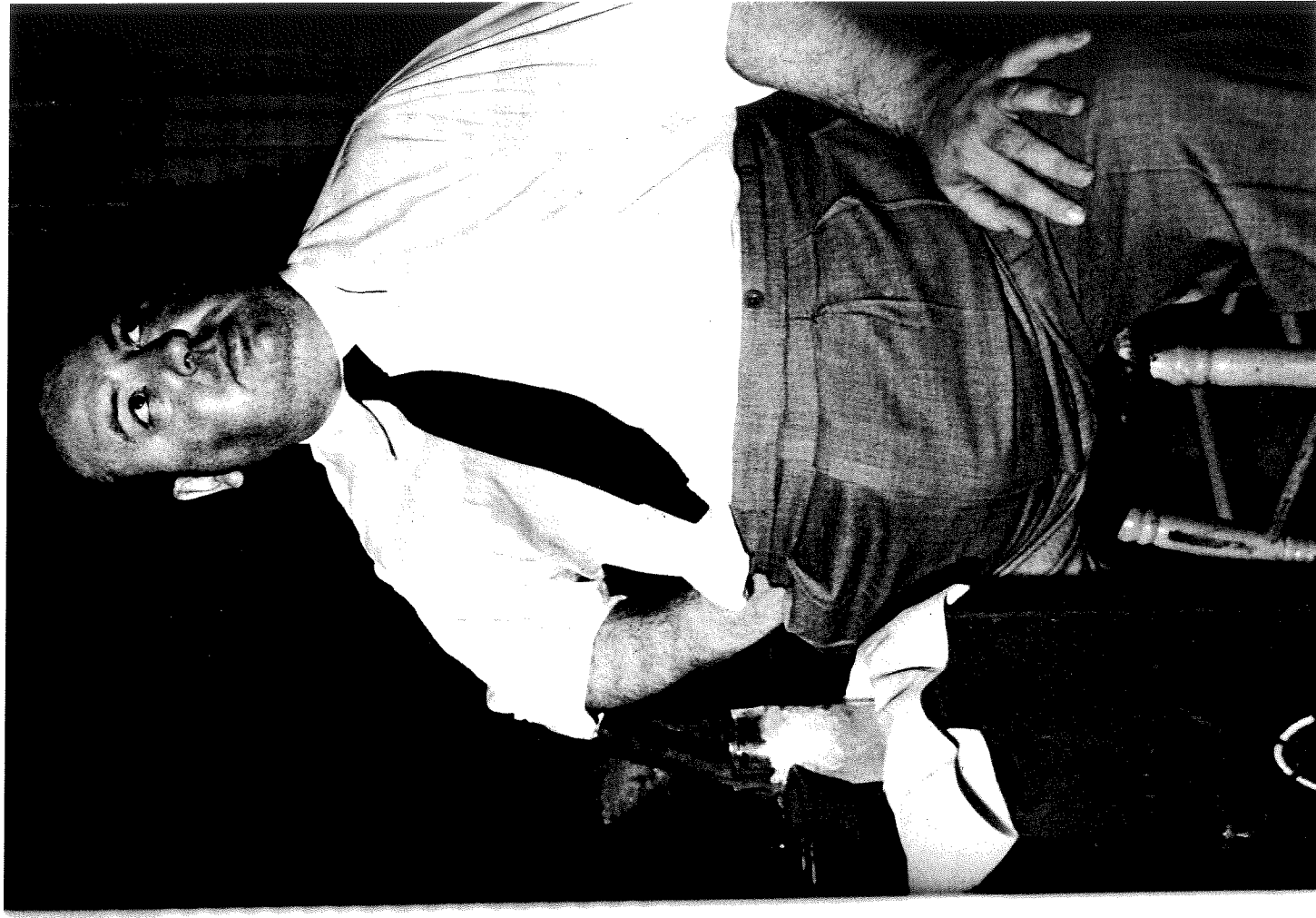
Unlike Selznick, Hitchcock scorned original source material. "I believe that I owe much of the success I have been lucky enough to achieve to my 'ruthlessness' in adapting stories for the screen," the director said in 1936. In *Waltzes from Vienna*, where he ignored his own advice and clung to the musical that inspired the film, he misfired. In *The 39 Steps*, however, where he changed author John Buchan's setting, created a female interest, and added two suspenseful Music Hall

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sequences, he earned critical applause and aroused the curiosity of Hollywood. To rethink an existing property for the movies, Hitchcock scanned it (reading it might lead to a "mere photographic reproduction"), then extracted its narrative skeleton. Next came the period of invention, the days and weeks when he, his wife, Alma, his assistant, Joan Harrison, and occasionally another writer would attempt to fit his lively but often disparate visual pyrotechnics into a coherent story. Hitchcock loved this part of the filmmaking process best. The resulting treatment contained "a description of exactly what you saw. As though you had plugs in your ears," Hitchcock said. "Then I'd go to a playwright. I'd say, there's the film. Just a lot of steel girders, you see." Add dialogue, light, and shoot.

Hitchcock had been a silent or credited scenarist on most of his British sound films; ideally, the scripting of *Rebecca* would become an in-house project, a Hitchcock-Hitchcock-Harrison effort carried out with the director's accustomed "ruthlessness." But when Hitchcock delayed choosing a writer, his new employer began pushing him. Selznick first proposed Clemence Dane, whose *Bill of Divorcement* Selznick had made at RKO; "I would have you negotiate deal," Selznick cabled Hitchcock, "as you could probably get her cheaper than we could especially since it would be my thought to have her work with you in England on first draft and then come over to work on revisions with me." When Hitchcock rejected Dane, perhaps because she might miscarry his ideas across the Atlantic, Selznick proposed John Balderston (*The Prisoner of Zenda*) and Ben Hecht (*Nothing Sacred*). Hitchcock remained unenthusiastic. Selznick then proposed Hugh Walpole, "perfectly charming to work with, very pliable and agreeable." Hitchcock sought iconoclasm, not complaisance. Again he stalled. The screenwriter should not endorse the original subject but supplement it, Hitchcock told Selznick by letter; "to use an analogy it must [be] like the idea of casting against type." Subtly asserting his case for a "more entertaining" adaptation of the novel, Hitchcock countered that Sidney Gilliat would be expert at "the writing of small parts [of] English characters to provide ingredient of humour." He had brought to *The Lady Vanishes* the qualities that Hitchcock wanted in *Rebecca*, wit and irony.

Not one to confront, Hitchcock preferred wars of attrition to wars of aggression; by indirection and persistence if not persuasion, he would



Hitchcock at work.

turn Selznick to his point of view. In London in November 1938, Hitchcock lunched with Kay Brown and Jock Whitney. They listened to his plans for *Rebecca*, particularly the changes in the second Mrs. de Winter's character, and came away excited. For \$5,000, Hitchcock offered to prepare a treatment with elaborated dialogue sequences. "Please cable your reaction," Whitney asked Selznick, "personally think too good to be true." Once sealed, the bargain would accord Hitchcock a significant measure of control, for as the primary author of the treatment he would influence and perhaps even set the structure, action, and characterization of *Rebecca*. Selznick was wary.

Like expensive racehorses, thought Selznick, celebrated artists like Hitchcock could give spectacular performances but needed a trainer's professional grooming and watchful discipline. "I have never had much success with leaving a writer alone to do a script without almost daily collaboration with myself," the producer had written two years earlier. In 1938, he remained almost pathologically anxious about any major task completed without his supervision, including Hitchcock's adaptation of a \$50,000 studio property. "Especially nervous changes second wife," Selznick wired Whitney, "since we have had overwhelming proof appeal of this character and further would challenge resentment if changed." Yet to become truly an "executive" rather than a "unit" producer, a course of action that Whitney and others had urged upon him, Selznick would have to loosen the reins. Perhaps feeling a subtle pressure from his business associate, Selznick reluctantly agreed to Hitchcock's proposal.

The novel was rife with challenges. For instance, first-person point of view, so important to the development of the second Mrs. de Winter's character, translated poorly to the screen. Orson Welles's hastily prepared yet successful adaptation of *Rebecca* used de Winter's wife as narrator, but radio actually benefited from a character-narrator; film had to use extensive voice-over or, as in *The Lady in the Lake* (1946), a camera that awkwardly stood in for the character-narrator, neither of which was very satisfactory. Selznick wanted to frame the narrative by opening and closing the film with the girl's voice-over commentary, but Hitchcock was doubtful. "Something might have to be substituted for the first person style of telling," he wrote Selznick, probably testing the waters for a less slavish adaptation. If only to attract a male star, they might find it necessary to expand the point of view. Hitchcock's

idea was to make the girl "fairly bright, attractive and amusing" in the Monte Carlo scenes and bring her down on her arrival at Manderley. "As the book stands at present this contrast does not exist particularly; or, if it does, it is purely mental, and I feel unless we do something like this our early scenes in the house will not have the dramatic kicks that they should have, because visually we shall be unable to show any change in the girl."

Throughout the winter of 1938-39, Hitchcock worked on the *Rebecca* treatment with Alma, Joan Harrison, and British writer Michael Hogan, whom Selznick had implicitly approved. Among other problems, the director fretted about de Winter's explanation of Rebecca's murder. "Is it sufficient to put this over verbally through de Winter's own words," he wondered, "or must it be done pictorially, in order to make absolutely sure that we do not lose any sympathy for him?" Hitchcock recognized that an audience might need to see Rebecca in order to comprehend fully what a heinous woman she was, yet one of the novel's strongest points was its ability to make the reader *feel* rather than *see* Rebecca. When de Winter describes her to his second wife, Hitchcock said, his account is "practically a visual one. Flashback? Ugh!" A two-page, single-spaced letter to Selznick in which Hitchcock shared his thoughts about the adaptation betrays his concern with the static quality of du Maurier's work, its limited settings, its monochromatic heroine, and its reliance on vague evocations of the past. When Hitchcock sought an option on the novel, he must certainly have been thinking of how he would have to dress it up, making it, as he told John Russell Taylor, more vivid and detailed, giving it more of an English flavor, less dreamlike and Gothic. In a September 1938 cable, Hitchcock had assured Selznick that he intended to "look after horrific atmosphere whatever writer we use," but if *Rebecca* veered toward the frisky tone of the British pictures, director and producer would clash.

With the unfinished treatment in hand, the director and his family left for America in early spring 1939, barely a month before the first twenty-week term of his contract began. While on the East Coast, Hitchcock addressed the History of Motion Pictures class at Columbia University. "If I were doing *Rebecca* in color," he told his audience, "the symbol of the dead woman's presence would be in a color. Obviously, it lends itself to exploitation. Why, just think, you might have a new color called 'Rebecca' sold in all the stores!" The students

laughed, but Selznick would later make the naive joke seem prescient. In early April the Hitchcock entourage arrived in southern California. Greeted by the Myron Selznicks, the Hitchcocks drove to their penthouse apartment at the Wilshire Palms, near the Los Angeles Country Club and not far from Selznick International Studios. Joan Harrison lived downstairs and other neighbors included one of the Ritz Brothers and Franchot Tone, recently divorced from Joan Crawford. Behind the wheel of a little Austin, Hitchcock chauffeured Pat to her Catholic day school and himself to his handsome suite of offices (including bath and kitchen) in Culver City. Meanwhile, with Selznick still preoccupied by *Gone With the Wind*, Hitchcock worked diligently on the *Rebecca* treatment. The press covered his progress—and everything else about him—with steady interest.

To reporters as well as colleagues, Hitchcock strove to make himself interesting. Most Hollywood directors usually wore "sandals of Mexican derivation," the *World Film News* observed in 1938, "fancy slacks styled in the Broadway fashion, loud polo shirts . . . and sometimes either caps or sunglasses to protect their eyes from the klieg lights and the actions of the Thespians beneath." Hitchcock reinforced the eccentricity of his dark business suits with an amused if enigmatic expression; he would "tell you the dirtiest joke in the world," Marcella Rabwin recalled, "and never crack a smile." When he spoke to journalists, though, he proved immensely quotable, spicing his interviews with bon mots as original as the images in his films. On two topics—directing and eating—he became voluble. He had always been particular about food; according to his mother, he left one grammar school because he "objected to the cuisine." Newspapermen lapped up his aversions, preferences, and habits. Commissary chow disagreed with him, so he lunched at Perino's or the Victor Hugo. He never ordered eggs or shellfish, he loved steak and American ice cream, and he drank Château d'Yquem. Frequently after dinner, he dozed.

When Hitchcock, all 260 pounds of him, went on salary in April 1939, he and Selznick began conferring sporadically. During these sessions, the producer and the director must have first sensed the inevitable conflict to follow. Disliking surprises, Selznick reiterated his intention to preserve the structure and characterization of *Rebecca*, including all of "the little feminine things which are so recognizable and which make every woman say [of the heroine], 'I know just how she

feels. . . . I know just what she's going through . . . etc." Selznick approached a narrative intuitively; he leaned *toward* the human drama in fiction, whether Margaret Mitchell's or Daphne du Maurier's. An analytic filmmaker, Hitchcock privileged form over character, irony over romance. Throughout the spring Hitchcock listened to Selznick, read the memoranda, then went his own way. His forty-five page, double-spaced "storyline," dated June 3, changed relatively little of the novel, even if it rearranged certain scenes; yet it demonstrated the director's attempt—admittedly not always successful or subtle—to breathe cinematic life into du Maurier's often static, occasionally repetitive work.

The Hitchcock treatment opens briefly on a moving-camera shot of Manderley's "tangled and neglected wilderness," then quickly fades to "the sound of the scream of the boat train as it roars into the camera," a sound-image transition similar to those used in Hitchcock's *Blackmail* and *The 39 Steps*. (Two years later, Orson Welles's *Citizen Kane* would echo the fallen estate and the manner of photographing it, the shock sound cutaway, and notable other elements of *Rebecca*.) With great economy, Hitchcock used predominantly nonverbal scenes to introduce Mrs. Van Hopper, Maxim de Winter, and "Daphne," Selznick International's name for du Maurier's unnamed heroine. The director obviously wanted to *move Rebecca*, to convert the words of du Maurier's restrained fiction into lively images that incidentally expressed Hitchcock's love of travel and explicitly dramatized the picture-book world of the Van Hoppers and de Winters into which the heroine so uneasily fit. Act one, he insisted, "has to be charming, replete with quips and whimsy."

The treatment contains not only a number of Hitchcock signature scenes (a car racing along a precipice, some well-observed moments of English domestic life) but several of his "experiments." For the so-called confession scene in which de Winter tells "Daphne" of his hatred for Rebecca, Hitchcock first considered showing the discovery of Rebecca's body, but a local embalmer's explicit report about the effects of saltwater on a corpse dissuaded him. Instead, Hitchcock specified that while de Winter speaks, the camera moves "to a SEMI-CLOSE UP of him in retrospect as he goes through the various emotional experiences he describes." The lighting and background change constantly to reflect his relationship to the action and we even "get an impression of his

physical movements as his voice narrative continues." Hitchcock intended the effect to differ from the "old fashioned 'flash back,'" and it does, for it dramatizes not the incident but a refraction of it in space and time. As scripted or even filmed, the scene might or might not have worked; it nonetheless represented Hitchcock's attempt to advance beyond a conventional mise-en-scène in a work that appeared somewhat resistant to cinematic treatment.

Selznick read the June 3 draft, marked his chief criticisms, and called in the stenographers for a lengthy session. The *Rebecca* treatment, he wrote to Hitchcock, left him "shocked beyond words." He spoke figuratively of course. In the almost three thousand words that followed, Selznick addressed the filmmaker's responsibility to a popular novel as well as Hitchcock's weaknesses as adapter. Beatrice, de Winter's sister, had been vulgarized, Mrs. Danvers detoxified, and Maxim de Winter left with "no charm, no mystery, and no romance." The changes in "Daphne" were especially harmful. "Every little thing that the girl does in the book, her reactions of running away from the guests, and the tiny things that indicate her nervousness and her self-consciousness and her gaucherie are all so brilliant in the book that every woman who has read it has adored the girl and has understood her psychology. . . . We have removed all the subtleties and substituted big broad strokes." Selznick served his new director well by forcing him to pay closer heed to character, for Hitchcock too often matched his cleverly reasoned visual logic with pallid characterization. He not only conceived pictures outwardly, from "big broad strokes," he also believed you first "decide what the characters are going to do. Then you provide them with enough characteristics to make it seem plausible that they should do it." This strategy compromised more than one of his films. Selznick sometimes let opulent but pedestrian visuals overwhelm his attention to subtle points of character, yet he attempted to render his characters' emotions fully and credibly. Selznick and Hitchcock made odd collaborators. The June 3 treatment represented the first skirmish in a long battle of contesting points of view.

"We bought 'REBECCA' and we intend to make 'REBECCA,'" Selznick dictated. Yet his ruminative June 12 memorandum repeatedly betrayed the hour and stressful circumstances of its composition. Principal photography on *Gone With the Wind*, a five-month drain on the small company's resources, was finally ending but providing no cause

for relief. "Quite apart from the cost factor," Selznick observed, "everybody's nerves are getting on the ragged edge and God only knows what will happen if we don't get this damn thing finished." According to his wife, Selznick used increasing amounts of Benzedrine to maintain his "insane" hours on *Gone With the Wind*. He occasionally went without sleep, and occasionally was impossible to awaken. If *Gone With the Wind* had seemed to run out of control—Selznick may have thought—*Rebecca* would not. At the end of the memorandum to Hitchcock, he ordered a new treatment, "probably with a new writing set-up." That same week, du Maurier told Jenia Reissar that she was "weeping bitter tears over [Hitchcock's] 'Jamaica Inn'" and hoped for better from *Rebecca*. Selznick responded immediately. "I have thrown out the complete treatment on 'REBECCA,'" he wrote to du Maurier through Kay Brown; furthermore, he boasted, it is "my intention to do the book and not some botched-up semi-original such as was done with 'JAMAICA INN'."

Hitchcock, Joan Harrison, and Scottish novelist-playwright Philip MacDonald (the author of three Twentieth Century-Fox "Mr. Moto" pictures) began work immediately on the new *Rebecca* treatment, and by the third week in June had completed an outline-script of over one hundred pages. In general, they followed the letter of the novel; they even added dialogue taken word for word from du Maurier's text. Eager to please Selznick but not yet resigned to producing a slavish *Rebecca*, Hitchcock attached a note to his revised treatment that seemed to challenge Selznick to accept it: This "will serve as a basis for discussion in order to decide what deviation may be permitted so as to remove some of the character weakness and slight static quality which I feel have emerged."

If Hitchcock thought that Selznick would regret having wholly embraced the du Maurier work, he erred. Once the treatment was set, Selznick intended to employ a dialogue writer who could readily finish the job: "We did not and do not now need a screenwriter," he told Kay Brown, "but simply someone to fill in that dialogue which we are not [yet] using from du Maurier." To cut *Rebecca* loose from its novelistic moorings, Hitchcock would first have to overcome his distaste for confrontation. An opportunity soon presented itself.

Toward the first day of summer, Hitchcock and his writers joined Selznick for an afternoon of business and pleasure on his boat. In the

1930s, John Huston recalled, "Sailing was the rage. Men who were mild-mannered and conservative behind their desks during the week put on yachting caps and brass-buttoned jackets and became Captain Blighs on their own quarterdecks each weekend." A nascent Mr. Christian, Hitchcock probably shed his accustomed dark suit but not his avoirdupois, 260-plus pounds fore and aft. On board, the foursome discussed *Rebecca*'s prospects, which for Selznick had brightened with the revised treatment. But transcribed into ten pages of single-spaced "minor notes," Selznick's response again signaled his intent to control the production, from treatment to direction to final cut. If Hitchcock wondered whether he should assert his independence, he had his answer between the lines. Of some added dialogue during de Winter's courtship of the heroine, Selznick observed: "I don't care for the girl's un-cued and unjustified disloyalty to her employer, as indicated by her gratuitous remarks about Mrs. Van Hopper to Maxim." An English director contemplating mutiny might well have taken the comment about labor and management personally.

As the writers revised the script, Selznick and Hitchcock discussed casting. A director at one of the five major studios generally secured actors from the pool of contract players; the notoriously frugal Warner Bros. would have forced Hitchcock to cast exclusively from its stock company, and later in his career MGM urged him to use contract actors Gregory Peck and Cyd Charisse as the leads in *North by Northwest*. Selznick International, which had only a few actors under contract, sometimes required its directors to look beyond the administration building's white colonnades. Hitchcock enjoyed searching for new faces, particularly at the theater, where he could audition performers without confronting them. In casting, Selznick generally supported his director.

For Mrs. Danvers, Kay Brown proposed someone new to film, Judith Anderson. The acclaimed stage actress demanded transportation from New York to Hollywood, a thousand dollars per week for the audition plus all other expenses, and a "written guarantee" that Hitchcock would direct the screen test, a tribute to Hitchcock's reputation if a slight to Selznick's. "Just who the hell does she think she is dealing with?" Selznick fumed to Daniel O'Shea. He nonetheless cast her. Throughout the summer of 1939, Hitchcock tested other, more malleable actors. His comments on the *Rebecca* auditions, while humorous,

betray not only traces of condescension toward the performers, but a notable delight in pigeonholing them, objectifying them as he did so many characters in his films. Of Leo Genn and Anthony Ireland, reading for minor roles: "In a mild way they would fit into the parts mentioned, but actually they are quite unimportant actors." Of John Mills, established in England but just coming to America: "Very, very British and very, very short." Of Guy Middleton, the Harrow-educated English actor and Laurence Olivier's choice for the part of Favell: "A caddish David Niven. . . . Mentally light-weight."

Since reading an early treatment, Selznick had wanted Ronald Colman, whom the studio had under contract, for the leading role of de Winter; equally enthusiastic, Hitchcock liked the actor's flair for the poignant. But from the beginning, Colman's fear about the "murder angle" and also about the possibility of the picture's emerging as a "woman-starring vehicle" had made his acceptance of the part unlikely. In May 1939, Hitchcock visited Colman's home to plead the production's case, but finally the actor refused. Selznick asked Hitchcock to consider Melvyn Douglas, Walter Pidgeon (who Selznick thought was "coming along nicely"), Leslie Howard, and William Powell. Hitchcock found Howard "a little too scholastic for the romantic angle necessary" (a sly comment on Howard's casting in *Gone With the Wind*?) and thought William Powell's American accent "dangerous." At last, Selznick and Hitchcock settled on Laurence Olivier, who had returned to Hollywood in the late 1930s after an unhappy period in America several years before. Both Olivier and his lover Vivien Leigh preferred the stage to films: actors made money—not art—in Hollywood. According to one magazine writer at the time, Olivier had "a fund of disdain as large as the Italian treasury deficit." That manner could serve Maxim de Winter and *Rebecca* well.

Over *Rebecca*'s female lead, Hitchcock and Selznick clashed. The producer had found *Young and Innocent* "a very intriguing and a very exciting picture"; furthermore, he was convinced that Nova Pilbeam, its heroine, could convey the du Maurier narrator's "gauche behavior, awkward movements and general immaturity." With proper guidance, Selznick intimated to Jenia Reissar, Pilbeam could become a "great star for the world market."

Hitchcock balked. Pilbeam was "correct casting according [to the] book," the director conceded, but not to his conception of the script's

heroine. Hitchcock obviously wished to influence *Rebecca* through the casting, if not the screenplay. Despite the objections to Pilbeam, however, Selznick pursued her, and without mentioning Selznick's name ("so as [to] keep [the] price down"), Jenia Reissar discovered that the actress was "very keen" on working in America. (Like Hitchcock, Pilbeam had suffered from the contraction of the British film industry; more to the point, Gaumont-British, her home studio in 1938, would neither cast her nor waive its restriction against her stage appearances.) Selznick's attempt to sign the young actress not only suggests his admiration about leaving intact du Maurier's book, heroine and all, but constitutes his implicit statement about the boundaries of Hitchcock's authority. By contract, Hitchcock had agreed to render his services "pursuant to Producer's directions, instructions and control." If Hitchcock could not veto casting selections, though, he could still twist arms. In October 1938 he had argued that Pilbeam was "too immature and difficult [to] handle in love scenes"; in November, that her range was too narrow. Meanwhile, as Selznick prepared a five-year contract for her, the lengthy term and binding exclusivity clauses of which troubled her agent, Hitchcock resorted to sarcasm. Referring to Colman's fear of *Rebecca* as a "woman-starring vehicle," Hitchcock wired Selznick: Why should Colman worry? With Pilbeam as de Winter's wife, the picture will be his.

To Hitchcock's relief, Selznick abandoned the notion of using Pilbeam. Olivier pressured them both to cast Vivien Leigh, whom Selznick International had under contract, but the director had other ideas. Since arriving in Hollywood, Hitchcock had urged Selznick to consider naming an *American* actress to play the heroine in order to stress her isolation at Manderley. The producer consented, the auditions began.

"Tested. Possibility," noted Hitchcock about Joan Fontaine's audition in midsummer 1939. She "has to show fair amount of nervousness in order to get any effect," he wrote. But he intended to test her again "to see how much we can underplay her without losing anything." Lucile Fairbanks, Douglas Fairbanks's niece and an alumna of Beverly Hills High, read in late June. She has "a sincere and naive hopefulness," Hitchcock told Selznick, but also "a husky voice reminiscent of Mae West in her youth (if any) and I don't really think we can take her seriously." On July 19, the director sent his producer a list of almost thirty women whom he had tested. Miriam Patty "should play the part



Maxim de Winter (Laurence Olivier) greets his brother-in-law, Giles Lacy (Nigel Bruce), dressed for the costume ball. In the screenplay—a Hitchcock touch—Lacy says that the

of the cupid that is broken—she's so frail." Marjorie Reynolds, who had appeared in a number of programmers, was "absolutely not the type—too much gangster's moll." Though she had had some experience on stage and in film, Jean Muir was "too big and sugary." And Audrey Reynolds was "excellent for Rebecca who doesn't appear." Many of the actors with whom Hitchcock worked found him endearing, but his humor had a darker side, sometimes abusive and inescapably deliberate. In one of James Thurber's anemically drawn but telling cartoons, a fencer beheads his opponent. The caption: "Touché!" Hitchcock's épée was his wit, wielded with grace, speed, and a sometimes unexpected fatality.

As the casting process continued, the writers completed the first script of *Rebecca*, an amalgam dated July 29, 1939, which reflects both Selznick's and Hitchcock's ideas on du Maurier's story. The screenplay opens on a train en route to Monte Carlo, dramatizes the awkward meeting, brisk courtship, and civil marriage ceremony of de Winter and "I" (formerly "Daphne"), and settles into Manderley where it more or less follows the novel. Consistent with Hitchcock's earliest intention (the "second wife should be much less passive"), the heroine appears more assertive; in the "confession scene," having learned of her husband's act of murder, she exhibits a serene calm: "We must think up some way of explaining everything," she tells de Winter, as though Rebecca's death were merely an inconvenience. However, when Mrs. Danvers reverently shows "I" her predecessor's beautiful "things"—hairbrushes, negligee, and so forth—the young woman becomes paralyzed with despair. Hitchcock's best films privileged cinema's visual element over literature and the theater's verbal emphasis. The man who feared "things" also made them the centerpiece of his work, where glasses of wine, glasses of milk, dinner forks, cigarette lighters, and even hairbrushes frequently exert a latent yet menacing power over his characters. In *Rebecca*, they had exceptional resonance.

Selznick, overseeing the previews of *Intermezzo* and the cutting of *Gone With the Wind*, commented on the script in installments dictated over several days and transcribed in thirty-seven single-spaced pages. Then, less than two weeks before *Rebecca* went into production, he hired Robert E. Sherwood to trim and polish the screenplay and give its conclusion a fresh slant. For a flat \$15,000 fee, the Harvard-educated

dramatist became the production's seventh writer. During late August, Selznick met often with Hitchcock and Sherwood. Working with the producer always tested an artist's mettle. At late-hour conferences in his office or summerhouse, Selznick ran on adrenaline (and speed), Hitchcock and Sherwood on liquor. By three o'clock one morning, with Selznick still roaring, Hitchcock fell asleep and Sherwood, having drunk too much, tried to sail away in the model boat in Selznick's pool. When they all came to, the script's third act—particularly the manner of Rebecca's death—still awaited them.

In du Maurier's novel, Rebecca had gone to her physician because she suspected that she was pregnant by Favell, but further examination discovered terminal cancer. She kept the diagnosis secret and, to avoid suffering, provoked her husband into shooting her. The industry's censorship office had objected to de Winter's homicide and suggested that Rebecca trip and kill herself in falling. "The whole story of *Rebecca* is the story of a man who has murdered his wife," the producer wrote to Jock Whitney just after Labor Day, "and it now becomes the story of a man who buried a wife who was killed accidentally!" Although the censor prevailed, the three collaborators worked to vitalize the "confession scene" that unravels the story of Rebecca's death. Neither Sherwood nor Hitchcock felt that the actors portraying de Winter and his second wife could carry the sequence alone. Hitchcock rejected a flashback and Selznick wanted a *Rebecca* "without tricks," negating the director's earlier thoughts of superimposing a shifting background against a close-up of de Winter.

During his last days on the production, Sherwood devised an amended "confession scene" that Hitchcock liked and Selznick eventually approved. Shifting the sequence to Rebecca's boat house cottage, where the murder/accident occurred, Sherwood and Hitchcock used a subjective camera to etch in film the geography of the first wife's death, particularly the "things" associated with it. "She was lying on the divan—a large tray of cigarette stubs beside her," de Winter tells "I." "CAMERA PANS over to the divan, showing the tea table and a portion of the divan with a tray of cigarette stubs on it." Rebecca taunts her husband with her infidelity and the possibility of her having another man's child; he strikes her and she falls. "CAMERA MOVES over to take in the ship's tackle on the floor." Back in the present, the discovery of Rebecca's corpse jeopardizes de Winter's life with "I." "Suddenly the

telephone rings, startling the two. CAMERA PANS to the phone, covered with dust, on the table. . . . CAMERA TILTS up to Maxim with the receiver to his ear." Despite the length of de Winter's monologue, a long take interrupted only once by a reaction shot of "I," the final shooting script sustains tension by counterpointing the agitato of de Winter's narrative and the legato of the camera's languorous movement.

The September 7 Final Shooting Script, the blueprint for *Rebecca*, resulted from the give and take of producer and director, neither willing to push the other too far. Selznick recognized that a mere re-creation would dull the picture. Though he preached fidelity, he endorsed those invented scenes that lent cinematic distinction to the narrative. Tenuous without becoming overbearing, he persuaded Hitchcock to distill the essence of du Maurier's novel, its most dramatic and best-remembered moments. Yet he also persuaded Hitchcock to explore the psychology of Maxim and his second wife, especially how love finally triumphs over masochism. British Hitchcock had been emotionally thin, *Rebecca* was robust. While seven writers might have defeated a lesser man and the script itself, Selznick held the project together and influenced its direction throughout the long spring and summer of 1939.

"This is a melodrama," noted one reviewer of the du Maurier book, "unashamed, glorying in its own quality." Although such "little British thrillers" as *Young and Innocent* and *The Lady Vanishes* also succumbed to theatricality, the presence of Selznick on *Rebecca* affected Hitchcock. "Things" still predominate, from the telephone in the cottage and the bones of a cold piece of chicken to Manderley itself. But unlike thirties Hitchcock, the *Rebecca* screenplay links the cool, stable surfaces of "things" to the perturbed characters' desires and fears. When de Winter screens the home movies from his second honeymoon (an invented scene), the two-dimensional figures mugging for the camera mock their now joyless counterparts; her wish unspoken, "I" longs to disappear into the character on screen, to become the "thing" before her, for it has the constancy that reality lacks. The shadow of Selznick had wrung the melodrama from Hitchcock.

During the evolution of the screenplay, Selznick never forced the issue of absolute control, for alienating Hitchcock made no sense. The critically acclaimed director was already the media's darling and poten-

tially a major corporate asset. His name on Selznick International films could enhance the studio's reputation and swell its income; during dry periods, his name on loanout contracts could improve the small company's cash flow. Finally, despite the stinging memoranda and fatiguing conferences, Selznick liked Hitchcock. "You sent for me?" the director said when greeting someone. Only Selznick literally had.

The naturally circumspect Hitchcock was even more reluctant to press for a "Hitchcockian" *Rebecca* screenplay. With war clouds gathering abroad, Hollywood was contemplating retrenchment. International ticket sales generated roughly half of a film's revenue, and if war came, movie companies would probably trim their production schedules. "Film business here very sticky on account lost European market," Hitchcock cabled his brother in fall 1939, perhaps warning him not to count on any more money sent home. "Hope to be subtle to another company immediately following *Rebecca* otherwise will have twelve week layoff without pay . . . fear companies here will ask salary reduction near future even though one under contract." Although Selznick International had promised to pay the director for forty weeks annually, by force majeure the studio could cancel one or even both of his twenty-week terms. A too demanding Hitchcock might become known as "difficult" and thus perhaps unemployable in America. More than Selznick's memoranda, Hitchcock's financial insecurity shaped his deference to the producer throughout the writing of *Rebecca*. On his American debut, Hitchcock did not intend to win the round but lose the fight.

"Dear Jack," Hitchcock wrote to his London business advisor on September 1, 1939. "Please forgive silly question at this time but can you cable if furniture shipment at all possible because we are sitting on the floor." The floor belonged to Carole Lombard, whose home on St. Cloud Road the Hitchcocks had leased. Although the director missed not only his furniture but his growing collection of oils and certain delicacies like English strawberries and Dover sole, Los Angeles and Selznick International satisfied many of his needs. Habit conspired with the balmy climate to make him drowse occasionally (at private dinners, nightclubs, the theater), yet he remained fully awake to Hollywood's advantages, particularly its access to the media. Into autumn, Hitchcock continued to make excellent copy. *Life*, *Newsweek*, and *Collier's*,

which usually reserved their feature pages for the stars, profiled the self-assured, eccentric director while he worked on his first American film. His corrosive comments about producers delighted journalists and their readers. "He smiled a little cynically when he discussed producers," Douglas Churchill reported in *The New York Times* in October, but impishly refused to be quoted. Said *Life*: "Judging from his past record it is only a question of time before he will give Louis B. Mayer the hot foot."

Selznick read the *Times* interview, noted Hitchcock's "snide remarks about producers," yet refrained from comment. Selznick could be charged with verbosity, perfectionism, and hard-nosed dealing, but not vindictiveness: secure in his own abilities, he not only vigorously promoted Hitchcock but allowed the director to vigorously promote himself. Hitchcock's courtship of the press opened another supply line (a free one at that) from the studio to moviegoers. Since content generally mattered less to Selznick International than lineage, the studio recognized advantages in all of Hitchcock's pronouncements, even his earlier statement to *Newsweek* that his first film would "reflect no personality other than his own." This comment, a wish-fulfillment fantasy that the director would increasingly struggle to realize, gave to Hitchcock and the press a certain satisfaction and to Selznick International fodder for its public relations machine. No less than Clark Gable's love of sport or Joan Crawford's supposedly warm home life, Hitchcock's assertion of independence helped to define a persona that Selznick's publicity department and later Hitchcock himself could use in selling pictures. As long as Hitchcock played his act on the road and not in the executive offices of Culver City, no one strenuously objected; his contract, after all, negated his claims of authorship.

In late summer 1939, Hitchcock's whimsical opinions claimed little of Selznick's attention. The studio, inadequately organized to operate on an assembly line, had three pictures—*Intermezzo*, *Gone With the Wind*, and *Rebecca*—in various stages of production; the threat of war and a concurrent cessation of motion picture exports made each film momentous for the company's future. With less than two weeks remaining before principal photography began, however, Selznick had still not cast the second Mrs. de Winter. In late August, Jock Whitney told him that their company had "a very serious problem. I cannot assure the Pioneer stockholders or the Bank of America that all is well with

Rebecca

REBECCA until this most important part is cast"; in short, investors would not supply completion money for the film without a leading lady. "Such procedure has not been and is not good business," Whitney gently chastised his partner.

In later years, Hitchcock complained that Selznick had intended all along to cast Joan Fontaine, that his heralded search for the second Mrs. de Winter was a wearying promotional stunt for the film; but Selznick was genuinely undecided. Margaret Sullivan and Anne Baxter, both finalists for the role, seemed far more likely choices than Fontaine. After a handful of films in which she appeared to show little potential, RKO had eliminated Fontaine from its studio roster in 1938. Alma Hitchcock thought her manner intolerably "coy and simpering" and her voice "extremely irritating." Like Kay Brown, Jock Whitney also inveighed against her: "The last test of Joan Fontaine was so bad that I cannot see her playing the role otherwise than as a dithering idiot, or as her other version—a talking magazine cover." Even her fiancé, thirty-seven-year-old English actor Brian Aherne, described her as "young, pretty, gay, and utterly charming—and no actress, thank God." As Whitney noted, however, the decision was Selznick's, and as he had in Hitchcock, the producer sensed in Fontaine something that others had missed. When he finally offered her *Rebecca*, she deserted Aherne and sped from their Oregon honeymoon cabin to Culver City. The Pygmalion in Hitchcock nodded his approval.

Toward the end of August, Selznick changed the starting date of *Rebecca* from August 30 to September 5, then to September 8. Even before Hitchcock had exposed a foot of film, he had worked twenty-one weeks, all on salary. Selznick's attempt to serve as executive producer on *Gone With the Wind* and *Rebecca* had contributed significantly to the director's meager progress. Nonetheless, to a studio that had planned to get two pictures from Hitchcock in two twenty-week periods annually, the delay was costly. Despite the fact that they were not working, the contracted artists were being paid: Olivier \$695 a day, Judith Anderson \$291, Fontaine \$166. An expeditious shooting schedule became essential. Hitchcock had first proposed a \$947,000 budget with a forty-eight-day shooting schedule. Selznick ordered it lowered to \$750,000 and forty-two days. "In view of the many speeches [Hitchcock] has made to me about how he pre-cuts a script so as to shoot only necessary angles [what the director called 'cutting-in-the-camera'], it is

a mystery to me as to how he could spend even 42 days." By the start of production, Selznick had established a thirty-six-day budget with expenses not to exceed \$800,000. Calling for the completion of four script pages daily, the shooting schedule seemed almost reasonable. Victor Fleming had averaged three pages daily on the epic *Gone With the Wind*. Gregory Ratoff nearly four on *Intermezzo*. Yet the shooting schedule did not account for Hitchcock's unfamiliarity with American production methods and his customary ten-week British schedules, to say nothing of the still-unfinished screenplay. In agreeing to the thirty-six-day shooting period, the director built failure into his effort. The consequences would affect his career long after *Rebecca* had been released.

William Dieterle, a director who lived by horoscopes and numerology, might have sensed other negative vibrations. Several days before Hitchcock began shooting *Rebecca*, England declared war on Germany. Although the war would not come to America for over two years, the director and his predominantly British cast experienced its effects in September 1939. "We felt blighted right through," Olivier recalled, "careers, lives, hopes." Hitchcock frequently cabled London to inquire about his family, specifically his mother. An actress with ebbing self-confidence, Joan Fontaine brought different but no less disturbing anxieties to the production. Like the second Mrs. de Winter, she was a newlywed among strangers, all of them having come to *Rebecca* long before she. Between reading the script, enduring the hours of fittings and photographic tests, and trying to master the new role of bride at home as well as at the studio, she had set a challenge for herself worthy of the celebrated and poised Rebecca. As Selznick warned Hitchcock, she would need "an enormous amount of rehearsal." Yet the director's enthusiasm for the project remained steadfast. At the beginning of a picture, said production designer Robert Boyle, Hitchcock glowed.

As the first day of principal photography approached, Selznick and Hitchcock made final preparations. Nothing escaped Selznick's attention. Pursuing authenticity, he asked the art director to heed "the descriptions given in the novel in dressing the sets, the props, atmosphere, etc." He authorized construction of an enormous miniature—almost the size of the cavernous stage that held it—for close-ups of Manderley and a second, smaller miniature for long shots. Disap-



Selznick and Hitchcock would finally cast the inexperienced Joan Fontaine as the heroine; she would perform with seasoned professionals Judith Anderson (above) and Laurence Olivier (below). Until she worked with Olivier, Fontaine had never realized that the screen actor must keep "doing the same thing over and over again, exactly the same way," repeating for the close-up what he did in the long shot. Olivier "did it to such perfection," Fontaine later recalled. In a breakfast scene, he "deliberately spilled some marmalade on his lap, or his chin, and it came exactly the same place" in every take.



HITCHCOCK AND SELZNICK

pointed in some background footage made abroad ("it lacks mood"), he ordered retakes, if necessary with California standing in for Monte Carlo. The number of retakes made throughout the picture would stagger and finally tire Hitchcock, yet budget never stood between the producer and perfection. The actors concerned him no less. When the wardrobe department completed its work, the performers (not their stand-ins) modeled their costumes for Selznick. A photographic still could tell him how the actor looked once dressed, but not how he *moved*. His keen eye and long arm never failed to surprise. Just before shooting began, Judith Anderson recalled, "I was in Nevada getting a divorce, and I had word from Selznick, 'Don't pluck your eyebrows!' It was the least of my worries at that moment. [But] that's as far as he went with everything."

Hitchcock proved equally fastidious. Many pages of the screenplay's text already specified camera placement and editing selections that the director or his writers had devised and that, in some cases, Selznick had modified. But Hitchcock also filled his copy of a script with drawings, occasionally one for each shot; when complete, the director's heavily annotated screenplay resembled what one reporter called "a traveling artist's sketch pad." Hitchcock conceptualized each image by first positioning the characters' faces ("the first thing that one looks at"), then framing them in the screen's rectangle. Although he rarely discussed his characters' psychology with either actors or interviewers, he invariably caught a scene's emotional tone in his imagery. Part of the effect relied on scale, part on juxtaposition. As Hitchcock knew, long shots followed by close-ups—or vice versa—accentuated one another and lent vitality to a film; furthermore, cutting from a full shot to a small "thing" endowed an object with great power or menace. Finished with his sketches, Hitchcock had fully realized the film: "After all, once a chess player has worked out his moves, it's just a matter of physically moving the men."

On Friday, September 8, 1939, with Joan Harrison still revising the Monte Carlo sequences, Hitchcock began "moving the men." Ironically, considering Joan Fontaine's relative unfamiliarity with the part, the first scene scheduled involved the second Mrs. de Winter's getting lost in her new home. Hitchcock had planned his setup weeks before, but for half an hour he and director of photography George Barnes tuned the lighting. Having spent the 1930s shooting pictures on the



When Selznick altered the script, Hitchcock (with script girl Adele Cannon) had to reformulate the blocking and camera moves.



HITCHCOCK AND SELZNICK

Warner Bros. assembly line, Barnes could work fast. As Selznick knew, the cinematographer could also work miracles. Barnes was known as "a Hollywood-woman cameraman," Hitchcock later observed, a specialist in glamor shots of leading ladies. Selznick wanted Joan Fontaine lit and photographed with enormous care, for he understood her role in the success of the picture. Hitchcock had founded his British films on action and things, not feminine beauty; he paid relatively little attention to stars. With pressure from Selznick, though, he learned to value photographic effects, particularly as they involved Fontaine. Soon his own demands for subtle, evocative light and shadow slowed him down.

Once the camera crew had set up, Hitchcock prepared Fontaine. While rehearsing, Frank Capra paced and Gregory Ratoff gesticulated and cursed; Hitchcock rarely left his canvas chair or raised his voice. Economy of movement became both condition and precept. "It is all the little nuances of expression that tell you what that character is feeling," Hitchcock said, "without reminding you that he is just an actor playing a part." A subtractive artist who exalted "things" and underplayed people, Hitchcock espoused "negative acting," an approach that he had developed in England and, to judge from the close-ups, had used to occasional advantage with Nova Pilbeam in *Young and Innocent*. "In other words," the director explained to Selznick, "you do not put a dramatic expression into a face, but you already have the face in a contrasting condition, say smiling, then to get a dramatic reaction you allow that smile to drain away from the face."

Preston Sturges and William Wyler rehearsed a scene extensively to find an interpretation they liked, while George Cukor, who stressed only the mechanical elements, forced his actors to save their emotions for the camera. Hitchcock belonged more to the Cukor camp. With experienced actors, Hitchcock provided little more than blocking; with younger performers whom he liked, however, he stipulated virtually everything, showing rather than telling them what to do. An expert forger, Hitchcock was also a fair mimic. With his actors rehearsed, Hitchcock said "Twirl 'em" and sat back to await the result. Several performers believed that he dozed while the camera turned. But on *Young and Innocent*, just as Derrick de Marney approached him after a shot, Hitchcock opened his eyes: "Too slow," he told the actor. "I had that scene marked for thirty seconds and it took you fifty seconds

flat. We'll have to retake." Actors carried around loads of insecurity; Hitchcock, exuding enormous confidence, gave them a place to stow it. Like several young actresses before her, Joan Fontaine grew to love the director for his beneficent control over both a performance and a production.

Hitchcock provided both gestures and expression for Fontaine; as script supervisor Lydia Schiller observed, "She was practically a puppet." Yet early on, an impatient Olivier told Hitchcock, "This girl's terrible, old man, she'll have to be changed." Getting the desired effect from an inexperienced actress—especially at Selznick International—certainly consumed time. One Thursday afternoon in September, for example, the producer viewed a scene of the de Winters at dinner, with "I" typically ill at ease; for two hours Selznick halted work and scripted some new dialogue. Hitchcock shot Selznick's revision in ninety minutes, then devised his own, one in which strong images obviated the need for any dialogue whatsoever. The latter version, which appears in the completed film, opens with a close-up of a lace-bordered napkin, "R de W" embroidered handsomely upon it. As the second Mrs. de Winter lifts the napkin to place it in her lap, the camera pulls back until it is positioned well behind and above de Winter, seated opposite his wife. In the act of withdrawal, a movement duplicated elsewhere in the film, the camera contributes to the young bride's feelings of unworthiness and abandonment. Joan Fontaine, more self-conscious in this scene than in most others, could not sustain a performance through the shot; apparently in conversation with her screen husband, she moves her head lightly to and fro in a stilted parody of awkwardness. Because of the lost time and technical problems in getting the shot, multiple takes were not economically feasible; likewise, Hitchcock would have diffused the emphasis of the sustained, rearward movement had he cut away to de Winter, the dog Jasper, or even the young bride herself in a better acted close-up. At the end of this day, according to the production log, Fontaine felt "pretty tired."

During her first ten days on the picture, the young actress reported to the studio at 7:00 A.M. and often left after 8:00 P.M. The script revisions and intensive rehearsals—exacerbated by the coolness of her peers—so tired her that Selznick, at her request, willingly reduced her hours. "Even if you don't want to think about it from a standpoint of consideration of the player," Selznick told his production manager Ray

Klune, "in view of the bad times that we are faced with due to the War you must nevertheless consider it from a commercial standpoint, facing the possibility of a delay as a result of overwork." Thrown into disquiet by a first marriage and a first major role, a well-trained actress would have used her reserves to counter such obstacles as long hours and inhospitable colleagues; young and inexperienced, Joan Fontaine immediately drew on her capital and, at its rapid depletion, became vulnerable to fatigue and even self-destruction.

In addition to Selznick's tinkering and Fontaine's problems, Hitchcock's occasional tardiness as well as his method of discretely supervising actors and crew limited progress on *Rebecca*. By Saturday, September 16, his eighth day on the set, the director had completed just over eighteen minutes of usable film and twenty-one script pages, throwing the production three days behind schedule. Compared to his peers, Selznick concluded, Hitchcock was "the slowest director we have had." Selznick probably based his assertion in part on the record of *Intermezzo*, a film whose few physical challenges and relatively inexperienced leading actress made it superficially comparable to *Rebecca*. On short notice, Russian émigré director Gregory Ratoff had replaced William Wyler on *Intermezzo* and in his first ten days of shooting completed thirty-six minutes of usable film (compared to Hitchcock's twenty-two minutes) and thirty-three filmed script pages (compared to Hitchcock's twenty-six). On average, he also completed his first shot of the day thirty minutes earlier than Hitchcock. Since "cutting-in-the-camera" required shorter takes, Selznick reasoned, the British director should have gained time once he began filming each shot, but even averaging eighteen daily setups to Hitchcock's eleven, Ratoff moved faster than his colleague with no diminution of quality. Ratoff had been directing in Hollywood since 1935, Hitchcock for two weeks; nonetheless, while Hitchcock appeared to fiddle on *Rebecca*, Selznick began to burn.

The second complete week of principal photography began on Monday, September 18. Throughout the week and thereafter, Selznick visited the set, rarely staying long and just as rarely refraining from comment. The week before, he had urged Hitchcock to "speed the pace a little more, even, than you think is right . . . I would much rather err on the side of too fast a tempo than on the slow side"; he even suggested that Hitchcock ask editor Hal Kern to prod him along. Hitchcock's



Hitchcock rehearses Joan Fontaine, who sits at the long dining table at Manderley.

deliberateness and Fontaine's weakness in the exposed footage, seriously aggravated by worries about *Gone With the Wind*, made Selznick doubt *Rebecca*'s future. Cukor had been wrong for *Wind* (and fired); Hitchcock and Fontaine, whom the industry perceived as risks if not outright liabilities, might both be wrong for the du Maurier adaptation. Some weeks into production, Selznick asked his wife to view a rough assembly of the footage and decide whether to scrap the picture; looking at it, Selznick told her, he could not determine whether it was good or bad. Irene said that the problem lay not with the film but with the anxieties of the producer. As even Selznick admitted, the pressures of moviemaking had begun to weaken his constitution.

In early autumn 1939, Selznick decided to temporarily close the studio as soon as possible and take the vacation long promised to Irene. Meanwhile, however, fixed costs as well as interest expense on *Gone With the Wind* left Selznick International financially strapped. Other studios generated income by selling actors and directors; MGM had in fact exchanged Clark Gable's services for fifty percent of the profits from *Gone With the Wind*. Although no producer had been willing to compete for Hitchcock in 1938, the release of *The Lady Vanishes* (which had won the New York Film Critics Award) as well as the imprimatur of Selznick and *Rebecca* had given the director a certain cachet. With luck, Selznick's hefty English import might equal his weight in gold. During the second week of principal photography on *Rebecca*, Selznick the matchmaker sent Hitchcock to lunch with Walter Wanger, an independent producer of taste and political commitment; five days later, Wanger formally agreed to borrow the director for \$5,000 a week upon the completion of *Rebecca*. Faced with possible suspension during Selznick International's retrenchment period, Hitchcock may have readily overlooked his employer's \$2,250-a-week profit.

Hitchcock and Selznick, together six days a week, spent Sundays apart. Selznick would have liked to see Hitchcock socially, but Irene lacked her husband's instant affection for the Englishman, and generally excluded him from their weekends of tennis and movie screenings. Although a respected immigrant director like Hitchcock would have fit in, many of his colleagues would not. The industry's class system, Lydia Schiller recalled, "was not all that thick, but it was there." Producers sometimes mixed with writers, but never with lesser writers; stars occa-

sionally mixed with featured players, but rarely with cameramen, language coaches, or script girls. Among the imponderables: income, an artist's studio affiliation, and even the box office returns of his latest picture. On entertaining, as on virtually everything, Selznick took "the larger view." Guest lists numbered thirty or so; after signing the leather-bound visitors' book (to document business parties for Internal Revenue), everyone had to greet David and, according to Joan Fontaine, kowtow to "the beautiful Irene." No affair worth throwing broke up before midnight. Hitchcock preferred intimate gatherings; "more than eight," he said, "is an insult to my friends." Select members of Hollywood's British colony as well as actors and his new secretary, Carol Stevens, enjoyed Hitchcock's wine and Alma's cuisine. When Hitchcock fell asleep after dinner, the evening ended.

Not long after Irene reassured her husband about *Rebecca*, Fontaine's performance ripened, Hitchcock's speed improved, and Selznick's prodding increased; with the producer's wind at his back, Hitchcock moved with an efficiency that had perhaps eluded him in England. The third week of principal photography, the director filmed twelve pages; the fourth, sixteen and a half; and the fifth, twenty-one. The number of usable film minutes also increased, from twelve minutes the third week to twenty the fourth. Although engrossed in the final cutting and imminent premiere of *Gone With the Wind*, Selznick kept a vigilant eye on *Rebecca*, primarily to insure that Hitchcock maintained speed without sacrificing quality. Despite the producer's intentions, though, Hitchcock resented all supervision. One morning during the third week of principal photography, Hitchcock began rehearsing the opening of the crucial scene in which Mrs. Danvers handles Rebecca's "things" as though they were religious relics. Having belittled and frightened the young bride, the housekeeper shows the second Mrs. de Winter her predecessor's room, then coyly invites her to remain and "listen to the sea." Selznick had prompted Hitchcock to include this dark moment from the novel in the screenplay. Moreover, he conveyed to Hitchcock some ideas on staging "I"'s entrance and expected the Englishman to follow them. As he blocked the scene contrary to Selznick's design, Hitchcock received a memorandum in which Selznick criticized him for not following directions.

Hitchcock felt ambushed. "You're supposed to be working with me, for me," he told Lydia Schiller, who had reported his deviation to her

employer. "Do you think Mr. Selznick cares anything about you? The studio is going to close down soon and you'll be out of work. Had you helped me, we could have been loaned out together." The response suggests not only his fear of angering Selznick but his naiveté: every American studio maintained what Preston Sturges called a "News Gathering Service." Recalling the 1940s in Hollywood, director John Huston said that when filming began, "your work was monitored.

... If they thought you were shooting an inordinate number of takes, there would be an inquiry. If a picture fell behind schedule, they would want to know exactly why. If anything untoward happened on the set, it was reported to the Front Office. You never knew who reported it, but no infraction was overlooked; the spy system was thorough." The daily log for the production (standard at all studios) also gave the front office such information as the time work began and ended; the number of setups, retakes, and completed script pages; the amount of picture negative exposed and the number of "film minutes" completed; and explanatory comments sufficient to provide a context for the daily figures.

By viewing the rushes (the day's exposed footage), scanning the log, and maintaining contact with his lieutenants on the set, Selznick closely monitored Hitchcock's progress on *Rebecca*. Unlike that of his peers, though, Selznick's interference often benefited a film. Against Hitchcock's wishes, for instance, Selznick had trimmed some dialogue in which Mrs. Danvers speaks of maintaining flowers in Rebecca's room; the line in question was, as Selznick argued, "silly" and the idea could more economically be conveyed by simply placing fresh flowers in the scene's opening shot. Selznick also decided that a picture of de Winter should sit upon Rebecca's dressing table, silently taunting "I"; he discussed the idea with Hitchcock and asked art director Lyle Wheeler to place "a handsomely framed photo of Maxim on dressing table, where 'I' will see and react. ... It should be the only photograph in the room."

The middle and close of this key sequence with Danvers and the heroine had been subjected to numerous script changes and remained in flux the day before its filming. Not content to rely solely on the reports of underlings, Selznick came to the set in time for Hitchcock's rehearsal; the director reluctantly proceeded. He first led Anderson and Fontaine through the balance of the scene, demonstrating how Anderson should play it. He wanted Danvers to recall her moments alone



"Feel this," Mrs. Danvers tells the new mistress of Manderley as they stand in Rebecca's bedroom. "It was a Christmas present from Mr. de Winter. He was always giving her expensive gifts, the whole year round."

When the second Mrs. de Winter appears at the costume ball in a gown worn by her predecessor, her husband orders her to change. Distressed, she runs upstairs and follows Mrs. Danvers into Rebecca's bedroom. The housekeeper calls her to the window, then whispers, "Look down there. It's easy, isn't it? Why don't you? ... Go on ... Go on ... Don't be afraid."



with Rebecca. Assuming her role, Hitchcock showed Anderson how her eyes should reveal memories of dressing and undressing her mistress. "I knew I was in the presence of a master," Anderson concluded. "I had utter trust and faith in him." Though no one mentioned the underlying lesbianism of the Rebecca-Danvers relationship, Hitchcock sensed it. Esme Percy (*Murder!*) and Peter Lorre (*The Man Who Knew Too Much*) had appeared as fey, perhaps homosexual characters in earlier Hitchcock pictures; according to numerous observers, sexual aberrance intrigued the director. In *Rebecca*, the unnatural attachment of servant to mistress awaited only his "touch."

But the relationship between Mrs. Danvers and Rebecca, who called her companion "Danny," skirted the industry's censorship dictum against "sex perversion or any inference to it." Joseph I. Breen administered the Motion Picture Association Production Code's bluenosed guidelines with zest, fairness, and, when pressed, flexibility. After reading a synopsis of *Rebecca* long before production started, the Breen office hailed the novel as "a magnificent subject"; with a few minor changes, Breen said, its "moral values" would not jeopardize the sensibilities of American moviegoers. He had accepted with equanimity Favell and Rebecca's liaison as a necessary story point, and Selznick had reluctantly agreed to change the murder of Rebecca to an accidental death. But "Mrs. Danvers' description of Rebecca's physical attributes, her handling of the various garments, particularly the night gown," reddened his Irish Catholic cheeks. In the final cut, Breen told Selznick, "there must be no suggestion whatever of a perverted relationship between Mrs. Danvers and Rebecca. If any possible hint of this creeps into this scene, we will of course not be able to approve the picture."

Hitchcock moved by indirection. In England, he sat with the censor as he reviewed films. One British Board member wore glasses with a single opaque lens, and whenever an "offending piece of film approached, I said, 'Mr. Wilkinson—.' He turned his head toward me, and the objectionable scene went by on the screen without his seeing it." Breen had twenty-twenty and never looked away. Like Selznick, he also moved by confrontation. Breen had nibbled away at *Gone With the Wind*; he gave Melanie an easier labor, muted the cries of the wounded in the Plaza, and turned the Belle Watling brothel into a saloon. But Selznick protested the ruling against Rhett Butler's tag, "Frankly, my dear, I don't give a damn." Going over Breen's head in fall 1939,

Rebecca

Selznick decided to appeal to the Motion Picture Association Board. Meanwhile, reluctant to alienate Breen altogether, he offered more concessions than usual on *Rebecca*. An abortionist became a reputable physician, de Winter turned penitent, and Danvers loved "naturally." Asked by a reporter whether it would be necessary to kill him (meaning de Winter) at the end of *Rebecca*, Hitchcock replied: "You mean Breen? I don't think so."

As his producer watched, perhaps to assure conformity with the Production Code, Hitchcock blocked the body of the Anderson-Fontaine scene, then filmed it in an average of three takes per shot. Rather than minimize Selznick's additions, Hitchcock actually enhanced them. At the dressing table, he had "I" begin to touch one of Rebecca's hairbrushes, then recoil as though reprimanded by her husband's framed portrait. Hitchcock used the flowers even more tellingly. Danvers reverently holds out Rebecca's black nightgown and asks "I" whether she has ever seen anything "so delicate"; the young woman stands frame left, her face mottled by the spindly shadows of the cut flowers as though entrapped by all that Rebecca meant to those at Manderley. Cinematographer George Barnes lit the scene to evoke a fine mixture of wonder and Gothic horror; Hitchcock's staging, alternately widening and narrowing the spaces between the characters in the large, airy room, mirrored the attraction-repulsion theme that tortures the young heroine not only in the sequence but throughout the film. The concluding moments in the dressing room, however, were the most important. "I" attempts to leave, but the housekeeper, her pasty face ringed in a cool halo of light, stops her: "Don't you believe that the dead can see the living?" she asks. Hitchcock suddenly tightens the two-shot as the housekeeper speculates that Rebecca indeed watches her husband and his new wife. Although "I" shrinks from the malicious Danvers, her paranoia taunt registers. In this shot, with its deliberately unflattering light (its source comes from below) and expressionistic shadows, the two actresses give controlled performances that just avoid the excesses of melodrama. But the climactic two-shot came hard. On it alone, Hitchcock worked for over an hour, photographing fifteen takes and printing only the fifth and tenth.

The production wore on. By the sixth week of principal photography, under its thirty-six-day shooting schedule, *Rebecca* was to have been

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finished, yet all signs indicated that it would continue for at least another two or three weeks. The strain began to influence the actors, the director, and the producer. Hitchcock himself had cast Florence Bates as Mrs. Van Hopper. A lawyer by training, Bates had acted on camera only once before. "Well, Miss Bates," Hitchcock said over the public address system on her first day, the ears of a hundred cast and crew listening, "when did you start playing with yourself?" She may never have recovered from this blue practical joke. As much as Joan Fontaine, she slowed the pace on the set. A medium close-up of her sighting de Winter—"Why! It's Max de Winter"—required ten takes. In a more demanding shot, Hitchcock moved in from a three-shot of de Winter, Mrs. Van Hopper, and "I" to a close-up of the older woman just as de Winter announces his forthcoming marriage. Hitchcock obviously coached Florence Bates in "negative acting": she brightly asks de Winter the name of his fiancée, but when he responds, her smile "drains away from the face." The shot required twelve takes. Viewing the rushes in which she appeared, Selznick remarked, "I think there is no line which she could not improve upon."

The more experienced performers were capable of their own brand of "negative acting." With his mind on a love affair, George Sanders (the blackmailing Favell) showed up in complete "ignorance of his role." His first day on the *Rebecca* set, he received a good-luck telegram from the co-star of his just completed picture at Universal. "It would be absolutely wizard," she concluded her wire, "if you could come over here some time between four and six for a slight celebration." She signed her name simply "Love." Obviously Sanders's mind was in blue heaven, not Manderley; two days later, he still had not memorized his lines. On the other hand, C. Aubrey Smith, the seventy-six-year-old British actor who played the county constable, thought himself fully prepared; according to the production log, however, he had "learned wrong lines, had to memorize and rehearse correct ones."

Olivier also caused concern. As the film's de Winter, he painted the character in dark colors taken from a limited palette. When, near the end of shooting, Selznick asked Hitchcock to "try to get Olivier tender and sweet and perhaps with something approaching a smile" in the last scene, neither the producer nor the director could have been optimistic. Selznick worried about the intelligibility of Olivier's accent for an American audience, especially if the actor persisted in his habit of



In Monte Carlo, de Winter greets Mrs. Van Hopper (Florence Bates) and her timid paid companion.

Colonel Jolyan (C. Aubrey Smith, second from right) reads a note from Rebecca that seems to challenge the interpretation of her death as suicide. De Winter, Frank Crawley (Reginald Denny), the second Mrs. de Winter, and Jack Favell (George Sanders) look on.



rating through his dialogue or "throwing away lines too much." He feared even more, however, that Olivier's smoldering silent reactions would retard the film's pace: "For God's sake, speed up Larry not merely in [his] close-ups, but in the rest of the picture on his reactions, which are apparently the way he plays on the stage where it could be satisfactory." Olivier, who began his screen career in 1931, alleges that his film apprenticeship lasted at least ten years, during which time his acting was "appallingly rough and ready, from sheer prejudice and ignorance." In spirit a man of the theater, he may have regarded *Rebecca* as an opportunity to experiment or, "happy with Hitchcock," merely a pleasant interlude demanding little exertion.

Olivier hardly worried Hitchcock. Joan Fontaine did. Unlike Archie Mayo, a director known for his long psychological discussions with actors, Hitchcock rarely chatted about motivation. (When actors asked about motivation, Hitchcock responded, "Your salary.") The English director offered physical rather than intellectual stimuli to his performers. His unorthodox methods could challenge the most adept actors. When filming alternating shots of two people in conversation, Hitchcock usually placed a stand-in opposite to feed the on-camera performer his or her lines. Accordingly, he shot Fontaine's close-ups with the script girl reading the absent Olivier's dialogue. An astonished Selznick ordered the practice stopped. On another occasion, the director resorted to violence.

During the fifth take of a tearful scene from *Rebecca* [Hitchcock later recalled], Joan Fontaine told me she couldn't cry any more, that she was out of tears. I asked what it would take to make her resume crying. She said, "Well, maybe if you slapped me." I did, and she instantly started bawling.

"She was not a good enough actress to play in *Rebecca*," Marcella Rabwin believed, "she really was not." Many of her fellow performers agreed. Shunned by the English community on the set, Fontaine felt isolated. "My grandmother was Lady de Havilland, the first lady of Guernsey," Fontaine told another cast member, hoping for acceptance of her English roots. "That's like being the first lady of Catalina," Hitchcock quipped. Despite the retort, the cockney director understood the alienation and diffidence that Fontaine (and the second Mrs. de Winter) felt. A self-confessed loner, the young Hitchcock had never

Rebecca

dated, when he married Alma, he was a sexual naif. He rarely expressed his feelings, though, and directed his actors to contain theirs. A month into production, Selznick feared that a pair of monochromatic lead characters, the sullen Olivier and the reticent Fontaine, would deaden the picture: "I'd like to urge that you be a little more Yiddish Art Theater," an irascible Selznick wrote to Hitchcock, "a little less English Repertory Theater." Hitchcock ignored the note, Fontaine continued to underplay.

"I have been thinking about how difficult I must be to live with these days," Selznick wrote to Ray Klune; "the only excuse I can offer is that I am simply worn out, and I suppose my nerves are pretty well shot." Klune had earned the apology. As principal photography on *Rebecca* continued, the production manager's days stretched to fourteen hours, his weeks to seven days. Selznick matched him almost moment for moment. Anyone who worked (or lived) with Selznick fell victim to the unconventional, crisis-prone rhythm of his days. Well into the evening hours, with a secretary or production staff member in tow, he typically made last-minute script changes or other alterations. When they upset the next day's plans, Klune later recalled, Selznick would telephone at two in the morning and give the production manager six hours to overhaul the schedule, usually to the surprise of crew, actors, and director. During the days that followed such nights, Selznick would call meetings in his office, then fall asleep; his associates would quietly leave. Later, Selznick would awaken with a start, reconvene his conferees, and resume the meeting, fully attentive to the artistic and material elements of his productions. According to Hitchcock, working under a producer who rode such relentless herd over his staff inhibited rather than facilitated picturemaking.

But while Selznick's directives certainly ruffled Hitchcock, they benefited *Rebecca* and helped form the Englishman's reputation for efficiency. "Many people do their best when they work for me," Selznick believed. "I bully them, harangue them, coach them into doing better." Yet on numerous occasions, he neither bullied, harangued, nor coached. "I think today's rushes on the Confession Scene are wonderful," Selznick wrote Hitchcock midway through the period of principal photography, "and I am really hopped up about this sequence." Few producers more enthusiastically stroked their directors.

Few directors cared less. Hitchcock strove to create a family on his

pictures, with himself as paterfamilias. The rites of passage included flowers and dinner invitations as well as cruel practical jokes and gossip. When Olivier privately criticized Fontaine, Hitchcock tattled to the actress; the "divide and conquer" strategy moved her into the Hitchcock circle. Selznick staffers often found themselves servants of two masters. Not long after the producer assigned Britisher Eric Stacey to *Rebecca* as a production supervisor, Hitchcock learned that Stacey reported to Selznick every evening. Hitchcock promptly shut him off: he ignored orders that Stacey brought from the front office and refused to answer his telephone calls after hours. Only when Selznick intervened did Hitchcock relent. The Lydia Schiller and Eric Stacey affair had demonstrated to cast and crew alike that, as Fontaine observed, Hitchcock "wanted total loyalty, but only to him." Each Wednesday, however, Selznick International employees earned a vivid reminder that David Selznick—not Alfred Hitchcock—ran the studio. And until Hitchcock could sign the paychecks of his own company, he would bristle under the authority of his producer.

Like a machine taxed beyond its capacity, the *Rebecca* company threatened to burn out. Into the ninth week of principal photography, the film over three weeks behind schedule, Joan Fontaine contracted influenza. Between her hospitalization and a wildcat strike by IATSE, the stagehands' union, production ceased until Monday of the tenth week. During the last complete week of work, the company filmed primarily exterior shots, averaging two script pages and under two "film minutes" daily. The production ended as it had begun: slowly. The final scene photographed, a retake, was set in Rebecca's bedroom, engulfed in flames, the mad Danvers tearing at the curtains. The producer of "the larger view" and the director of "things" naturally argued about the film's close. At the end, with de Winter's stately mansion in flames, Selznick wanted Hitchcock to conclude on an image of smoke forming a gigantic *R* against the heavens; instead, Hitchcock wished to move from a long shot of the house into Rebecca's room, to her bed, to the *R* embroidered on her pillowcase. Although the director prevailed, Selznick found the rushes "a trifle slow in getting up to [Rebecca's] nightgown case"; he also wanted the "photographic effect" of "the flames rising as they devour the 'R,' to give us a natural curtain of flames as a background for our end title." To no one's surprise, the producer appeared on the set as Hitchcock began shooting retakes of

The confession scene: "I've loved you, my darling—I shall always love you—but I've known all along that Rebecca would win in the end."



Rather than see the de Winters happy there, Mrs. Danvers destroys Manderley.



this last sequence. Between some last-minute exterior shots and the problems of getting satisfactory footage in the bedroom, filming did not end until 4:30 A.M. On Monday, November 20, 1939, *Rebecca* had been in production 63 days (to *Intermezzo*'s 35), had required 617 setups (to *Intermezzo*'s 342), and had exposed 216,000 feet of film (to *Intermezzo*'s 133,000). Numerous retakes and much dubbing still lay ahead, but the filming had ostensibly concluded.

In November 1939, *Rebecca* existed only in rough cut. Throughout principal photography, Hitchcock had screened the dailies to review the lighting, performance, texture, and pacing of the evolving film. Beyond "cutting-in-the-camera," however, he did not edit the film; that task belonged to Selznick, who believed "a picture could be ruined or made great in the editing." An inveterate tinkerer, Selznick enjoyed supervising final shot selection. The logistics of shooting a film involved hundreds of technicians, craftsmen, and artists; neither Selznick nor even Hitchcock, as an occasional dispute with cinematographers suggested, could control them absolutely. Editing, a solitary activity, involved only two or three persons and, furthermore, licensed an indecision that occasionally must have affected all moguls like Selznick. A journalist once conferred on David his father's "knack of making quick decisions"; yet production assistant Lydia Schiller recalled that "as long as a film was in his hands, he was never satisfied." Running an entire film endlessly through his fingers, Selznick could dictate not only the juxtaposition of shots, the pace and rhythm, but also the placement, volume, and cuing of the music. The next day, he could change it all. Whereas Hitchcock planned the editing in pre-production, directing his editor to cut by the numbers, Selznick experimented a great deal during post-production, which concluded only when chief editor Hal Kern said, "This is it; you cannot have that film anymore. Out it goes."

Selznick loved the freedom that miles and miles of footage offered him. By Thanksgiving 1939, nearly a quarter of a million feet of exposed film sat in the small clashboard editing room; much of it Selznick had requested in order to make *Rebecca* his *Rebecca*. When "I" and Mrs. Danvers met, for instance, Hitchcock filmed the sequence exclusively in close-ups; Selznick, on viewing the rushes, asked in addition for "a close two-shot of 'I' and Mrs. Danvers, or some other angle that will keep us from playing it in too many short cuts." *Rebecca*, like the

Selznick/Hal Kern *Gone With the Wind*, would have an even, almost stately pace; a concentration on emotions evoked from the performances; and a noticeable avoidance of "cuttiness." The opposite of a montage style, but one that Hitchcock would adopt by the end of the decade, Selznick's approach observed the rules of classic Hollywood cinema. The producer used a long shot-medium shot-close-up sequencing to highlight his investment in polished stories, major stars, and majestic exteriors and interiors. His long shots fused character and setting, the chief elements in his mise-en-scène; from *Gone With the Wind* to his 1957 *Farewell to Arms*, he seemed to weight the narrative and the pictorial (not necessarily synonymous with the cinematic) equally. His medium shots accommodated or privileged two or more actors engaged in dialogue; he moved further in—for two-person shots or, more rarely, one-person close-ups—to capture especially felicitous dialogue or to clarify a potentially obscured plot point. Following Hollywood's conventional shot-reverse shot protocol, he tended to cut not *against* the dialogue (as Hitchcock often did) but *on* it, satisfying the expectations of viewers accustomed to an on-screen harmony of speech and speaker. Words mattered to Selznick, who elevated the literary or verbal over the visual.

During the week before Christmas, 1939, Selznick worked full-time on cutting *Rebecca* and laying in Franz Waxman's hastily written score. Then, on Tuesday, December 26, he previewed a still very rough cut of the picture at the Huntington Park Theater. Although generally favorable, the response mandated further trimming as well as some additional rewriting and reshooting. With Hitchcock and Joan Harrison already at work on Walter Wanger's *Foreign Correspondent*, Selznick assumed post-production responsibility. He not only edited the retakes but also rerecorded much of the dialogue to correct technical problems and improve line readings. The velocity of Olivier's dialogue, to which Selznick had objected, was generally irremediable, perhaps a sign of the actor trying to control his performance: if his speech were slowed down, the image would lose synchronization with the sound. But the work of George Sanders, Florence Bates, and especially Joan Fontaine was extensively rerecorded.

Joan Fontaine dubbed *Rebecca*'s famous prologue ("Last night I dreamt I went to Manderley again . . .") as well as dozens of isolated lines. Later, the Academy of Motion Pictures recognized the film's

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achievement in almost every major category (eleven nominations in all) except one, sound recording. "We had so much dubbing after the picture was completed," Ray Klune said, that the sound was considered "far from perfect from a technical standpoint." With Hal Kern, Selznick carefully edited Joan Fontaine's portrayal of Mrs. de Winter. He often grafted improved line readings onto weak visuals, strengthening them; he also revised scenes to highlight Fontaine's best moments. When he had no suitable take of the actress from which to choose, he neutralized her performance on especially marginal readings by using (where possible) master shots or close-ups of other actors, as was done at the conclusion of the Lacy-de Winter luncheon scene. *Rebecca*, Selznick later maintained, succeeded only "after I got through completely recutting it, making wild lines [rerecording dialogue], etc." While the picture was not made in the editing and dubbing rooms, the increasingly favorable response of preview audiences, especially to Joan Fontaine's performance, indicates that it was remarkably enhanced there.

Anticipation built rapidly. In late January, belatedly showing interest in the editing, Hitchcock made specific suggestions about cutting the revised inquest scene, and Selznick implemented them. As February approached, the director and producer enjoyed a ripening bonhomie. "The picture looks perfectly swell," Selznick told Hitchcock and Joan Harrison, as he had on a number of occasions throughout the filming, "and I think we are all going to be very happy with it." Fully a week before the February 13 Santa Barbara preview, the director had announced the date and place to "everybody in Hollywood." Although Selznick himself had difficulty keeping such trade secrets, he changed the time and counseled his English protégé in discretion. Hitchcock's loose lips would deliberately sink a few ships over the years, but in this instance, he seemed merely overeager to watch his first American film projected for an American audience. Together, *Rebecca* and Hitchcock promised the studio great benefits; in fact, profitably loaned out to Walter Wanger, the director was already paying the studio a handsome dividend. In mid-February, Selznick decided to show his appreciation. "I know that Hitchcock would give his eyeteeth to spend a week with his writers in Palm Beach but can't afford it," Selznick wrote to Daniel O'Shea. "What would you think of our giving him this [working vacation] as a bonus?"

Two days after *Rebecca* played Santa Barbara, Selznick wrote to United Artists' Murray Silverstone, the distributor of Selznick International films: "It is with great pleasure that I am able to advise you we have seldom if ever had a more splendid audience reaction, and that judging by the enthusiasm of this preview audience we have made, with prove to be the best and most successful picture we have made, with exception of 'Gone With the Wind.' " Selznick's telegram reads more as pep talk than report, for upon the sale of *Rebecca* rode not only such intangibles as Academy votes at Oscar time but company profits and an American future for Hitchcock.

Promoting the picture, Selznick authorized a movie edition of the novel as well as a "Rebecca Luxury Wardrobe," an idea that Hitchcock had inadvertently mocked a year before. The producer also revved up the studio publicity machine. "Extremely nervous, he paces his office as he talks," *Life* wrote of "Hollywood's Selznick" in December 1939, "but he talks well." The Atlanta premiere of *Gone With the Wind* (which occasioned the magazine's piece) and the subsequent openings around the country put both the Civil War epic and Selznick himself in the news for months. The lineage naturally helped *Rebecca*. Hitchcock preceded Selznick in *Life* by several weeks; the November 1939 article that profiled the director also included photographs of him walking with his family, working on a script, and shooting *Rebecca*, whose budget he intimated was less than half that of most pictures. Several months later, a radio broadcast reinforced *Life*'s portrayal of Hitchcock as the compleat filmmaker. On *Your Hollywood Parade*, the host opened with an anecdote. Once, a man asked at a studio for the producer. He was sent to see Hitchcock. He asked for the screenwriter, again Hitchcock. For the art director, Hitchcock. For the director, Hitchcock. The radio host then introduced the cinematic superman "known to his friends as 'Hitch.' " The mild-mannered Englishman did not state that he worked for a great Hollywood studio, a deliberate oversight that would rapidly become a source of friction between producer and director.

The synopsis of du Maurier's *Rebecca* in newspapers, the Mercury Theatre radio adaptation, the merchandise tie-ins, and the selling of Hitchcock, Selznick, and the picture itself culminated in the selection of Manhattan's cavernous Radio City Music Hall as the site of the New

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York premiere. *Rebecca* opened on Thursday, March 28, 1940. With the surprising exception of the trade press, which predicted that the pace and "English tone" might reduce the appeal to general audiences, critics hailed the film. *Theatre Arts* called *Rebecca* "a piece of suspenseful Hitchcock magic," and *Time* devoted two of six paragraphs to an analysis of the director's beautifully orchestrated "confession scene." Only Frank Nugent, writing in *The New York Times*, seemed to notice that while the American Hitchcock had become "less individualized," he had also developed his "widely-publicized 'touch'" into "a firm, enveloping grasp." The producer's guiding hand had contributed to that "firm, enveloping grasp."

Selznick International's *Rebecca* merited the praise of critics and moviegoers. As Nugent observed, however, the collaboration between Selznick and Hitchcock marked a change in the director's style. Hitchcock's British films lurched from one big moment to the next, the characters riding the roller coaster of plot; Selznick helped bring mood, seamless continuity, and psychological nuance to the director's work. The camera, which glides along the halls of Manderley, diminishes the second Mrs. de Winter in full shots, relentlessly envelops her in close-ups; meanwhile, Danvers appears or disappears ghostlike, eluding the enclosure of the frame. Under Hitchcock's direction, cinematographer George Barnes avoided the excesses of German *chiaroscuro* yet still evoked an artificial and oppressively stable world, utterly interior. Likewise, Selznick's editing smoothed out the narrative but retained—to great effect—Hitchcock's cutaways to the portraits along the stairway and the billowing window curtains, clattering teacups, latched doors. Throughout the picture, enhanced by Hitchcock's direction and Selznick's editing, Olivier, Anderson, and especially Fontaine skirted the edge of Gothic melodrama without ever losing their characters' humanity. The quintessence of the Hollywood studio system, *Rebecca* deserved to advance the careers of both its creators.

Along with the reviews and the plugs, good word-of-mouth sent urban moviegoers on both coasts scurrying to the theaters. The picture nearly sold out its opening days in New York, Montreal, and Boston. "Of course, you can always break a record at the Music Hall," Hitchcock later said with a snoot. "We had the best wet Tuesday in the history of the theater." Yet the director closely followed all box office reports. For Selznick, they proved disappointing. Although a studio



The Selznick touch: vast sets, rich appointments, and a shot wide enough to encompass them all.

like RKO would have considered the \$700,000 profit on *Rebecca* grounds for celebration (only two of more than one hundred RKO releases between 1939 and 1941 earned over \$700,000), Selznick wanted a blockbuster. Despite its popular and artistic success, *Rebecca* showed the producer a principal weakness of the independent: distribution.

Selznick nonetheless refused to abandon *Rebecca*. Although he gave it only "a fair chance" at the Oscar, he mounted another radio adaptation (with Ida Lupino and the elusive Ronald Colman as the winners, Judith Anderson as Mrs. Danvers) and reissued the picture. On Oscar night, the beneficiary of Selznick's talent for filmmaking and promotion, *Rebecca* captured the awards for Best Picture and Best Achievement in Black-and-White Cinematography. John Ford took home the statuette for Best Achievement in Directing (*The Grapes of Wrath*), an honor never accorded Hitchcock. Among the various factors influencing the academy's choice of director, one deserves particular notice. Members cast their 1940 Oscar ballots several months after the premiere of *Foreign Correspondent*, the Hitchcock successor to *Rebecca*. Although favorably reviewed and commercially successful, Hitchcock's second American picture marked a return to his British style, rough and melodramatic but hardly picture-of-the-year caliber. *Rebecca* may have suggested a burgeoning talent, *Foreign Correspondent* its contraction. Perhaps more than he imagined or wished, "Alfred the Great" needed the support of his producer. By having assigned *Rebecca* to Hitchcock, stretched its budget to nearly a million dollars, and forced the director to explore the psychological intensity of the narrative, Selznick had given Hitchcock an auspicious American debut. Few Hollywood moguls could have managed Hitchcock's transition to American filmmaking with as much distinction or visibility.

Years later, Hitchcock attempted to distance himself from the production. "Well, it's not a Hitchcock picture," the director said, explaining his dissatisfaction with *Rebecca*. "It's a novelette really." His possessiveness applied to people and pictures: unless he could control them, he dismissed them. Rather than cement the bond between producer and director, the Selznick connection with *Rebecca* made Hitchcock more eager than ever to declare his independence.

4

BETWEEN ENGAGEMENTS

The year 1940 marked a watershed in the careers of David Selznick and Alfred Hitchcock. For the first time in over a decade, a period of production activity lay behind Selznick rather than ahead of him. The dissolution of his company to secure a tax advantage should have brought something beyond financial rewards. Yet *Gone With the Wind* and *Rebecca* left Selznick emotionally and physically spent, almost too burned out to celebrate. Moreover, with two consecutive Oscars for Best Picture of the Year on his mantelpiece, he grimly contemplated the future. How could the producer of *Gone With the Wind* and *Rebecca*—not yet forty years old—top himself? Worse still, Benzadrine dressed him up with no place to go: the interaction of a chemical high and a spiritual low aggravated his disequilibrium. Feeling that he had crested, but driven to further achievement by dint of personality and a near addiction to stimulants, Selznick turned to making money rather than pictures. Hitchcock remained his commodity of choice.

Selznick and *Rebecca* had moved Hitchcock from the over-the-