

**Woman in the Window (Finn)**


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[Summary](#) | [Author Bio](#) | [Book Reviews](#) | [Discussion Questions](#) | [Full Version](#) | [Print](#)


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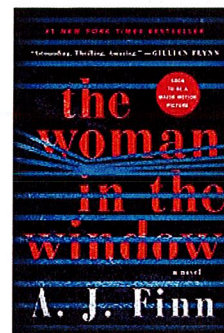
***The Woman in the Window***

A.J. Finn, 2018

HarperCollins

448 pp.

ISBN-13: 9780062678416


[Purchase Book Here](#)
**Summary**

[A] twisty, powerful Hitchcockian thriller about an agoraphobic woman who believes she witnessed a crime in a neighboring house.

It isn't paranoia if it's really happening ...

Anna Fox lives alone—a recluse in her New York City home, unable to venture outside. She spends her day drinking wine (maybe too much), watching old movies, recalling happier times ... and spying on her neighbors.

Then the Russells move into the house across the way: a father, a mother, their teenage son. The perfect family. But when Anna, gazing out her window one night, sees something she shouldn't, her world begins to crumble—and its shocking secrets are laid bare.

What is real? What is imagined? Who is in danger? Who is in control? In this diabolically gripping thriller, no one—and nothing—is what it seems.

Twisty and powerful, ingenious and moving, *The Woman in the Window* is a smart, sophisticated novel of psychological suspense that recalls the best of Hitchcock. (From the publisher.)

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**Author Bio**

A. J. Finn has written for numerous publications, including the *Los Angeles Times*, *Washington Post*, and *Times Literary Supplement* (UK). A native of New York, Finn lived in England for ten years before returning to New York City. (From the publisher.)

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**Book Reviews**

The rocket fuel propelling *The Woman in the Window*, the first stratosphere-ready mystery of 2018, is expertise. Its author is ... a longtime editor of mystery fiction. He is well versed in the tricks of the trade ... [and] clearly knows a lot about the more diabolical elements in Hitchcock movies...At heart, this is a locked-room mystery in the great Christie tradition.... Once the book gets going, it excels at planting misconceptions everywhere. You cannot trust anything you read.... A book that's as devious as this novel will delight anyone who's been disappointed too often.

**Janet Maslin - New York Times**

As the plot seizes us, the prose caresses us.... [Finn] has not only captured, sympathetically, the interior life of a depressed person, but also written a riveting thriller that will keep you guessing to the very last sentence.

**Washington Post**

The secrets of Anna's past and the uncertain present are revealed slowly in genuinely surprising twists. And, while the language is at times too clever for its own good, readers will eagerly turn the pages to see how it all turns out.

**Publishers Weekly**

Finn's white-knuckler defines the term hot debut. Its heroine...sees—or thinks she sees—something shocking, and what follows has wracked nerves enough to merit *Gone Girl*/*Girl on the Train* comparisons.

**Library Journal**

(*Starred review.*) [A] neo-noir masterpiece. Grab a bottle of Merlot, and settle in to accompany Anna Fox on her nightmare journey.... An astounding debut from a truly talented writer, perfect for fans in search of more like *Gone Girl* and *The Girl on the Train*.

**Booklist**

Crackling with tension, and the sound of pages turning, as twist after twist sweeps away each hypothesis you come up with about what happened in Anna's past and what fresh hell is unfolding now.

**Kirkus Reviews**

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**Discussion Questions**

*We'll add publisher questions if and when they're available; in the meantime, please use our GENERIC MYSTERY QUESTIONS to start a discussion for The Woman in the Window ... then take off on your own:*



# Book Club Questions for The Woman in the Window by A.J. Finn

written by [Heather Caliendo](#) July 14, 2018

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*The Woman in the Window* by A.J. Finn is a twisty read with a familiar premise: an unreliable narrator with a drinking problem. The following book club questions will have **spoilers** so if you haven't read the novel yet, check out my [preview](#) first. This was a fast-paced read for me. Compared to other similar stories (*The Girl on the Train*, *Gone Girl*), I like this protagonist, Anna Fox, the best. She felt a little more real than the other ones, especially with her bits of humor. I also felt for her as she's experienced the unimaginable.

**Spoilers:** Still, I personally saw the twists coming. I could tell right away that her husband and daughter were actually dead. I had my suspicions that the neighbor Ethan was somehow involved with his mom's murder. But I still thought it was a compelling read and it kept my interest to the end. I think this story might even work better in the film version.

## Let's get into the book club questions

- What was your initial impression of Anna? Did it change as the book went on?
- Why do you think Anna was so obsessed with observing her neighbors? How did it make her feel more connected to the outside world?
- Do you know anyone who has experienced agoraphobia?
- Did you believe her husband and daughter were still alive or were you surprised when it was revealed they passed away?
- Anna serves as an unreliable narrator. Did you believe that she did see a murder or did you wonder if it was in her head/she made it up?
- Did you suspect Ethan at any point?
- There have been a number of thrillers/suspense stories with an unreliable narrator suffering from a drinking problem. Why do you think the authors make that choice? How does drinking impact the story they're telling?
- What did you think about the many film references Finn included in the story? Several times, what's happening on screen is almost happening in Anna's world as well. Have you seen any of those films?
- What changes do you think they'll make in the movie version of this book? Will you go see it?
- What did you think of the ending? Were you satisfied or did it leave you wanting more?
- The story focused on grief, addiction, anxiety disorder and trusting one's instinct. What are some other themes you picked up on?

## GENERIC DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### *Mystery / Crime / Suspense Thrillers*

1. Talk about the **characters**, both good and bad. Describe their personalities and motivations. Are they fully developed and emotionally complex? Or are they flat, one-dimensional heroes and villains?

2. What do you **know**...and when do you know it? At what point in the book do you begin to piece together what happened?

3. Good crime writers embed **hidden clues** in plain sight, slipping them in casually, almost in passing. Did you pick them out, or were you...clueless? Once you've finished the book, go back to locate the clues hidden in plain sight. How skillful was the author in burying them?

4. Good crime writers also tease us with **red-herrings**—false clues—to purposely lead readers astray? Does your author try to throw you off track? If so, were you tripped up?

5. Talk about the **twists & turns**—those surprising plot developments that throw everything you think you've figured out into disarray.

- a. Do they enhance the story, add complexity, and build suspense?
- b. Are they plausible or implausible?
- c. Do they feel forced and gratuitous—inserted merely to extend the story?

6. Does the author ratchet up the **suspense**? Did you find yourself anxious—quickly turning pages to learn what happened? At what point does the suspense start to build? Where does it climax...then perhaps start rising again?

7. A good **ending** is essential in any mystery or crime thriller: it should ease up on tension, answer questions, and tidy up loose ends. Does the ending accomplish those goals?

- a. Is the conclusion probable or believable?
- b. Is it organic, growing out of clues previously laid out by the author (*see Question 3*)?
- c. Or does the ending come out of the blue, feeling forced or tacked-on?
- d. Perhaps it's too predictable.
- e. Can you envision a different or better ending?

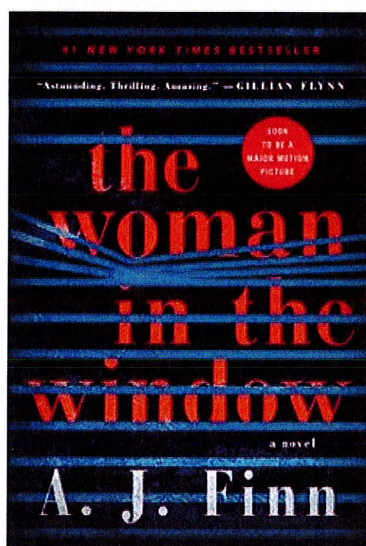
8. Are there certain **passages** in the book—ideas, descriptions, or dialogue—that you found interesting or revealing...or that somehow struck you? What lines, if any, made you stop and think?

9. Overall, does the book **satisfy**? Does it live up to the standards of a good crime story or suspense thriller? Why or why not?

*(Generic Mystery Questions by LitLovers. Please feel free to use them, online or off, with attribution. Thanks.)*

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Popularity:★★★★★

## The woman in the window (Jan 2018)

Author: Finn, A. J.

Adult Fiction



### Description:

"It isn't paranoia if it's really happening... Anna Fox lives alone -- a recluse in her New York City home, drinking too much wine, watching old movies... and spying on her neighbors. Then **the** Russells move next door: a father, a mother, their teenaged son. **The** perfect family. But when Anna sees something she shouldn't, her world begins to crumble -- and its shocking secrets are laid bare. What is real? What is imagined? Who is in danger? Who is in control? In this gripping Hitchcockian thriller, no one and nothing are what they seem."--.

**Book Appeal Terms:** Definition of Appeal Terms

**Genre:** Psychological suspense

**Themes:** Unreliable narrator

**Storyline:** Intricately plotted

**Tone:** Menacing; Suspenseful

**Writing Style:** Compelling

**Persistent link to this record (Permalink):**

<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=neh&tg=UI&an=10>

### Booklist:

*/\* Starred Review \*/* "Funeral March of a Marionette" is heard somewhere off in the distance as the shadow of Alfred Hitchcock, for whose TV program that 1872 Gounod piece served as the theme, moves across each page of this neo-noir masterpiece. Grab a bottle of Merlot, and settle in to accompany Anna Fox on her nightmare journey, a journey confined, almost in its entirety, within the walls of her New York City home. Anna suffers from agoraphobia and has carefully arranged her housebound existence around her many medications, including bottles of wine and classic thriller films, as she keeps in contact with her husband and daughter, nurtures fellow agoraphobes in an online support group, plays virtual chess, Skypes French lessons, and maintains close surveillance of her neighbors. Safe from the world outside. Then her cocoon begins to unravel when she witnesses a murder in the house across the way. Sound familiar? However, author Finn has carefully paced Anna's internal narrative and intricately woven interactions (real or imagined?) and added a diabolical dimension that makes this story even more intense than Hitchcock's *Rear Window*. And when the catalyst for Anna's condition is ultimately revealed, it is far more traumatic than a broken leg. An astounding debut from a truly talented writer, perfect for fans in search of more like *Gone Girl* and *The Girl on the Train*. **HIGH-DEMAND BACKSTORY:** Scheduled for publication in 35 languages and with a film already in development at Fox 2000 with Scott Rudin producing, this could be the first novel that climbs highest on this year's bestseller lists. -- Murphy, Jane (Reviewed 11/1/2017) (Booklist, vol 114, number 5, p33)

### LibraryReads:

A menacing psychological thriller that starts out like *Rear Window* and then veers off into unexpected places. An agoraphobic recluse languishes in her New York City home, drinking wine and spying on her neighbors. One day she witnesses a crime that threatens to expose her secrets. -- Joseph Jones, Cuyahoga County Public Library, Cuyahoga, OH. (LibraryReads, January 2018)

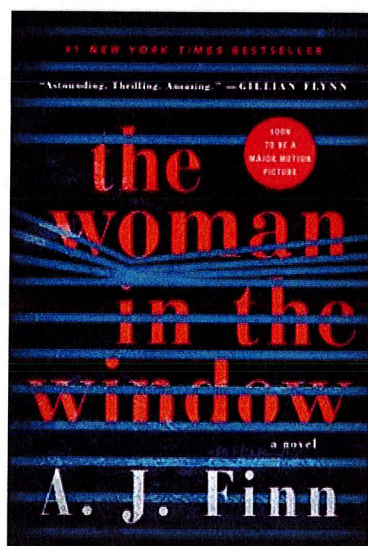
### Library Journal:

*/\* Starred Review \*/* Likened to blockbusters by Paula Hawkins, Gillian Flynn, and Ruth Ware—and billed as the breakout book of 2018—Finn's debut lives up to the hype. The title, also the name of a 1944 film noir, refers to both the protagonist, Dr. Anna Fox, and the horrific scene she witnesses from her kitchen window. An agoraphobic and former child psychologist,

Anna spends her days in her Harlem brownstone drinking Merlot by the case, watching old black-and-white mysteries, and spying on her neighbors. Her latest obsession is the new family across the park, the Russells. The trio—a husband, wife, and teen son—remind Anna of her own husband and young daughter, who no longer live with her. Anna's peeping soon reveals what she's positive is a murder and hasty cover-up. But no one—including the police—believe the ravings of a hermit who consistently mixes prescription medication with large doses of alcohol. VERDICT With overt and subtle references to classic thrillers from Hitchcock to Polanski, Finn, a pen name for William Morrow executive editor Dan Mallory, crafts a tightly coiled tale that will keep fans of the genre guessing. A riveting and mature first novel that stands out in a crowded genre. [See Prepub Alert, 7/3/17.]—Kiera Parrott, School Library Journal --Kiera Parrott (Reviewed 08/01/2017) (Library Journal, vol 142, issue 13, p82)

**Kirkus:**

A lonely woman in New York spends her days guzzling merlot, popping pills, and spying on the neighbors—until something she sees sucks her into a vortex of terror. "The Miller home across the street—abandon hope, all ye who enter here—is one of five townhouses that I can survey from the south-facing windows of my own." A new family is moving in on her Harlem street, and Dr. Anna Fox already knows their names, employment histories, how much they paid for their house, and anything else you can find out using a search engine. Following a mysterious accident, Anna is suffering from agoraphobia so severe that she hasn't left her house in months. She speaks to her husband and daughter on the phone—they've moved out because "the doctors say too much contact isn't healthy"—and conducts her relationships with her neighbors wholly through the zoom lens of her Nikon D5500. As she explains to fellow sufferers in her online support group, food and medication (not to mention cases of wine) can be delivered to your door; your housecleaner can take out the trash. Anna's psychiatrist and physical therapist make house calls; a tenant in her basement pinch-hits as a handyman. To fight boredom, she's got online chess and a huge collection of DVDs; she has most of Hitchcock memorized. Both the game of chess and noir movie plots—Rear Window, in particular—will become spookily apt metaphors for the events that unfold when the teenage son of her new neighbors knocks on her door to deliver a gift from his mother. Not long after, his mother herself shows up...and then Anna witnesses something almost too shocking to be real happening in their living room. Boredom won't be a problem any longer. Crackling with tension, and the sound of pages turning, as twist after twist sweeps away each hypothesis you come up with about what happened in Anna's past and what fresh hell is unfolding now. (Kirkus Reviews, November 1, 2017)



Popularity: ★★★★★

## The woman in the window (Jan 2018)

**Author:** Finn, A. J.

Adult Fiction



### Description:

"It isn't paranoia if it's really happening... Anna Fox lives alone -- a recluse in her New York City home, drinking too much wine, watching old movies... and spying on her neighbors. Then the Russells move next door: a father, a mother, their teenaged son. The perfect family. But when Anna sees something she shouldn't, her world begins to crumble -- and its shocking secrets are laid bare. What is real? What is imagined? Who is in danger? Who is in control? In this gripping Hitchcockian thriller, no one and nothing are what they seem."--.

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**Genre:** Psychological suspense

**Themes:** Unreliable narrator

**Storyline:** Intricately plotted

**Tone:** Menacing; Suspenseful

**Writing Style:** Compelling

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### Author Information:

A. J. Finn

### Publisher information:

New York: William Morrow & Co. 2018.; 368 p.

### Dewey Number:

813

### Genre:

Psychological suspense

### Themes:

Unreliable narrator

### Storyline:

Intricately plotted

### Tone:

Menacing  
Suspenseful

### Writing Style:

Compelling

### Location:

New York City

**Subject headings:**

Women recluses  
Neighbors  
Surveillance  
Obsession  
Agoraphobia  
Women witnesses  
Women psychologists  
Secrets

**Author Characteristics:**

Male  
United States  
American

**ISBNs Associated with this Work:**

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**A. J. Finn**

Gale Biography in Context. 2018.

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Born: 1979? in New York, New York, United States

Other Names: Mallory, Daniel; Mallory, Dan

Nationality: American

Occupation: Novelist

**Full Text:**

A.J. Finn is an American writer and editor. While working as an editor, he published his first book, *The Woman in the Window*, in 2018. The book, published under his pseudonym, became a best seller. A division of the movie studio 20th Century Fox acquired the film rights to the book.

**Early Life**

A.J. Finn was born Daniel Mallory in New York City to John and Pamela Mallory. His father worked on Wall Street. He enjoyed reading as a child and listed mysteries, thrillers, and detective novels among his favorites. Finn attended Duke University in North Carolina, where he majored in literature. During his senior year, he began to have mental health issues. He was diagnosed with severe depression. Finn continued his education at Oxford University in London, England, where he received his master's degree and doctorate.

His mental health conditions followed him to his job at British crime publisher Sphere in London. He then moved back to New York to work for the publisher William Morrow. Things got so bad that Finn decided to take off some time from work. He told *Event* magazine, "I struggled from the age of 21. I tried everything--drugs, therapy. There were days I couldn't get out of bed. Nothing worked."

Finn said he felt better once he received a diagnosis and began treatment. He continued in *Event*, "I'd been misdiagnosed. When I finally got the 'right' doctor he diagnosed bipolar disorder and put me on the correct medication." As he was sitting in his small New York apartment getting used to his new medications in the summer of 2015, Finn decided to write a book. He wanted to write about his experience with depression and mental illness, but he wanted to present it in a fictional piece.

**Wrote a Best Seller**

Finn said that he got the idea while sitting on his couch and looking out his window. He saw a light flick on in an apartment across the street. He wrote an outline for a story about a woman who has agoraphobia and becomes obsessed with watching the family in the building across the street from her. Agoraphobia is an anxiety disorder in which unfamiliar surroundings can cause intense fear. Finn sent the finished outline to a literary agent friend for her opinion on the piece. She encouraged him to write the novel.

Finn went back to his job as an editor at Morrow and worked on the novel in his spare time. He only told a handful of people about the project. He decided to use the pen name A.J. Finn, taken from the name of his cousin and a relative's dog. He did not want to tell his coworkers about the book.

Inspired by the books-turned films *Gone Girl* and *The Girl on the Train*, he approached writing his book like writing a film. When he was finished, Finn sent his finished manuscript, *The Woman in the Window*, to several publishers. A few of the publishers bid on the book, with Morrow giving Finn seven figures for the North American rights to the title. The editors at Morrow who acquired the book had no idea it was written by one of their employees until the bidding process. *The Woman in the Window* was published in early 2018. It debuted at the top spot of the *New York Times* best sellers list.

Finn eventually quit his job at Morrow to focus on a full-time writing career. Prior to the publication of the book, the movie studio Fox 2000 bought the film rights to the book, with producer Scott Rudin and writer Tracy Letts set to work on the film. Finn continued to promote *The Woman in the Window* in 2018 and was working on his second novel.

#### FURTHER READINGS:

#### Online

"A.J. Finn: The Man Who Was Born to Write Crime Fiction," *Sydney Morning Herald*, <http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/books/aj-finn-the-man-who-was-born-to-write-crime-fiction-20180103-h0d1l4.html> (February 18, 2018).

"Instant Best-Seller *The Woman in the Window* Is Much More than *Gone Girl* with the Dragon Tattoo on the Train," *INDY Week*, <https://www.indyweek.com/indyweek/instant-best-seller-the-woman-in-the-window-is-much-more-than-gone-girl-with-the-dragon-tattoo-on-the-train/Content?oid=11554175> (February 18, 2018).

"Meet the Oxford Graduate with Bipolar Disorder Behind the New Girl on the Train: Author Bags Seven-Figure Publishing Deal for Must-Read Thriller with Emily Blunt's Sister as His Agent," *Daily Mail*, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-5301553/Author-Woman-Window-wrote-secret.html> (February 18, 2018).

"Your Book Editor Just Snagged Your Spot on the Best-Seller List," *New York Times*, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/19/books/aj-finn-the-woman-in-the-window-daniel-mallory.html> (February 18, 2018).

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## INTERVIEW WITH A.J. FINN

Posted on January 1, 2018 by A.J. Finn

### What was the inspiration behind *The Woman in the Window*?

Growing up, I gorged myself on Agatha Christie, the Hardy Boys, and Ellen Raskin's murder mystery *The Westing Game*; later, during my teen years, I dove headfirst into Patricia Highsmith, Graham Greene, and Ruth Rendell. As a doctoral student at Oxford, I focused on detective fiction, after which I launched a career publishing crime novels. At some point I had a notion that I might one day write a suspense story of my own, but for ages—probably since 1988, when Thomas Harris published *The Silence of the Lambs*—the market was dominated by serial-killer thrillers. I didn't have one of those in me. Then, in 2012, Gillian Flynn changed the game with *Gone Girl*. Here was intelligent, character-driven mystery storytelling of the sort that Highsmith had pioneered sixty years earlier—the very kind of book that I had read and studied and felt I might try to write.

Trouble was, I didn't have a story, even though the market conditions were favorable. Not until 2015, when I started to rebound from a serious depressive episode, did it occur to me to write about a protagonist who, like me, had trouble leaving the house. By this point, I'd wrestled with severe depression for nearly fifteen years, the entirety of my adult life; after my diagnosis and medication were adjusted, I felt significantly improved and ready to tackle a creative project. I wanted to bring my hard-won empathy to bear on the character of a woman who had lost all faith in the possibilities of life.

### Tell us briefly what the book is about?

*The Woman in the Window* is *Rear Window* for the 21<sup>st</sup> century: an agoraphobic woman believes she's witnessed a crime in a neighboring house but can't set foot outside to investigate. And soon she feels unsafe even in her own home. Is the danger real, though, or has she imagined it?



## Which writers had the greatest influence on you?

Agatha Christie, Josephine Tey, and Ellen Raskin introduced me to the abiding pleasures of suspense fiction when I was a child. As a graduate student, I focused on Patricia Highsmith, Graham Greene, and Henry James, a trio of writers whose novels bristle with psychological acuity. So they're formative influences. Among contemporaries, I'd cite Gillian Flynn, Kate Atkinson, and Tana French, all of whom write substantive books inhabited by three-dimensional characters. I like tart, crisp dialogue, as perfected by Dashiell Hammett and Andrea Camilleri; I love the quirky charisma of Carl Hiaasen and Fred Vargas; and for atmosphere, no one tops Dickens.

## What are you reading now?

I tend to shuttle between a broad range of books. Right now, I'm re-reading Kate Atkinson's *Started Early, Took My Dog*; such a big-hearted novel, such a well-oiled plot. I'm halfway through both Carl Hiaasen's *Native Tongue*—among his dizziest, daffiest capers—and *Uncle Silas*, which I only pretended to have read in grad school. Tomorrow I'll turn the last page of Amor Towles's magnificent *A Gentleman in Moscow*. I've just finished Madeline Miller's spellbinding *Circe*, a retelling of the Greek myth; *The Soul of an Octopus*, Sy Montgomery's exploration of invertebrate consciousness; and *Strange Weather*, Joe Hill's stunning four-novella collection. Next up: *Manhattan Beach*, the new Jennifer Egan novel, and a fantasy called *Smoke*, by Dan Vyleta.

## What advice do you have for beginning authors?

I'd encourage all authors—beginning or veteran—to read as much as possible. This will expose you to new ideas and techniques; it'll help aerate and freshen your work. Beyond that, bear in mind that writing is a job... and like any job, it's not always (or even often) fun. I don't wait for the muse to call because I've noticed she often develops laryngitis. ... I bet she'll ignore me for saying that.

## Are you an outliner?

Absolutely. I've heard many authors talk about their characters "surprising" them, but before I tap out a single word, I need to know exactly what's going to happen, and when, and to whom. Once I've plotted the story in depth, I can focus on the sentence-level writing.

## Are you a fan of Hitchcock?

I love Hitchcock. Love the style, so luscious in *To Catch a Thief* and *The Man Who Knew Too Much*. Love the urgency—see *Shadow of a Doubt*, in which Teresa Wright begins to suspect that her uncle and upstairs boarder might be a notorious killer. Love the wit—here I'm thinking of that errant windmill in *Foreign Correspondent*, the rapid-fire dialogue rattling through *The Lady Vanishes* and *The 39 Steps*. Love the technical virtuosity on showy display in movies like *Rear Window*, filmed entirely on a massive soundstage, and *Rope*, which splices ten long takes into what appears to be a single shot. Love the magnificent set pieces: the chase across Mount Rushmore in *North by Northwest*, the merry-go-round finale of *Strangers on a Train*, the crows congregating on a jungle gym in *The Birds*. But most of all, I loved those gutsy plot twists that pull the rug out from under



the viewer—plot twists so distinctive and iconic that today we describe them as Hitchcockian. He blindsided his audience effortlessly, even ruthlessly, in *Psycho* and *Vertigo*, of course—but to splendid effect in many other films, too. Hitchcock practiced a sophistication and craft that remain indelible, even timeless.

**How did you manage to write so many chapters; did the construction of them feel difficult?**

Well, some of the chapters are only a paragraph long, which certainly inflates the page count. Going in, I knew I wanted to keep the chapters digestibly brief; I'm a pretty slow reader, and I find that short chapters spur me on. At some point I clocked that the manuscript was going to end up in the 100-chapter range, which appealed to me. Improbably, I didn't have to meddle with the structure much in order to cap the book at an even 100—it just shook out that way.

**You have earned a lot of praise for this book. I think it'll hit the list. What are you working on now?**

Man, I hope so! I'm at work on my second novel, a psychological thriller set in San Francisco.

Posted in [Interviews](#).