Study Questions on The Birds (Alfred Hitchcock, 1963)

1) Hitchcock is famous for making cameo appearances in his films. When you see Hitchcock's cameo, point it out to the others. Keep in mind, however, that the cameos are more than just a game between the director and the audience. The setting, costuming, and props associated with Hitchcock's cameos often have some bearing on the most important motifs in his films. What, specifically, do you notice about the cameo in The Birds, and what bearing might it have on the film's themes or motifs?

2) Hitchcock's films often explore family relationships against the backdrop of something more extreme (espionage, horror, etc.). As you watch The Birds think about the relationships between parents and children and how those relationships adapt to change. Think also about nontraditional relationships. What patterns do you notice in these relationships? Do they have anything whatsoever to do with the main conflict (i.e., the bird plague), and, if so, what?

3) Works about disaster, plague, or alien invasion often beg to be read as allegories for something else. For example, the film Invasion of the Body Snatchers (1956), which deals with alien infiltration, can be read as a rather contradictory allegory of the Cold War. On one hand, the "infiltration" of humans by aliens is easily read exploiting and promoting the fifties paranoia about communist "infiltration." On the other hand, the idea of body-snatched friend turning on friend could be read as a critique of the "Red scare." Perhaps the filmmakers were playing both sides of the fence. Clearly Hitchcock was aware of these allegorical trends, but it's hard to say just what his film might allegorize: The Red scare? Civil Rights? Sexual freedom? Sexual (im)maturity? What do you think?