

# Harvard Film Studies: A Review

*Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage.* By Stanley Cavell. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981. \$17.50.

*Hitchcock: The Murderous Gaze.* By William Rothman. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982. \$27.50.

*Two or Three Things I Know About Her: Analysis of a Film by Godard.* By Alfred Guzzetti. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981. \$28.50.

Within the last year, the Harvard University Press has published three books on film by three Harvard professors. These volumes appear under the banner "Harvard Film Studies." They are united not only by press and academy but by considerable bonds of mutual reference and congratulation. There is no series introduction reprinted at the head of each volume; there is not even a Harvard Film Studies Editor to present each work. Whatever claims are made by the series as a whole must be deduced from the compared contents of the works themselves.

Stanley Cavell's book on Hollywood romantic comedy is a philosophical apology for marriage. To this end at least his discussions of Milton, Kant, Emerson, and others are relevant. Particularly Emerson, one supposes, for Cavell is specifically concerned with America as the site and potential home of the romantic couple. An essay written after this book was finished makes this clear.

My ground is the thought that while America, or any discovered world, can no longer ratify marriage, the achievement of true marriage might ratify something called America as a place in which to seek it. This is a state secret.<sup>1</sup>

Cavell's book explores the notion of "true marriage" and of America as its true place. Needless to say, this is a project of the utmost idealism and its execution is not less so. Cavell's essays labor to release the meaning of abstract concepts like "true marriage" through a process of intuition and abstraction undimmed by his-

torical or material realities. The issues of marriage in 1981 are the same as those of the 1930s and 1940s, or indeed of Shakespeare's time. Marriage, to Cavell, is constant, perhaps eternal in its nature and problems; one need not study history or society but only meditate rightly upon the notion itself.

Cavell's philosophic project is, in the last analysis, theological. His book is an essay in philosophical-theological speculation and, as such, belongs to a very old tradition of American thought. But in this case Cavell has hitched his speculations to certain films, seven to be exact, which brings his book to the attention of film scholars, most of whom might not otherwise be concerned with Cavell's work.

I think that there is a fundamental misalliance between Cavell's philosophical-theological project and the group of films he has chosen to discuss. In the terms of an older criticism he has failed to find an objective correlative for his concerns. The result is a forcing of his ideas upon his materials; Cavell raids the films to develop his favorite themes. He ignores aspects of genre, structure, visual form, plot, character, and dialogue that get in the way of his concerns or that do not support them. On the other hand, he devotes page after page to a line of dialogue or an aspect of plot that illuminates the problem of "true marriage" as he understands it. From another point of view, I suppose, *Pursuits of Happiness* is too much film criticism and too little general cultural essay. If Cavell had taken "true marriage in America" as his theme and had followed it out, with illustrations from films and other materials, it might have been a more coherent book. As it is, Cavell attempts both film criticism and a general cultural essay and achieves neither. His double project allows him to shuttle back and forth between the two, rarely finishing a point, doing justice to neither.

The issue of Cavell's writing must be posed at the outset. When reviewers carp about writing or organization, readers may say: "Get on with it. Do the best you can. What does the book say?" Cavell's writing and organization, however, often prevent understanding; they

make one doubt that there is an argument at all. In order to criticize it, a reader must construct a Cavell argument, selecting passages that seem to make one out. As Leo Braudy said in a review of *The World Viewed* (1971),

Most critics tacitly promise the reader a basic clarity . . . but Cavell makes no such promises. Subjects are brought up, dropped, and resummoned to serve the demands of a logic no doubt rooted in the author's psyche, but little in evidence on the page.<sup>2</sup>

Cavell raises two methodological problems concerning his film criticism. One has to do with his use of philosophy in analyzing films. He says, "I am not insensible, whatever defenses I may employ, of an avenue of outrageousness in considering Hollywood films in the light, from time to time, of major works of thought." (p. 8) He defends his doing so at length, here and elsewhere, ringing numberless variations on the propositions that philosophy is good for film and film is good for philosophy. But Cavell's diffidence about using Kant and Wittgenstein to discuss romantic comedies is somewhat disingenuous. Beneath his apologies, Cavell seems delighted with himself for putting these things together; he says of his philosophizing later, quoting *The Philadelphia Story*, "Ain't it awful?" But Cavell's endless defenses and retorts are needless. Any critic is free to use any source or system to analyze romantic comedy or any other topic; he need only convince us of its interest and usefulness. If Cavell is to be faulted, it is not for putting Kant and Capra together but for how he does so.

Cavell is genuinely defensive about his second recurring methodological point, the lack of visual analysis in his book. Cavell's in-advance resentment to criticism on this point leads him to denigrate visual analysis itself.

So many remarks one has endured about the kind and number of feet in a line of verse, or about a superb modulation, or about a beautiful diagonal in a painting, or about a wonderful camera angle, have not been readings of a passage at all, but something like items in a tabulation, with no suggestion about what is being counted or what the total might mean. Such remarks, I feel, say nothing, though they may be, as Wittgenstein says about naming, preparations for saying something (and hence had better be accurate). (36-37)\*

Yes, Cavell reduces his films to their literary content and takes that as his object of analysis.

\*See also p. 11 and pp. 40-41.

Yes, his remarks are addressed to plot, characters, theme, in short, to the film's script. But one may take the filmscript for one's object as well as any other aspect. What is inadmissible is the claim that one is dealing with all aspects of the film at one time, or with its essence. Cavell's quite needless disparagement of visual analysis may reflect a project to reveal the full and final *truth* of the films he addresses. (See Barthes, *Critique et vérité*.)

A methodological point that Cavell does not raise squarely, alas, is that of genre. Cavell's distinctive version of generic criticism is concerned with "The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage," a genre of his own discovery and designation. His discussion of it extends through the entire book and provides its structure: an introduction followed by a chapter devoted to each of the films that comprise the genre. These are: *The Lady Eve* (1941), *It Happened One Night* (1934), *Bringing Up Baby* (1938), *The Philadelphia Story* (1940), *His Girl Friday* (1940), *Adam's Rib* (1949), *The Awful Truth* (1937).

Determining Cavell's definition of the genre of remarriage comedy is a considerable problem, finally insoluble. He does not define it in a 42-page introduction; he is still defining and redefining the genre in the book's final chapter and does not resolve it there either. Is the reader expected to do this work that the book fails to do? One might arrive at something by a process of abstraction and synthesis from the less confusing passages; but the book is full of sliding senses of terms and reversals that say "You thought I was arguing so-and-so, but I'm not." Cavell says, for instance:

Now here is what the marriage in *The Philadelphia Story* comes to, I mean what it fantasizes. It is a proposed marriage or balance between Western culture's two forces of authority, so that American mankind can refind its object, its dedication to a more perfect union, toward the perfected human community, its right to the pursuit of happiness.

It would not surprise me if someone found me, or rather found my daydream, Utopian. But I have not yet said what my waking relation to this daydream is, nor what my implication is in the events of the film. (158-159)

These early statements in the book seem clearer on the genre of remarriage than most, though they are not free from later qualification either.

What I am calling the comedy of remarriage [casts] as its heroine a married woman; and the

drive of its plot is not to get the central pair together, but to get them *back* together, together *again*. Hence the fact of marriage in it is subjected to the fact or the threat of divorce. (1-2)

Put a bit more metaphysically: only those can marry who are already married. It is as though you know you are married when you come to see that you cannot divorce, that is, when you find that your lives simply will not disentangle. If your love is lucky, this knowledge will be greeted with laughter.

A critic can call any group of works a genre. The question is: what does calling them that allow one to accomplish or discover? William James said that kinds are teleological instruments, not essences. Cavell's "genre of remarriage" generates more difficulties and conflicts than it resolves—he spends the entire book pursuing these. The problems arise not only in application; his genre designation is contradictory on its surface. First, "remarriage" commonly means the entry of a person from a dissolved union into a new union with someone else; *The Second Time Around, Remarriage in America* by Leslie Aldridge Westoff does not even mention the case of two people marrying each other again. Second, of the seven films, only *The Philadelphia Story* shows a remarriage in Cavell's sense, although *His Girl Friday* implies it. In *Adam's Rib*, the couple separates briefly then rejoins. *The Awful Truth* brings the couple back together just as the divorce decree becomes final. But *The Lady Eve*, *It Happened One Night*, and *Bringing Up Baby*? These are classic tales of single persons who meet in the course of the film, undergo various attractions and difficulties, and end up together. They do not belong in Cavell's ballpark. Ellie is married (unconsummated) to someone else at the start of *It Happened One Night*, but this is not Cavell's "remarriage."

Along the way, Cavell adds various clauses and additions to his definition: the "expansion of the father-daughter relationship" (49), the removal of the action from a starting place of impasse to a place in which perspective and renewal are to be achieved—in four of the seven films, this is Connecticut (47). The death and revival of the woman from Old Comedy becomes in these films, the death and revival of feeling—"it has to happen with the woman, and she cannot, nobody can exactly *bring* that resolution about" (163). This is, however, related to the generic requirement that the man

in each of these films lectures the woman at some point, in order to educate her, which means to awaken her awareness of her desire.

Each of these categories brings up new exceptions and inclusions, which Cavell chases down at considerable length. For instance, after making a good point about *The Awful Truth*,

[The film presents] an unbroken line of comic development, a continuous unfolding of thought and of emotion, over a longer span than is imagined in the companions among the genre of comedy in which we are placing the film. (237)

Cavell then traces "the comedic to its roots in the everyday" and he is off on a many-paged digression on the diurnal succession of light and dark in these films and how this relates to the succession of the seasons in classical comedy.

He makes another good point:

You learn to look, in a McCarey scene, for the disturbing current under an agreeable surface. He has the power to walk a scene right to that verge at which the comic is no longer comic, without losing either the humor or letting the humor deny the humanity of its victims. (243)

But then he takes off from the scene where Irene Dunne sings for Cary Grant and company to consider all the scenes in all the seven comedies in which people sing.

Before considering that effect let us loop back and collect the instances of singing throughout the films of remarriage we have been reading. It seems a firm commitment of the genre to make room for singing, for something to sing about and a world to sing in. (248)

But then it becomes a problem for Cavell that Dunne sings for Grant; in the other films, the man sings to the woman. This is one of many instances in which Cavell's "definitions" of the comedy of remarriage create imaginary problems; the book is largely spent pursuing these.

Cavell takes his genre project seriously enough to recognize and discuss conflicting features in the films he is discussing. But because he adds ad hoc and arbitrary features to his definition of genre—Connecticut, man lecturing to woman, who sings to whom, etc.—the exceptions and problems multiply. Add to this that Cavell is still adding features in his last chapter—singing is one, day-night alternation as classical succession of seasons is another—and you get a sense of the book's mode of proceeding. ("Method" is not quite the right word.) The terms of this proceeding are already loose

enough to permit wandering forever without ever deciding anything; but to them Cavell adds a “compensation” principle whereby the absence of one genre feature may be balanced in some unspecified way by the presence of another. This is nothing less than a license to fish for whatever metaphysical catch one wishes at any point in the discussion that one chooses. If I add that the dispensable/compensable features include remarriage itself, the reader interested in genre may well stop reading. On *It Happened One Night*:

I might, again, say that the matter of remarriage is only one of an open set of features shared by this genre of comedy and that the absence of even that feature may in a given instance be compensated for by the presence of other features. (84)\*

Since his book is devoted to it, why does Cavell never discuss the nature of genre and genre criticism? He might have consulted, among others, Aristotle, Hegel, Bradley, Todorov, Croce (a classical anti-genre position), Derrida. On film genre, he might have consulted, among many others, Warshow, Ryall, Kitses, Buscombe, Braudy, Kaminsky, Neale, Schatz. Cavell does cite Coghill and Frye on whether to call the place beyond the normal “the green world” or “the golden world,” but not on the central issues of his thesis. One wonders at last whether Cavell is serious about his genre project, despite his persistence and its domination of the book’s pages. Perhaps he does indeed use it as a pretext to support his various digressions and mini-essays on diverse topics along the way. Because the genre discussion is so arbitrary and unconvincing, one feels that perhaps one should attempt to read the book in other ways, despite itself.

An odd result of the application of Cavell’s philosophic interests to these films is that he often fixes on details that seem minor, at least when isolated from their contexts. Let us look

\*Concomitantly, the fact of remarriage itself does not guarantee the inclusion of a comedy in the genre of remarriage. “One moral to draw from the structure of *Private Lives* is that no one feature of the genre is sufficient for membership in the genre, not even the title feature of remarriage itself. Another moral is that the fact that *Private Lives* seems closer than our comedies do to the spirit of Restoration comedy is a good reason not to look to Restoration comedy (as I have periodically, for obvious reasons, found myself tempted to do) as a central source of the comedy of remarriage.” (19)

at Cavell’s chapter on *It Happened One Night*. It begins with an eight-page discussion of the notion of limits as elaborated by Kant and other philosophers. “If it is inevitable that the human conceive itself in opposition to God . . . then it is inevitable that the human conceive itself as limited.” (73) When Cavell does get to the film, he begins in this way.

Not knowing whether human knowledge and human community require the recognizing or the dismantling of limits; not knowing what it means that these limits are sometimes picturable as a barrier and sometimes not; not knowing whether we are more afraid of being isolated or of being absorbed by our knowledge and by society—these lines of ignorance are the background against which I wish to consider Frank Capra’s *It Happened One Night* (1934). And most urgently, as may be guessed, I wish to ponder its central figure of the barrier-screen, I daresay the most famous blanket in the history of drama. I am not unaware that some of my readers—even those who would be willing to take up Kant and Capra seriously, or earnestly, in isolation from one another—will not fully credit the possibility that a comic barrier, hardly more than a prop in a traveling salesman joke, can invoke issues of metaphysical isolation and of the possibility of community—*must* invoke them if this film’s comedy is to be understood. I still sometimes participate in this doubt, so it is still in part myself whose conviction I seek. (80–81)

But then let us be wise enough, if we care about this film, to care about the rigors of this symbolism. (81)

At such points, one is either with Cavell or not. We are asked to participate in a project of interest to Cavell but that he fails to make interesting to us. He also fails to deal with the films themselves in any satisfactory way: no film completely, nor even aspects of films, rather odd details that his systems invest with great significance. Cavell calls his project “reading films” but he merely raids them for philosophic topics. As the topics proliferate, none pursued to a conclusion, the estrangement from the films increases. Occasionally, usually in the form of a digression from a digression, Cavell will suddenly connect with an issue of importance, but this is never for long; another digression carries him away.

What this pair does together is less important than the fact that they do whatever it is together, that they know how to spend time together, even that they would rather waste time together than do anything else—except that no time they are together could be wasted. (88)

Cavell is idealizing further what is already idealized in the films—his notion of reading them—but he is onto something of importance here. One hopes that he will probe this sense of interaction, tracing the mechanics by which the films produce it—such moments occur at particular plot points, in specific settings; they use certain dialogue, gestures, acting style, etc. A catalogue of kinds of activities and kinds of time spent together in these films would be of interest. But he is soon off on a six-page discussion of food in the film. This is followed soon enough by a five-page analysis of why Gable leaves Colbert before the film's climax brings them back together—when Cavell does play film critic, he often plays the most rudimentary kind, analyzing why a character does this rather than that. He ends with five more pages on the blanket-barrier, this time likening it to a movie screen. Cavell's swoops include odd claims for a modernist reading of this or that detail, but these are, like everything else in the book, sudden inspirations, not parts of an overall scheme. Bellow says of a character in "Mosby's Memoirs," "And when he emerged from the bathroom he invariably had a topic sentence." At times Cavell's book seems nothing but topic sentences.

Cavell on women and on men-women relations is as contradictory as he is on any other topic. He takes it as an essential feature of his genre

to leave ambiguous the question whether the man or the woman is the active or the passive partner, whether indeed active and passive are apt characterizations of the difference between male and female, or whether indeed we know satisfactorily how to think about the difference between male and female. (82)

He calls the genre also "the comedy of equality." As before, Cavell manages here to idealize further what is already idealized in film. But he is on an interesting track and again one hopes in vain that he will pursue it. (Instead he turns right after this to more speculations on the blanket in *It Happened One Night*.) And Cavell pursues other topics that themselves quite undermine his "comedy of equality."

In the genre of remarriage the man's lecturing indicates that an essential goal of the narrative is the education of the woman, where her education turns out to mean her acknowledgment of her desire, and this in turn will be conceived of as her creation, her emergence, at any rate, as an autonomous human being. (84)

Unfortunately this is a topic that Cavell does pursue; he returns to it again and again throughout the book. In his genre, woman must die and be reborn. This is the basis of his somewhat far-fetched relation of the genre of remarriage to Old Comedy and to Shakespeare. In Old Comedy, he says, the woman is the center whereas the man is the center of New Comedy. Is the woman the center of Cavell's seven Hollywood films? This is questionable and, besides, centerplace is often given to the object of spectation and pursuit rather than to the protagonist. In Old Comedy the woman supposedly undergoes death and transformation—this is something I have been unable to verify in Francis Cornford, *The Origin of Attic Comedy*. This is what he finds in Shakespeare also, particularly *The Winter's Tale*, in which Hermione is dead, cast away by Leontes, but a statue of her appears in the last act and comes to life. If one insists on comparing these films to Shakespeare, a dubious enterprise, should it not be the Shakespeare of the early comedies, such as *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night*?

Cavell is obsessed with the notion of the creation of woman by man or through his agency; this determines his interest in and treatment of classical sources also. I need not belabor the reactionary and paternalistic myth in Cavell's notion nor how inconsistent it is with any version of feminism that one can think of. Woman is an object to be moulded by men, which is to be understood as her birth to herself and liberation. Cavell's theme of woman as statue to be awakened by man fits one of his films rather well—*The Philadelphia Story*, with its images of virgin goddesses and garden statues that come to life—but he stretches outrageously to make it fit the others.

Cavell is also obsessed with the actual women who play in these films. He raises the question

why it was only in 1934, and in America of all places, that the Shakespearean structure surfaced again, if not quite on the stage. I have in effect already outlined the answer I have to that question. Nineteen thirty-four—half a dozen years after the advent of sound—was about the earliest date by which the sound film could reasonably be expected to have found itself artistically.\* And it happens that at that same date there was a group of women of an age and a temperament to make possible the definitive realization of the genre that answered the Shakespearean description, a date at which a phase of human history, namely,

a phase of feminism, and requirements of a genre inheriting a remarriage structure from Shakespeare, and the nature of film's transformation of its human subjects, met together on the issue of the new creation of a woman. (19–20)

Cavell makes clear that he means the *actual* women as somehow a precondition for the appearance of his genre, not their skills as actresses. "What suits the women in them—Claudette Colbert, Irene Dunne, Katherine Hepburn, Rosalind Russell, Barbara Stanwyck—for their leading roles?" (18) His answer is that all were born between 1904 and 1911 and that their mothers were of the 1880s generation, a distinguished group of women. Cavell's belief that the women who play in this genre must somehow "be" what they portray no doubt reflects his notions about the ontology of film generally. But it also reflects traditional sexist ideas linking women with "being" and attempting to identify their appearances with their essences, in order to control them. And it reflects quite uncritically that fixation on the woman as object of spectation and desire that classical narrative cinema proposes. Characteristically, Cavell makes a metaphysical, pseudo-"modernist" amplification of his interest in the women of these films, attempting to map it back on the films themselves.

The relation between Eve and Jean is not an issue for us, but the nature of the relation of both Eve and Jean to Barbara Stanwyck, or to some real woman called Barbara Stanwyck, is an issue for us—an issue in viewing films generally, but declared, acknowledged as an issue in this film by the way it situates the issue of identity.

It is a leading thought of mine about the film comedies of remarriage that they each have a way of acknowledging this issue, of harping on the identity of the real women cast in each of these films, and each by way of some doubling or splitting of her projected presence. (63–64)

We know from deconstructive criticism, and from earlier modes of reading, that all texts are readable as signifying their textual mechanisms and ideological pretexts. The question is therefore which of these the *critic* "harps on" and for what reasons. As for the text itself harping on certain things in a textual action that the critic merely recounts objectively—

\*This is not only wrong; its "reasoning" is appalling. By 1934, Von Sternberg, Lubitsch, Fritz Lang, Jean Renoir, Dziga Vertov, Hawks, Hitchcock, earlier Capra, etc. had all made—to say the least—fully accomplished films in sound.

that is an illusion no longer tenable. As for the availability of skilled actresses to play these roles in the 1930s, why should this need accounting for? There have been actresses equal to the parts of Shakespeare, Congreve, Sheridan, Wilde, Shaw, *et al.* since women have been allowed on the stage. (See Rosamond Gilder, *Enter the Actress* [New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1960].)

In a number of earlier reviews and other pieces, William Rothman has cast himself as Stanley Cavell's foremost follower in filmic matters. He has more than once asked of a film book why it has not considered the work of Stanley Cavell; behind his other criticisms, one feels, this is the root, unforgivable fault. In an article on Jean Mitry, Rothman includes a footnote to his own comments: "With respect to the subject of film, this is an obscure reference to Stanley Cavell." But another footnote in the same essay also has an overt reference to Cavell.<sup>3</sup> Rothman is never happier than when making overt or covert references to Stanley Cavell. Even *The Murderous Gaze* evidences a desire to follow a Cavellian line, however unlikely to his purpose.

A film like *It Happened One Night* opens with an announcement that it is a comedy, that love will not finally be denied (of course, we don't know what kind of comedy it is going to turn out to be; indeed, the world never before knew the genre of comedy that Capra's film inaugurates). (134)

As I have argued, the Hitchcock thriller has always borne a close and complex relationship to the "comedy of remarriage" initiated by *It Happened One Night*. (178)

Even after one has read Cavell's book, this statement makes one sit up—Frank Capra's comedy of what? You mean his film about two people who meet on the road, fall in love, and marry? Rothman's not infrequent willingness to take silliness to madness is displayed in this line:

All the pre-Hitchcock films that develop and explore [Cary] Grant's screen persona, even remarriage comedies such as *The Awful Truth*, *Bringing Up Baby*, *His Girl Friday*, and *The Philadelphia Story*, play on our dark suspicion that Grant may be murderous by nature. (122)

The "murderous gaze" is evidently the critic's own, seeing murderousness everywhere.

But Cavell is a hard act to follow; his critical method is idiosyncratic enough to make disci-

pleship next to impossible. Rothman's book is, in any case, very unlike Cavell's, even in its absurd overuse of such favorite Cavell terms as "acknowledge" and "declare." Gusts of strong and tepid winds characterize Cavell's book and, heaven knows, they blow every which way. Rothman's book is very regular—five long chapters on five films, *The Lodger* (1926), *Murder!* (1930), *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (1935), *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943), and *Psycho* (1960)—and its tone is very even, but there is an odd, suppressed fury underneath it. Cavell puts the "I" at the center of his book; Rothman suppresses the "I" until his "Postscript," where it emerges to make monstrously egotistical claims.

It must be admitted that, sentence by sentence, Rothman writes better than the other Harvard writers. But the tasks he sets himself are lesser ones than theirs. He has no theoretical introduction and proposes no method. Each of his long chapters describes the film in question, often with crucial omissions, at great length. It is easier to write flowingly if one is not encumbered by theoretical concerns and if one does not justify anything, or even argue, but just describes. Rothman does interpret Hitchcock, but he does this in the course of his ongoing descriptions. This is a way to disown the responsibility to present and defend an interpretation by mapping it onto the film itself. Thus Rothman's metaphysical and psychological statements are short, declarative sentences intermixed with his descriptive "he says this," "she does that" sentences. This is a clever rhetorical strategy, at least for unwary readers, for the massive descriptions give one the sense of seeing the film again (sometimes), while the interspersed metaphysics and psychology turn that experience in Rothman's interpretive direction. One might call this manipulation; Rothman does not argue or propose, he recycles the film through the reader, rewriting his memory of it.

How specifically is this done? What does Rothman "add" to his apparently simple descriptions? He adds interpretations of characters' motives, psychological states, actions, as well as his metaphysics of "acknowledgment." Cavell does this sometimes, but Rothman does it pervasively: "film criticism" for him is very largely the matter of deciding why characters do things and what their psychic-spiritual states are. Rothman "fills out" the films, by

filling in their gaps and ambiguities with specific psychological contents. As noted, he does this not separately and in the open, but by alternating them with his action descriptions as simple statements. Rothman does not analyze; essentially he has written a novel based on each film.

She has had her fill of Norman, and declares this encounter, and indeed their entire relationship, closed. In the warm glow of her pity, Marion feels beholden to this hopeless case, edified by this example of the resilience of the human spirit. She does not regard Norman as her equal. For example, she does not view Norman as a man she could desire or who could desire her. Even as she thanks him for imparting a lesson in humanity, she summarily dismisses him. . . . But in his voice can also be heard disdain for this woman who is oblivious of her own hypocrisy, and oblivious as well of his intelligence. (286)

"People always call a madhouse 'someplace,' don't they? Put her in 'some place'." These words, spoken as if to no one present, once again imply that Marion is just like all the rest, not prepared to acknowledge him. (285)

To these novels Rothman has added one new character: Hitchcock himself. Quite consistently with his approach, Rothman deals with questions of authorship and creativity by making Hitchcock, the actual Hitchcock, a character in his films. If Rothman has written a dark metaphysical novel then Hitchcock is its Miltonic Satan and God. Rothman's Hitchcock does not tip his hand around every corner of his universe, but only at certain moments, which are the cream of his creationist jest.

The motives of characters and their interactions; the transactions between Hitchcock, his characters, and his audiences; the critic's relation to the films, to Hitchcock, and, presumably, to readers are governed by a protocol: that of "acknowledgment." Demands for, refusals or exchanges of acknowledgment also enlist the cognate terms "(to) declare" and "(to) author." Thus a particular killing by Norman Bates "declares" this or that, while he is the "author" of his murders and demands "acknowledgment" for them. This bizarre and opaque terminology is apparently necessary if Rothman is to bring Hitchcock into his creation in the way that he wishes; for in his book every killer is an artist and an author, that is, a stand-in for Hitchcock, seeking acknowledgment for his handiwork, while Hitchcock himself is "murderous" toward the viewer if

acknowledgment is refused him.

[*The Lodger*] calls for and authorizes an attentive reading that acknowledges its authorship. Hitchcock does not avenge himself on viewers who acknowledge him; he exempts them from his indictment. (52)

Indeed, if things go well for him, Hitchcock can be quite sunny.

[In *The Thirty-Nine Steps*] Hitchcock too must be satisfied with the fate of his subjects: the Professor's challenge to his authorship has been defeated and punished, and those who acknowledge his power have been saved. . . . Why should Hitchcock not give his blessing to those who identify with Hannay, who join in affirming the author of this world? (172)

But if things do not go Hitchcock's way, it can be pretty hard on all concerned.

[On *Psycho*] the intruder intends to teach Marion a lesson [and] stands before her demanding acknowledgment. . . . In her hubris, Marion has denied the world in the person of Norman Bates, denied Hitchcock, and denied us. Now we are joined with Hitchcock in subjecting her to a twofold demonstration. First, she is compelled to acknowledge this apparition as her own projection. Second, she is compelled to acknowledge this nightmare figure also as real, beyond her control. . . . In the scene that ensues, we join with Hitchcock in subjecting Marion to a savage assault unprecedented in its violence, while Hitchcock also avenges himself on those who fail to acknowledge him. (301)

It is sometimes quite unclear in Rothman who is doing what to whom and who is acknowledging it or failing to do so. What "acknowledgment" means is a constant puzzle. Rothman uses the word in many different contexts and for many different relationships: character-character, author-character, character-viewer, author-viewer, critic-character, critic-author, critic-reader, etc. It is his central critical term, he uses it over 75 times in the first half of the book alone; but he never defines it or discusses the word at all. He writes as though we all know the word already and as though its meaning were clear whatever the context in which it is used. What does it mean to say that Marion is not prepared to acknowledge Norman? Or that Handell Fain dies unacknowledged in *Murder!*? Is this a metaphysical statement, a psychological one, a sexual one, a social one? Is her failure to acknowledge him the reason that Norman kills Marion?

Rothman sometimes includes visual descriptions in his running account of the five films, sometimes duplicating one or more of the

many stills that are reprinted from the film, sometimes not. Since his description is so full—concerning the parts of the films he deals with—the stills often seem superfluous, an alternate text rather than integrations into the main one. Rothman's visual analyses tend to be the standard ones, familiar to anyone who knows the Hitchcock literature. For example, he makes much of the identical placement in the frame of Uncle Charlie and young Charlie in our first views of them and later in *Shadow of a Doubt*. But this has been explored by every Hitchcock critic I can remember from Rohmer and Chabrol in 1957 to Raymond Durnat in 1974. Rothman writes as though he is discovering these things for the first time, but he is not. The same is true of the framings of Norman and Marion in their discussion scenes, including the careful handling of their reflections in the mirror. Besides the published accounts, these visual patterns are familiar to teachers and students who discover or rediscover them perennially in their lectures and papers. Rothman chooses to devote 25 large pages and some 75 stills to the shower sequence in *Psycho*, one of the most analyzed and reproduced in the entire film literature. There are reproductions of the sequence in Truffaut, in Yvonne Rainer's *Work, 1961-1973*, and, of course, in Richard J. Anobile's 1300-plus frame blow-ups from the film, admittedly some of them cropped. Given these, Rothman's 215 frame reproductions from the film seem like conspicuous consumption.

In his extraordinary "Postscript," the most pretentious piece of film criticism I have read, Rothman confronts "the tyranny of the Hitchcock legend head on" (342). Rothman is disgusted by the public tributes to Hitchcock, which sought to make him "one of us." That this is the supremely unpalatable designation for Rothman says more about him than about the ordinary mortals who presumed to praise his hero. Rothman talks about Hitchcock in the almost purely projective terms reserved for an ego ideal.

Hitchcock's silences mocked those who took for granted that they knew him when they had not penetrated his most elementary secrets, not escaped his simplest traps, not even recognized his disdain or his anguish. (344)

Rothman builds inevitably to "declaring" his own role in the "acknowledgment" of Hitchcock.

Clearly, in the readings that make up this

book, I cast myself as the figure who steps forward to answer Hitchcock's call for acknowledgment. . . . When I say that my writing aspires to answer Hitchcock's call for acknowledgment, I also mean that Hitchcock's films call for writing such as this, even call it forth. If Hitchcock is secret author of his own obituary, my writings are equally projections of his authorship; only they are authorized not by his words but by his silences. The Hitchcock who emerges in these readings could well have written them himself. (346)

In a most unfortunate ad campaign for this book, the Harvard University Press has advertised it in *The New Republic* and elsewhere as "One book Hitchcock might have written."<sup>4</sup> This is unseemly for any press to say, but for a university press it is inexcusable. The attribution of opinions to those who cannot refute them, including the dead, is low enough; what bothers me even more is the utter misstatement of the goal of criticism.

Rothman continues, rather astoundingly outdoing himself in the assertions of an unbridled ego.

Yet the Hitchcock for whom I speak, who calls forth my words, is also my creation. I am his character and he is mine; the boundary between my identity and his is unfathomable, like that between Norman Bates and "mother." That the voice speaking for Hitchcock's films here is also possessed by them is what is most deeply Hitchcockian about the book, what Hitchcock would have most appreciated, I believe, what might have moved him beyond words. (346)

If Rothman steps forward to acknowledge Hitchcock, "where that calls for discovering his life's blood on every frame of his films" he does it "not for Hitchcock but for his audience, which stands in need of instruction in viewing his films" (347). Not surprisingly, given the rest, Rothman feels a need to explain why

Hitchcock died without reading a word of this book. I sent him no part of it, although for some months several chapters were in virtually final form. (347)

What I most feared, I now believe, was that he would acknowledge my writing. I was afraid for myself and for him. (347)

Besides the call for acknowledgment, Hitchcock's work reveals a "dread, and avoidance, of acknowledgment," which Rothman deduces that he must share.

Rothman is strong on acknowledgment in the metaphysical sense but quite weak on acknowledgment in the mundane sense of

taking note of prior work on a subject. Truffaut is insulted for, of course, failing to acknowledge Hitchcock in their interactions; Wood is mentioned in passing; Durgnat, Rohmer & Chabrol, Andrew Sarris, Peter Bogdanovich, Ian Cameron, Godard, etc., etc. are not mentioned at all.

Guzzetti's book is a useful contribution to film scholarship. Its detailed presentation of the script of *Two or Three Things I Know About Her* (1967) is an invaluable tool for the close study of this important film. It is difficult to imagine a future analysis of the film that will not benefit from this book. It is also a natural for classroom use; but not at \$28.50. It should be issued soon in a paperback edition for under \$10.

The script is printed in French and English in facing columns on the lefthand page; a commentary on the film appears on the righthand page. The length of each shot in minutes and seconds is noted as well as cumulative film time elapsed at the end of each shot. Guzzetti divides the film into eighteen sequences and numbers the shots of each sequence; for example, the last shot of the carwash sequence (Sequence 12) is designated 12.29. Guzzetti's sequence division is frequently arbitrary, particularly its allocation of construction shots and other documentary material to one sequence rather than the next or rather than making them separate sequences. Shots 5.2 to 5.6 are an example; they belong neither to the sequence shot of the day-care center/brothel (5.1) nor to the dress shop sequence (Sequence 6). Such divisions bear upon interpretation of the film, they *are* interpretations of it, and will be challenged by other readings. But Guzzetti's division will almost certainly become standard because it makes precise reference to a highly complex film simple and quick.

Most usefully, Guzzetti has reproduced at least one frame from each shot of the film, printed in the exact Techniscope proportions and in black-and-white. Sometimes there are two frames from the shot to show a change of glance or some other development; there are eleven frames from 5.1, to indicate camera movement and reframing in this long sequence shot. He even includes the exact musical notation for Godard's excerpts from Beethoven's String Quartets #16 and #4! Much less well

rendered are camera movements, indicated very approximately, and sounds, admittedly difficult to describe but essential to *Two or Three Things*.\*

On the debit side, Guzzetti has unaccountably omitted a list of credits for the film. He should also have included somewhere a plot summary of the film, preferably in outline form, perhaps as an appendix. He might have included a simple map of Paris, indicating where the “ensembles” of the film are located.† He should most definitely have included the *Le Nouvelle observateur* articles on housewife prostitution that were the point of departure for the film. This material would have increased the value of the book for students and specialists alike; a book devoted to a single film, a large and expensive book at that, requires such essential items.

The book’s commentary is far more open to question than its presentation of script. Guzzetti describes the method of his commentary in a seven-page introduction. His approach

has a character that is unavoidably shaped by the film it takes for an example. Because *2 ou 3 choses* presents itself, as I have said, as built from images and sounds, it encourages and supports an analysis along the same lines. (5)

Guzzetti has referred earlier in the introduction to “a marked weakening in the role of narrative” in Godard’s films from the mid-sixties on.

Godard’s slackening interest in narrative and his growing absorption in the political come to a head in his thirteenth feature film, *2 ou 3*

\*James Roy MacBean’s article on *Two or Three Things* (*Film Quarterly*, Summer 1968) makes the film’s near-constant noise its central theme. First viewers of the film are still often struck most by its use of sound. Guzzetti’s commentary makes little of this feature of the film and even then sees it as impediment to hearing the lines or as a kind of atmosphere. The book carefully reclaims every line of dialogue except one (14.19); but this makes the film more lucid, more totally accessible than viewing the film can be, at least without subtitles.

†Godard shot the film so as not to show the skyline and buildings of the old Paris, a matter requiring some care. *Alphaville* (1965) presents an imaginary Paris of the future by selectively shooting the Paris of its day. “Le Nouveau monde,” in *RoGoPag* (1962) shoots the Paris of its day unselectively and calls it the future. *Two or Three Things* presents a Paris of its day that is already the future and becoming more so, a more dialectical conception than the sci-fi plans of the earlier films.

*choses* . . . [This film] includes a significant number of shots and texts, extending from the first sequence to the last, whose presence is not explicable in terms of the narrative. This material, unlike its counterparts in the earlier films, comprises a major element in the structure of the whole. Accordingly, the burden of the spectacle is shifted from the narrative to the image; the film is, as it were, built from sounds and images rather than story. (3)

Guzzetti makes this sense of the film, itself unsupported and underived but simply announced as fact at the outset of the introduction, the basis for his mode of commentary.

As for the particular character of my analysis, it is shaped in part by the decision to follow in my commentary the succession of shots and sounds in the film. If I had to describe this procedure in a word, I should call it “empirical,” since it begins from the organization of the seen and the heard. (5)

Guzzetti also calls this method “interpreting what the film signifies at each moment” (5).

Whether or not it is inherent in his method, Guzzetti’s “moment by moment” approach in fact leads him to ignore the overall structures of *Two or Three Things*, a serious failing. One example is narrativity itself, which can only be considered from a holistic standpoint.\* From this point of view alone can one comprehend: ellipses, implied events, implied relations between events; relations between discourse (sounds and images) and story; meanings, themes, connotations deriving from these. Even departures from narrative can be authoritatively identified and evaluated only from the standpoint of the narrative as a whole. This includes those ambiguous instances that one finds in *Two or Three Things*: is a street or a poster shot narrative or non-narrative? It also includes determining those non-narrative figures that relate connotatively to the narrative—some of the film’s construction shots look like human sexual activity, etc. These and other shots may be placed in relation to narrative sequences so as to assume meanings that other such shots do not have.

Other structures and qualities of the whole film are beyond the reach of Guzzetti’s method also: visual-sound constructions as a whole,

\*Note the circularity of the argument: Guzzetti derives his method from the assumed unimportance of narrative in *Two or Three Things*; that method in turn makes consideration of narrative difficult or impossible.

including the relations of the off-screen voice to the narrative as a whole.

An equally serious defect of Guzzetti's commentary is that, like "empirical" approaches generally, it is blind to its own assumptions and standards and to the partiality of its interests, what semioticians call its principle(s) of pertinence. Guzzetti stresses that his approach is shaped by the film itself, that it begins from the film's organization of the seen and the heard, that it is empirical. This presents the commentary as an accurate reflection of the whole film and makes the film itself responsible for the commentary. The standards and assumptions that shape the commentary are denied, as are the gaps and omissions inherent in any reading.

A commentary's distribution of attention to the various parts of the work in question is always an index of its values and assumptions. In Guzzetti's commentary, Sequences 8 (coffee-cup) and 12 (carwash) get far more attention than the other sequences, about one-fourth of the commentary as a whole. The first half of the film, Sequences 1-12, receives about twice as much attention as the second half, Sequences 13-18. Guzzetti is aware of this imbalance and addresses it in a four-page "Digression" following his commentary on Sequence 12.

The service station scene is, in my view, one of the richest and most beautiful in the cinema. Its every detail of imagery, phrase, and construction is brilliantly imagined and executed. It not only succeeds in mobilizing, elaborating, and advancing the entire complex of events and ideas developed throughout the first half of the film, but does so with precision, economy, and inventiveness. It is a dazzling achievement.

Even after many viewings, I cannot honestly say that I find anything that follows Sequence 12 remotely so good or interesting as it—or, for that matter, as a number of other sequences in the first half of the film. It appears that by this point the film has exhausted its repertoire of ideas and spent its energy. . . . On the whole, the second half of the film, despite many strong details, is thin, flat, and rather boring. Ideas often seem muddled, and the writing and direction are sometimes shapeless and hesitant. In short, with the end of Sequence 12, the film loses its sense of forward movement. (226)

One is surprised at the commentary's imbalance and at Guzzetti's explanation for it. Most traditions of commentary in other disciplines (literary study, art history) require one to deal with the whole text. If the text is worth commentary at all, the critic must comment on the

entire work. No site of the signifier abandoned, says Barthes, admittedly an ideal. One is tempted to say that it is not works of art that run out of energy, but commentaries on them that do.

Guzzetti's explanation makes one realize that he is not so far from the other Harvard film critics as one at first supposed. He is committed to Godard's political films, he is interested in genuine cinematic modernism; above all he attempts to theorize his practice as commentator and thereby to lay open his method to the reader's scrutiny, making his criticism already, in part, a self-criticism. But behind this commentary, as behind the other Harvard Film Studies, stands the man of taste and judgment, telling us what is good and what is bad in works of art; what is boring, scintillating, dull, brilliant. The sign of this dispensation is above all *dividing up* the work, not to understand all of it, but to determine before analysis what is to be addressed and what is to be discarded. There are reasons and justifications but behind these stands, ultimately, the man. The merit of Guzzetti's book in this respect is to attempt a theoretical justification, necessarily doomed to fail, and thereby to call attention to the ideology involved.

I have not hesitated to venture value judgments about many portions and aspects of the film. For example, I criticize Sequence 15 for being thin and tedious and praise Sequence 12 for its complexity and beauty . . . the basis of my critical remarks is the measurement of details against what I take to be the film's dominant and successful line. These issues coalesce around the judgment, which I make explicit in the section headed Digression, that what follows Sequence 12 is on the whole not so good as what precedes it. While I argue this judgment at some length—indeed, it is woven into the entire fabric of my analysis—I do not claim to justify the values on which it is based, for I believe this to be a major, separate, and largely theoretical task. (5-6)

Guzzetti's admission stops the discussion. If his justifications for his value judgments lie elsewhere, beyond our attention, they cannot be discussed.

Guzzetti shares with his colleagues a taste for philosophy; that is what he most often looks for in *Two or Three Things*. (His commentary had its roots in a 1971-72 study group that included Cavell and Rothman.) Sequence 8 and Sequence 12 are by far the most philosophical of the film; it is they that get the most

attention and it is their philosophical issues that are mainly discussed. That this gives the entire commentary a bias and excludes other modes of criticism is a truism; every mode of criticism does this. The error lies in presenting particular, partial criticism as general, universal criticism, in which case exclusions become banishments or suppressions. All the Harvard Film Studies do this. But methods of criticism and particularly, one supposes, philosophy, may miss the materiality of the film in favor of an idealized meaning. In his "Digression," Guzzetti puts together the philosophical questions his commentary is interested in with his sense of the film's "loss of energy" in its second half.

In the first half of *2 ou 3 choses*, the sense of forward movement results from the struggle in one sequence toward defining a problem that is elaborated in a later one: the messages from the beyond, the possibility of talking together, *ensemble*, the barrier of subjectivity, the situation of the director, the nature of image and narrative, and so on. In Sequence 12 the summary text of Commentary 23 leads to a new perspective in a way that we recognize from the equally dense cafe scene, which at its conclusion promises an "apparition de la conscience." That promise, which the combination of text and image in 8.27-8.29 simultaneously fulfills and criticizes, is reformulated in Sequence 12, where (to put it schematically) the double meaning of the French word *conscience* becomes—or yields—the dichotomy *politique/poetique*. . . . [A]s the film unfolds from this point, it continues to back away: although Godard recognizes the compatibility of the *poetique* and the *politique* as problematical, he never addresses it in anything like the depth that he does, say, the problem of language or of talking together or of trying to imagine what the "apparition de la conscience" might be and look like. In other words, he never deals openly with the scene's incipient Marxism. (226-227)

It seems that Guzzetti is asking the wrong questions of the work. He expects it to answer the philosophic questions it poses and to solve the political problems it poses; therefore he is disappointed when the film fails to do this. Of course it is the latter half of the work that most bears his disapproval because it is there that the failures he perceives ripen and become definitive. If one sees the first half of a film as posing problems and if one treats it as a linear argument, then one will be disappointed with the second half, which fails to satisfy these expectations.

It seems to me that Godard does not resolve his philosophical puzzles with philosophy, but with cinema. As he speaks of isolation between people and of the need to break out of this, the film shows a series of shots of people immersed in their own solitudes in a cafe, yet aware of the others around. The coffee cup shots suggest a solitary absorption with oneself, although whose coffee cup this is—the young man's, Godard's, or the viewer's—is left ambiguous. Social ambiguities are also suggested: does she want me to speak to her?, Do I wish to speak to her?, Do I wish to speak to him?, Does he wish me to speak to him?, and: Is she a prostitute?, Do I want him for a customer or a friend, or a lover, or nothing? Toward the end of the sequence, the voice-over speaks of a rising of consciousness. Godard achieves this cinematically, not philosophically, by cutting to four fluid, somewhat repetitive shots of Juliette walking outside. Aided by Beethoven's String Quartet #16, the passage suggests a rising up out of the coffee cup and the isolation/immobility of the cafe into motion, space, joy. Even if that too is solitary, the sense of emergence into the world from the prison of the self, and into clarity from ambiguity, is achieved strikingly. The passage always works as cinema; its philosophic problem remains unresolved. Likewise the film's political problem: it does not pose and then fail to answer a question, it poses the wrong question throughout by seeking a politics based on *conscience* alone. Such, in any case, is the perspective of Godard's later films.

Although his subject is one of the most written-about of film-makers, and *Two or Three Things* one of his most discussed films, Guzzetti includes no bibliography. He occasionally cites a previous Godard critic like Richard Roud, but only to borrow a Godard quote not for a judgment or analysis. As noted, William Rothman also ignores previous writers on Hitchcock. He too has no bibliography, either on Hitchcock generally or on the five films he discusses.

There is less material on romantic comedy than on Godard and Hitchcock, but there is some and Cavell cites almost none of it. Of course he has no bibliography. Mainly Cavell cites himself; his book is studded with references to his other books and articles—in the body of the text and in asterisked material at the bottom of the page, some of it quite exten-

sive. The index to *The Pursuits of Happiness* includes 19 references to Stanley Cavell, but I counted 45 references to his other works in the book. Rothman and Guzzetti both cite Cavell frequently in the body of their texts and in notes; they also cite each other.

This system of references combined with the striking absence of references to other writers suggests that prior film criticism is not to be taken seriously. In effect, it denies the existence of film study as a field. The Harvard Film Studies act out a myth of the birth of film criticism. Little or no prior work is worthy; the true word, film criticism itself, begins now with these books.

#### NOTES

1. "North by Northwest, in *Critical Inquiry*. Volume 7, Number 4 (Summer 1981), p. 776.
2. *Film Quarterly*, Vol. XXV, No. 4 (Summer 1972), pp. 28-29.
3. *Quarterly Review of Film Studies*. Volume 1, Number 2 (May 1976), p. 139, notes 4 and 12. The latter says: "This 'philosophical authority' is, of course, not guaranteed by Merleau-Ponty's credentials as a professional academic philosopher of high standing. On the basis of Merleau-Ponty's prose, I am convinced of his understanding of what the practice of philosophy has been, historically, and convinced that his work in turn occupies a significant place in the history of philosophy. The only major American writer on film who has a comparable relationship to philosophy is Stanley Cavell."
4. *The New Republic*, February 17, 1982, p. 27.