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THE "I" OF THE CAMERA
Essays in Film Criticism, History, and Aesthetics

WILLIAM ROTHMAN

The right of the University of Cambridge to print and sell all manner of books was granted by Henry VIII in 1534. The University has printed and published continuously since 1584.

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To Kitty
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In 1982, Hitchcock – The Murderous Gaze was published, the culmination of a project that had occupied me for ten years.* During that period, I had published other essays on films and filmmakers. These had appeared in widely scattered journals, and at the time I submitted the Hitchcock manuscript I resolved to collect them in one volume, along with a number of papers presented at conferences but never published. The "I" of the Camera is the product of that resolution, although half its essays were written in the intervening five years, in part with the aim of making the volume less a collection and more a real book.

There are differences of style and emphasis between the earlier and later essays, but they are unified by a consistent reliance on the close reading of sequences to back up the claims made about the films, a consistent practice of close reading, and a consistent commitment to reflecting on what that practice reveals about film. Taken together, these essays survey film history from early Griffith almost to the present day. From this survey, a picture of the history of film emerges, at least in outline – a picture that acknowledges the centrality of films that reflect philosophically on the mysterious powers and limits of their medium.

Through extended readings of five characteristic films, Hitchcock – The Murderous Gaze attempted to arrive at an understanding of Hitchcock's authorship and its place in the history of film. At the same time, the book was an investigation of the conditions of film authorship, a critique (in the Kantian sense) of film as a medium of authorship. However incessantly the death of the author may be proclaimed, the fact is that there are film authors. But what is it to be an author in the medium of film? What is authorship, what is a medium, what is film?

In its reflections on authorship, *The "I" of the Camera* is a companion piece to *Hitchcock – The Murderous Gaze*. It contains essays on two Hitchcock films ("Vertigo: The unknown woman in Hitchcock" and "North by Northwest: Hitchcock’s monument to the Hitchcock film") that complement and extend the readings in the Hitchcock book. It also contains essays that attempt to sketch perspicuous pictures of the work of a number of other exemplary film authors, most notably D. W. Griffith ("D. W. Griffith and the birth of the movies," "Judith of Bethulia," and "True heart Griffith"), Howard Hawks ("Howard Hawks and Bringing Up Baby" and "To have and have not adapted a film from a novel"), Charles Chaplin ("The ending of City Lights") and Jean Renoir ("The filmmaker in the film: Octave and the rules of Renoir’s game" and "The River").

In negotiating the treacherous conceptual waters surrounding authorship, both books draw continually on the analysis of the concept of expression worked out in "Three Essays in Aesthetics," my doctoral dissertation in philosophy.* To say that Hitchcock expresses himself in his films is to say that he is revealed by them and also that he declares himself in them. Beyond this, through his acts of making films, he fulfills himself, becomes more fully who he is, creates himself. It is possible to know Hitchcock through his films because he is the creation of the films as surely as he is their creator. But this does not mean that the Hitchcock made knowable in these films is a fiction of the films’ texts, that the real Alfred Hitchcock remains unknowable. The Hitchcock the films make knowable is the human being of flesh and blood. (This is part of what Hitchcock’s famous cameo appearances declare.)

That we may know Hitchcock through his films may seem impossible, but it is no more impossible than that human beings are capable of expressing themselves in any other medium, are capable of expressing themselves at all. It is a fact that human beings are capable of revealing and declaring and creating themselves. Yet this fact is also a mystery. *The "I" of the Camera* takes this mystery to be, historically, one of the central themes of film. Hitchcock’s films, and the other films I write about, develop this theme by creating intimate, mysterious relationships between the camera and the camera’s "subjects," the human beings who dwell within the world of the film (they are also the stars who present themselves to the camera and are revealed by it), and equally intimate and mysterious relationships between the camera and the author, the "I" the camera represents. (The camera also represents the viewer. Does it, then, always serve two masters?)

Authorship is only one of the central concerns of The "I" of the Camera. Two essays ("Virtue and villainy in the face of the camera" and "Pathos and transfiguration in the face of the camera: A reading of Stella Dallas) study the ways in which theatrical melodrama is transformed by the role of the camera and what that transformation reveals about film and its traumatic break with theater. "Red Dust: The erotic screen image" reflects on the erotic dimension of film's awesome power. "Alfred Guzzetti's Family Portrait Sittings" explores the camera's role in cinéma-vérité and the relationship between "documentary" and "fiction." "Hollywood reconsidered: Reflections on the classical American cinema," which opens this volume with an overview of the history of film, addresses the question (among others), What is American about American film?

By publishing all of these essays under one cover, I hope to make them readily available and also more approachable, for although their prose is untechnical and as clear as I know how to make it, their way of thinking about film, which is also a way of viewing film, a way of viewing film as thinking, will be unfamiliar to many readers. My hope is that reading the essays together will help impart familiarity with their way of thinking. But another aim in putting these essays together is to make their way of thinking less familiar — more provocative, more critical, more demanding. This is writing that calls upon the reader to think about movies, which means, in part, thinking about the hold movies have over us. This in turn means, in part, thinking about why we resist thinking about movies, why such resistance is, as it were, natural. (This thought, too, it may be natural to resist.)

Most of what I understand about resistance to thinking about movies I learned the old-fashioned way, in the classroom. But it was also in the classroom that I learned that this resistance may be overcome, or, even better, put to use.

All of the pages that follow bear the mark of almost twenty years of lecturing about film, beginning at Harvard when I was a graduate student in philosophy, then continuing at the University of California at Berkeley and Wellesley College. I was Assistant Professor in Cinema Studies at New York University before I returned to Harvard, where I taught film history, criticism, and theory from 1976 to 1984, the period in which most of these essays were written. My practice in the classroom is an essential source of this writing, and it is important that I characterize it.

In a typical classroom session, I spend at least half the time going through one or more sequences with an analyzer projector or video player that allows me to stop the film at any time, fixing the image and keeping it on the screen. Taking the passage line by line, gesture by gesture, expression by expression, shot by shot, I speak about what
is on the screen (and what is significantly absent) at each moment, what it reveals, what motivates it, and how it affects the viewer’s experience. I speak about what every viewer sees and also about what I have come to see that other viewers may not see (Hitchcock films, especially, are crisscrossed with private jokes and other "secrets" that are nonetheless in plain view). In short, I perform a reading of the sequence, moment by moment, and I invite others in the room to interject at any time with a remark or a question that adds to or revises or challenges my reading or proposes an alternative reading.

Usually the sequence is from a film I have viewed with the class the night before, have read about in the critical literature, and have previously known (viewed with an audience and also studied, moment by moment, on an editing table). Increasingly, over the years, it is a film I have also previously taught. I enter the classroom already knowing much of what I am going to say. I am already prepared with a reading, but I am also always prepared to revise that reading by testing it in class. In the classroom, I am also always thinking — thinking out loud in front of the class and in front of a film that is holding all of us in its spell even as I speak. I am making discoveries — and inviting others to make discoveries, and they are making discoveries — here and now in the face of the power of film. (And the reading I have already prepared is itself woven from discoveries originally made, or at least made to be tested, in the classroom.) The deepest of these discoveries are about the mysterious hold film has over viewers. They are about what viewers ordinarily pass over in silence, and about that silence.

What goes on in the darkness of a movie theater, like what goes on behind the closed doors of a classroom, is open to all who are present, yet is at the same time intimate and private. Ordinarily, even when a film ends and the lights go on and we resume our ordinary lives and our ordinary conversations, we do not break the silence of our communion in the face of the film. Films speak to us in an intimate language of indirectness and silence. To speak seriously about a film, we must speak about that silence, its motivations and depths; we must speak about that to which the silence gives voice; we must give voice to that silence; we must let that silence speak for itself. This is an important part of what I learned — and learned to achieve (at least when the stars were with me) — while thinking out loud in front of a class.

In the classroom, we are all engaged in a common enterprise. I am the lecturer, but I am also a student being initiated, initiating myself, in thinking about film. Over the years, the thinking that goes on in the classroom has fed innumerable conversations outside the classroom. These conversations have deepened the sense of a common enterprise and in turn fed the thinking in the classroom. And it is from this
thinking and talking and listening in and out of school that the writing in this book emerged.

In a sense, this writing attempts to recapture the magic of those hours in class and those conversations out of school. It is animated by a wish that underlies all writing, perhaps, and is certainly a wish (the wish?) that underlies film: the wish to keep the past before us, however inadequate we may be to bring it back to life. Yet in another sense those classroom sessions and conversations, however magical, were only rehearsals for this writing. Indeed, what made them magical was never separable from the fact of my writing, from its promise that I was committed to thinking things through, to working toward formulations that, however subject to revision, however provisional, I would un provisionally be prepared to call my own, to make available, to publish.

My authority in the classroom has always borrowed on this promise, as has my participation in the conversations that have sustained my thinking, conversations inspired by the shared vision of a community of writers, understood in the widest sense of men and women dedicated to making their mark. Such a promise can be kept, such a debt made good, only by writing.

Writing must establish its own authority, but writing with authority about film poses particular problems, problems that are at once literary and philosophical. Thinking out loud in front of a classroom, one can trust to the film itself to make everyone present mindful of what a film is. The written word cannot in this way join writer and reader in the face of the film. Writing can only invoke (call upon the reader to remember) or evoke (call upon the reader to imagine) the power of film and the particularity of an individual moment on film. In attempting this, the writer’s primary tool is description, although frame enlargements provide a useful supplement.

In class, there are occasions when I stop the film in order to speak and other occasions when I stop the film in order to remain silent, allowing the moment to resonate in everyone’s thoughts. (Often I do not know before I push the button whether I am going to speak or remain silent.) In any truly artful “sequence reading” performed in the classroom, one speaks only when the silence itself calls for giving voice to it. When the silence speaks in its own voice, the art is in listening. Every such masterful sequence reading is a study in the limits of what can be said. It is also a study in the limits of what goes without saying. What the possibility of such mastery reveals is that the limits of language and the limits of film coincide. That is, there is a boundary between them, and it is possible for a sequence reading to discover this boundary, even survey part of it.
When one performs a sequence reading in the classroom, there is a clear distinction between speaking and being silent, a distinction drawn automatically, as it were, every time one opens one's mouth. In writing about a sequence, however, even when the words are supplemented by frame enlargements, it is necessary to describe what is on the screen at a particular moment in order to make a remark about it at all or even in order to let it pass without remark. In writing, description is a form of speech, but it is also a form of silence. In order for writing to survey the boundary between speech and silence, that boundary – like the power of film and the particularity of the moment of film – must be invoked or evoked by the writing itself, by its voices and silences.

The sequence readings in this book set this challenge for themselves: to describe every individual moment in all its dramatic power and its psychological depth while also conveying the power and depth of the succession of moments out of which the sequence – and ultimately the whole film – is composed.

The challenge is also to make every individual remark – every philosophical remark occasioned by a particular moment – rigorously accountable both to the film and to my own experience while also making these remarks succeed each other with inexorable logic. The goal is a piece of writing that sustains each of its interweaving lines of thought until it comes to an end, perhaps by reaching a conclusion. That it is possible for a sequence reading to sustain thinking that is at once spontaneous and strictly logical is a significant and inherently unpredictable fact about writing, about thinking, and about film. To the degree that I have achieved such writing in *Hitchcock – The Murderous Gaze* and in the present essays, I have made the sequence-reading form my own, one that enables me to express myself, to say what I have to say about the films I write about. And what I have to say about these films is that they have something to say and that they say it.

A deconstructionist, in rejecting the possibility of such an achievement, might well embrace the sequence reading as the ideal medium for demonstrating that film – like writing, like speech, like thought itself – can never be coherent, intact, whole, can never take full possession of its cacophony of silences and voices. My readings present an alternative to this skeptical vision (although I relish as much as any deconstructionist the opportunities for free association, epigrams, jokes, paradoxes, digressions, parenthetical remarks, and so on, afforded by the sequence-reading form).

When I read a sequence, I put my own words to the thoughts of the camera’s subjects and to the author’s thoughts. I give voice to these thoughts, although all I have to go on are the views framed by the
camera, views from which the author is absent and which present the camera's subjects only, as it were, from the outside. My assertions are claims to have achieved — and claims that the film has achieved — something that a skeptic would take to be impossible, and I make such claims in order to assert what I find most astonishing, revolutionary, transfiguring, about the films I study. At one level, this is their extreme self-consciousness, the depth of their thoughts about the "I" of the camera. As I read them, these films are thinking; they are thinking about thinking, and they are thinking about film, meditating on the powers and limits of their medium.

Film, a medium limited to surfaces, to the outer, the visible, emerges in these films' meditations as a medium of mysterious depths, of the inner, the invisible. "The human body is the best picture of the human soul," Wittgenstein writes in the *Philosophical Investigations*, expressing his wonder — wonder is always his starting point — that we have so much as the idea that other minds are inaccessible to us, separated from us by an unbridgeable barrier.* Wittgenstein's ambition is nothing less than to overcome skepticism by an acknowledgment of the everyday, effecting a fundamental transformation of the central tradition of Western thought. Film participates in this enterprise by demonstrating that the "barrier" of the movie screen — like the boundary between invisible and visible, inner and outer, subjective and objective, female and male, imaginary and real, silence and speech — is not really a barrier at all, however natural it may be to envision it as one, and by wondering what this "barrier" then is.

Acknowledgments

This book is deeply indebted to so many people that I cannot hope to present an accounting here. There are three people whom I must single out, however, for without them it would not exist at all.

Marian Keane was my close collaborator on almost every film course I taught at Harvard. Harvard called her my “Teaching Fellow,” but she was really my fellow teacher. Our almost daily conversations during the years I was writing these essays were essential, irreplaceable sources of energy and commitment and ideas, not to mention laughs. Every time I asked her to read a draft of an essay, I was rewarded (and the reader of this book will be rewarded) by her suggestions and criticisms. This book is also indebted to her writings about film, from which I have greatly profited, as have all her readers.

Stanley Cavell and I worked together extremely closely during the years I was teaching film at Harvard. We had innumerable conversations about film and related matters; we avidly read each other’s writing. Whenever we could, we attended each other’s classes, and we jointly taught a course on film comedy. Long before my return to Harvard, he had been my doctoral advisor, and I thought of myself—I still think of myself—as his student. But one thing one learns by being a student of Stanley Cavell is that a student is not a disciple. We have separate visions; we see eye-to-eye, but from different slants. That he has learned from me as I have learned from him, that he is as interested in my writing as I am in his, that a teacher is also a student, are also things he taught me, somehow having a faith in education so deep as to enable him to find a way to ram such ideas through my thick skull. This book owes an immeasurable debt to Stanley Cavell for his teaching, his writing, and the example he sets by the civilized way he lives his life.

Kitty Morgan, my wife, has likewise taught me more than I once thought it possible for one person to learn from another. She under-
stood before I did how important publishing this book was to me and would not allow me to abandon the project. Without the benefit of her encouragement, support, inspiration, and companionship, I would long ago have run out of spunk.
Chapter I. "Hollywood reconsidered: Reflections on the classical American cinema" was presented at the Symposium on Film and Intercultural Communication at the 1985 Hawaii International Film Festival. I wish to register my appreciation to Wimal Dissanayake and Paul Clark for inviting me to participate in that exceptionally rewarding dialogue between Asian and American filmmakers and critics. "Hollywood reconsidered" was published in the East-West Film Journal, 1(1):36–47 (December 1986).


Chapter III. "Judith of Bethulia" is a revised version of an unpublished paper initially written in 1976.

Chapter IV. I wrote "True heart Griffith" in 1987 to balance the otherwise skewed picture of Griffith that would have emerged from this book had my remarks on Judith of Bethulia and The Birth of a Nation been left to stand on their own.

Chapter V. "The ending of City Lights" was written in 1986 for inclusion in this volume.

Chapter VI. "Red Dust: The erotic screen image" is a version of a paper presented at the convention of the Society for Cinema Studies, 1976.

Chapter VII. "Virtue and villainy in the face of the camera" was presented at a 1982 symposium on film and melodrama at the Whitney Humanities Center, Yale University. Thanks to Professor Norton Batkin, who organized the event, the symposium was a challenging exchange of views.


Chapter IX. "Howard Hawks and Bringing Up Baby" was presented at the Film and the University Conference held in 1975 at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York.

Chapter XI. "The filmmaker in the film: Octave and the rules of Renoir's game" was written for a collection of essays edited by Ellen P. Wiese, who made a number of suggestions that led to many changes and improvements in the piece. The collection was published as a special issue of *The Quarterly Review of Film Studies*, 7(3):225–36 (Summer 1982).

Chapter XII. "The River," the latest of the essays in this book, was written as I was about to depart for my second visit to India. As a study of the cinema of Jean Renoir, it complements "The filmmaker in the film: Octave and the rules of Renoir's game." In its reflections on the ambiguous relationship between fiction and documentary in the medium of film, it is a companion piece to "Alfred Guzzetti's Family Portrait Sittings."


Chapter XIV. "North by Northwest: Hitchcock's monument to the Hitchcock film" was read at the 1980 session of the English Institute and published in *The North Dakota Quarterly*, 51(3):11–24 (Summer 1983).

America's experience of film is virtually unique in that in almost every other country, the impact of film cannot be separated from the process or at least the specter of Americanization. In America, film in no sense represents something external; it is simply American. But what is American about American film?

For a decade or so after the first film exhibitions in 1895, film shows presented a grab bag of travelogues, news films, filmed vaudeville acts, trick films, and gag films. The audience for film in America was disproportionately urban and was made up of recent immigrants, largely from eastern Europe. (The extent to which that was true is a subject of some contention among film historians.) In a sense, film has been involved, even in America, in a process of Americanization — "naturalizing" recent arrivals, teaching them how Americans live (and also breaking down regional differences, a process that television has taken over with a vengeance). However, following the sudden growth of nickelodeons in 1908, exhibitions were skewed to be more "upscale." The theatrical narrative — especially adaptations of "legitimate" novels and stage plays — became the dominant form of film in America, as it has remained to this day. Griffith's early films made for the Biograph Company were clearly intended for an audience of Americans who, like Griffith himself, could take for granted the fact, if not the meaning, of their Americanness.

Of course, the question of the Americanness of American films is complicated by the fact that in every period, foreigners played major roles in their creation. From Chaplin to Murnau to Lubitsch to Lang, Hitchcock, Renoir, Ophuls, Sirk, and Wilder, many of the most creative "American" directors have been non-Americans, at least when they began their Hollywood careers. This is almost equally true among stars, screenwriters, and producers. Indeed, there are entire genres of American film, such as film noir and the thirties horror film (with their influence of German expressionism), that can seem to be hardly American at all.

Reprinted: See "Notes on the essays."
But then again, virtually all Americans either are born as non-Americans or are recent descendants of non-Americans. One might think that there could be no such thing as a specifically American culture, but that is not the case. In the nineteenth century, for example, what is called transcendentalism — the philosophy of Emerson and Thoreau, the stories and novels of Hawthorne, Poe, Melville, and Henry James, the poetry of Whitman — is quintessentially American. However, this example underscores a distinctive feature of American intellectual and cultural life. There was no nineteenth-century French philosopher approaching Emerson's stature, but had there been, young French men and women today, as part of the experience of growing up French, would be taught his or her words by heart and learn to take them to heart. But in the process of growing up American, young men and women are not taught and do not in this way learn Emerson’s words or the value of those words. Americans, as compared with the English or French or Chinese or Japanese, are unconscious of the history of thought and artistic creation in their own country — unconscious of the sources, American and foreign, of their own ideas. Nonetheless, through mechanisms that are at times obscure, American ideas such as those of Emerson remain widespread and powerful in America. It is one of Stanley Cavell’s deepest insights, to which I shall return, that Hollywood film of the thirties and forties is rooted in, and must be understood in terms of, the American tradition of transcendentalism. That this is so and that Americans remain unconscious that it is so are equally significant facts about American culture.

Some may challenge the American pedigree of American transcendentalism, arguing that it is only a belated flaring of a worldwide Romantic movement whose genesis had nothing to do with America, but grew out of the Transcendental Idealism of the German Immanuel Kant, who in turn built on the work of Locke, Hume, and Berkeley in Great Britain, Leibniz in Germany, and Descartes in France. Emerson and Thoreau, voracious readers, were conscious of these sources, but conscious as well that although Romanticism was a source of their own thinking, America in turn was a central source of Romanticism. It is no accident that Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* was contemporaneous with the creation of the United States of America or that Descartes — Shakespeare’s contemporary — was writing at the time of the founding of the first French and English colonies in America.

The American and foreign roots of nineteenth-century American philosophy and literature cannot be disentangled: This is part of what makes that work so American, as is the fact that it takes the identity of America to be a central subject. What America is, where it has come from, and what its destiny may be are central themes through which American culture has continually defined itself. In the crucial period
from 1908 to the country's entrance into World War I, the period when narrative film was taking root, American film took up this question of America's identity, culminating in *The Birth of a Nation*, the film that definitively demonstrated to the American public the awesome power that movies could manifest. Indeed, in the work of D. W. Griffith, the dominant figure of American film during those years, America's destiny and the destiny of film were fatefully joined.

Griffith started out with an idealistic vision: America's destiny was to save the world, and film's destiny was to save America. By the time of *The Birth of a Nation*, however, he had drawn closer to the more ambiguous, darker vision of Hawthorne, Poe, and Melville. He had made the disquieting discovery that in affirming innocence, the camera violates innocence; however idealistic their intention, movies touch what is base as well as what is noble in our souls. This knowledge, with which he struggled his entire career, is Griffith's most abiding—if least recognized—legacy to American film.

In *Indian Film*, a landmark study, Erik Barnouw and S. Krishnaswamy shrewdly insist that neither historians nor sociologists can give us precise answers regarding the impact of film on society. They limit themselves to a qualified endorsement of the claim, made on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Indian film industry, that film "has unsettled the placid contentment of the Indian masses, it has filled the minds of youth with new longings, and is today a potent force in national life."* In other words, although we may well never fully understand film's efficacy in causing or resisting social change in India, we can at least say that film has been centrally involved in the process by which Indian society has adapted itself to modern ideas. In the clash between modern ideas and orthodox Hindu canons on such matters as untouchability and the role of women, film in India (at least until recent years) has been allied, implicitly or explicitly, with the forces of modernity.

Griffith's attitude toward modern ideas, especially concerning the role of women, was ambivalent. That ambivalence was most pointedly expressed in the tension between his flowery, moralistic intertitles and the dark mysteries he conjured with his camera. Griffith combined a Victorian conviction that it was proper for women to be submissive with a profound respect for the intelligence, imagination, and strength of the women in his films. And what remarkable women he had the intuition to film! As I ponder Griffith's spellbinding visions of Lillian Gish, Mae Marsh, Blanche Sweet, and others, I am struck equally by

the voraciousness of his desire for women and his uncanny capacity to identify with them.

After the war, the American film industry grew to international dominance. The postwar Hollywood in which Griffith struggled fruitlessly to reclaim his preeminence clearly allied itself with the libertarian spirit of the "Jazz Age." But with all their glamor and spectacle, their Latin lovers, flappers, and "It" girls, Hollywood films of the twenties never really made clear what that spirit was, nor its sources, nor the grounds of its opposition to orthodox ideas, nor the identity of the orthodoxy it was opposing. Following the withdrawal or repression of Griffith's seriousness of purpose, the years from the end of the war to the late twenties are the obscurest period in the history of American film.

We are taught that that was the "Golden Age of Silent Film," the age when film became a glorious international art and language. Yet those were also the years when Hollywood's power over the world's film production, and its hold on the world's film audiences, came closest to being absolute. Strangely, except for the occasional cause célèbre, such as von Stroheim's Greed, the magnificent comedies of Chaplin and Keaton, and Murnau's Sunrise (which, together with Chaplin's City Lights, provided the swan song for that era), no American film of that period still has an audience (beyond a core of hardened film buffs), even among film students.

Coming at a time of creative crisis, the simultaneous traumas of the new sound technology and the Great Depression (which brought about changes in studio organization and ownership) disrupted the continuity of American film history. There was an influx of personnel - directors, actors, writers, producers - from the New York stage (and, increasingly, from abroad, as political conditions worsened in Europe). By and large, the Broadway imports (unlike the Europeans) were unlettered in film. They approached the new medium with ideas whose sources were to be found elsewhere than in the history of earlier film achievements. Then again, "the talkies" were a new medium for everyone, even for movie veterans for whom filmmaking had been their education.

When Hollywood movies began to speak, no one could foresee the new genres that would emerge. It took several years of experimentation, of testing the limits, before a new system of production was securely in place and a stable new landscape of genres and stars became discernible. The release of It Happened One Night in 1934, the first year of rigid enforcement of the Production Code, can be taken to inaugurate the era of what has come to be known as "the classical Hollywood film."

Such films as It Happened One Night, for all their comedy, revived
Griffith's seriousness of moral purpose and his original conviction that film's awesome power could awaken America, in the throes of a nightmare, to its authentic identity. Or perhaps it is more accurate to say that classical Hollywood films leapfrogged Griffith to link up directly with nineteenth-century American transcendentalism.

It was Stanley Cavell who first recognized the implications of this. In his seminal book *Pursuits of Happiness,* Cavell defined a genre he named "the comedy of remarriage" (the central members of this genre include *It Happened One Night, The Awful Truth, Bringing Up Baby, His Girl Friday, The Philadelphia Story, The Lady Eve,* and *Adam's Rib*).

In remarriage comedies, men and women are equals. They have equal rights to pursue happiness and are equal spiritually — equal in their abilities to imagine and to demand human fulfillment, as Cavell puts it. In these films, happiness is not arrived at by a couple's overcoming social obstacles to their love, as in traditional comedy, but by facing divorce and coming back together, overcoming obstacles that are between and within themselves.

Indian film, in siding against orthodox Hinduism, and Japanese film, in siding against feudal consciousness, endorse the claim that women have the right to marry for love. There are classical Hollywood films — *Camille* is one that comes to mind — in which feudal attitudes and religious orthodoxy obstruct the course of love, but such films typically are set in the past and set elsewhere than in America. American society, as presented in the remarriage comedies, already sanctions the right of women to marry and even to divorce for reasons of the heart. It is marriage itself, the nature and limits of its bond, that is at issue in these films — at issue, that is, philosophically.

Cavell understands the women of these films, played by the likes of Katharine Hepburn, Claudette Colbert, Irene Dunne, and Barbara Stanwyck, as being on a spiritual quest, like Thoreau in *Walden,* Emerson in his journals, and the poet in Whitman's "Song of the Open Road." A non-American source he cites is Nora in Ibsen's *A Doll's House,* who leaves her husband in search of an education he says she needs but she knows he cannot provide. The implication, as Cavell points out, is that only a man capable of providing such an education thereby could count for her as her husband. The woman of remarriage comedy is lucky enough to be married to a man like Cary Grant or Spencer Tracy who has the capacity, the authority, to preside over her education, her creation as a new woman.

In “Psychoanalysis and Cinema: The Melodrama of the Unknown Woman,” a paper Cavell delivered in 1984 at a forum on psychiatry and the humanities, he goes on to asks himself:

What of the women on film who have not found and could not manage or relish relationship with such a man, Nora’s other, surely more numerous, descendants? And what more particularly of the women on film who are at least the spiritual equals of the women of remarriage comedy but whom no man can be thought to educate – I mean the women we might take as achieving the highest reaches of stardom, of female independence as far as film can manifest it – Greta Garbo and Marlene Dietrich and at her best Bette Davis?*

This question leads Cavell to discover a second genre of classical Hollywood film, which he calls “the melodrama of the unknown woman” (Blond Venus, Stella Dallas, Random Harvest, Now, Voyager, Mildred Pierce, Gaslight, Letter from an Unknown Woman).

One cost of the woman’s happiness in the comedies is the absence of her mother (often underscored by the attractive presence of the woman’s father), as well as her own failure to have children, her denial as a mother. In the melodramas, the woman does not forsake motherhood and is not abandoned to the world of men. No man presides over her metamorphosis, and it leads not to the ideal marriages the comedies teach us to envision but to a possible happiness apart from or beyond satisfaction by marriage. As in the remarriage comedies, it is not society that comes between a woman and a man – not, for example, the threat of social scandal or a law that can be manipulated to separate her from her child. Rather, it is the woman’s absolute commitment to her quest to become more fully human.†

In “Virtue and villainy in the face of the camera,” I argue that Stella Dallas – one of the films Cavell includes within the genre of the melodrama of the unknown woman – in no way glorifies a woman’s submission to a system that unjustly denies her equal right to pursue happiness. My understanding of the film, like Cavell’s, rejects the generally accepted critical view that such melodramas affirm a woman’s noble sacrifice of her happiness, that they affirm that there are things more important than a woman’s happiness. When Stella, standing outside in the rain, unseen, watches her daughter’s wedding through a

† Cavell notes that this feature distinguishes films in this genre from Madame Bovary and Anna Karenina. It may also be pointed out that it equally distinguishes the American melodramas from the films of Kenji Mizoguchi in Japan, which might seem to offer a parallel. Actually, Ozu’s films probably have a more intimate kinship with the American films.
window and then turns away with a secret smile, she is not a figure of pathos, but a mysterious, heroic figure who has transformed herself before our very eyes, with no help from any man in her world. This is a transcendental moment of self-fulfillment, not self-sacrifice.

Through such genres as the remarriage comedy and the "melodrama of the unknown woman" — and, by extension, the whole interlocking system of genres that emerged in the mid-thirties — classical Hollywood films inherited the Victorian faith in the marvelous and terrifying powers of women and fulfilled a deep-seated nineteenth-century wish by placing a "new woman" on view.

In the decade or so after 1934, Hollywood films were intellectually of a piece, like network television today. The diverse genres were not in ideological opposition, but derived from a common set of ideas and a common body of knowledge — at one level, knowledge about the medium of film. But by the mid-forties, that commonality began to break down. Although extraordinary films like *Adam's Rib*, *Letter from an Unknown Woman*, and *Notorious* continued to keep faith with the classical Hollywood vision, a regressive tendency was ascendant.

I think of film noir, for example, as regressive because it disavows the vision of classical Hollywood melodramas and comedies without addressing their ideas. In *Double Indemnity*, there is a moment that is emblematic of this failure. As Fred MacMurray is struggling to kill her husband, Barbara Stanwyck sits silently in the front seat of the car. The camera captures the look on her face, which is meant to prove that she is the incarnation of evil. Yet in the face of the camera, she remains unknown to us, like Stella Dallas (also Barbara Stanwyck, of course) when she turns away from watching her daughter's wedding and smiles a secret smile. *Stella Dallas*, like other classical Hollywood melodramas and comedies, interprets the unknownness of the woman as an expression of her humanity, hence of our bond with her, forged from within. *Double Indemnity*, withdrawing from that understanding without acknowledging it — an understanding about women, about humanity, about the camera and the medium of film — interprets the woman's unknownness as a mark of her inhumanity, which makes it rightful for Fred MacMurray to kill her — alas, too late — at the end of the film.

By the fifties, American movies were divided on ideological grounds in ways that mirrored the political divisions — and, unfortunately, the debased political rhetoric — of a country racked by the paranoia of the McCarthy era. Within each of the major fifties genres, "liberal" and "conservative" films struck opposing positions, as Peter Biskind argues in *Seeing Is Believing*, his study of Hollywood films of the pe-
period.* But except for a number of directors of the older generation, such as Ford, Hawks, Hitchcock, and Sirk, the classical Hollywood voice – and conscience – had fallen silent.

Hollywood’s audience was fragmenting. The older generation, once the audience for classical Hollywood films, stayed home and watched television. Why the men and women of this generation abandoned movies, or were abandoned by movies, is no less a mystery than why they once demanded movies that spoke to them with the greatest seriousness. Surely they could not really have believed that America in the fifties fulfilled the transcendental aspirations expressed by the movies they had taken to heart. Yet they opted for television’s reassurance that what was happening now was not really passing them by, that they were plugged into a human community after all. At the same time, rock 'n' roll (with its seductive promise of breaking down barriers now), not film (in which a screen separates the audience from the world of its dreams), fired the imagination of the young. The fate of film in America, and the longing to become more fully human that it expressed, hung – and still hangs – in the balance.

In the fifties, a new generation of American directors, Nicholas Ray perhaps the most gifted among them, made the "generation gap" their subject in films that, identifying with the young, dwelled on such matters as the failure of American fathers to pass on something of value to their sons. An avant-garde attempted to create a new American cinema – unfortunately, without undertaking to learn the first thing about the old. "Method acting" struggled to infuse film with an authenticity that was eluding it, as did cinéma-vérité documentary in the sixties. But despite all this activity, American film drifted further from its sources and from even the memory of its past achievements. America had lost a knowledge that it has not since reclaimed, as witness the creative crisis today facing a barren Hollywood seemingly intent on producing films that are the moral equivalent of video games – films that parody our perilous existence as human survivors even as they deny that anything important is at stake.

When I say that knowledge has been lost, I certainly mean to imply that there has been a failure of education, and in turn of criticism. Even today, film students in America are taught (and most contemporary film criticism underwrites this) to dismiss remarriage comedies like *It Happened One Night* as mere "fairy tales for the Depression" and to despise melodramas like *Stella Dallas* for their supposedly regressive attitude toward women.

It is especially poignant that the recent upsurge in feminist film criticism has so far remained less than fully attentive to the depth of

the feminism of classical Hollywood films. In part, this blindness testifies to the current extent of the dogmatic acceptance, within academic film departments, of a number of seductive but flawed theories. Especially influential among feminist film critics is Laura Mulvey's theory that classical Hollywood films subordinate women to the status of objects of the camera's male gaze. Accepting this premise, feminist criticism has failed to recognize that the camera in classical Hollywood films cannot simply be identified with the authority of the patriarchal order. Rather, the films take up and explore the implications of one of Griffith's central discoveries about the camera, also one of the deepest sources of film's universal appeal: In its passivity and its agency, its powers of creation and the limits of those powers, the camera is male and female. (This is one of the central themes of Hitchcock – The Murderous Gaze.)

The blindness of criticism to the achievements of American film goes deeper than the transient influence of any particular theory. After all, I have been suggesting that until the publication of Pursuits of Happiness forty years after the films were released, no critic had even articulated what the remarriage comedies—among the most popular films ever made—were really saying.

The gap that needs to be accounted for is not between readings like Cavell's and the ways audiences have experienced these films (I do not believe there is such a gap) but between the ways we experience films and the ways we ordinarily speak about them. What makes this gap possible is the fact that movies address matters of intimacy and do so in a language of indirectness and silence. From the beginnings of film history, what it is that actually takes place within and among silent viewers in those darkened halls has been a mystery. In the thirties and forties, film was the dominant medium of our culture, and yet public discourse about film (no doubt this was true of private conversation as well) virtually never attempted to probe the truth of our experience of movies. But perhaps this should not surprise us, for it simply underscores the fact that movies expressed ideas that had no other outlet in our society. Except within the discourse of films themselves, America's experience of film, its knowledge of film, has always been and remains primarily unarticulated, unconscious. If we are to understand film's impact on society, this knowledge must be brought to consciousness. Criticism must finally fulfill its role.

Movies exercise a hold on us, a hold we participate in creating, drawing on our innermost desires and fears. To know a film's impact, we have to know the film objectively. To know a film objectively, we have to know the hold it has on us. To know the hold a film has on us, we have to know ourselves objectively. And to know ourselves objectively, we have to know the impact of the films in our lives. The
idea of a criticism that aspires to be at once objective and rooted in the critic’s experience (yet another idea whose American and non-American sources cannot be disentangled) is one that Stanley Cavell has taught me to associate with the names of Kant, Emerson, Thoreau, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Freud, Heidegger, and Wittgenstein – and Cavell himself. Such criticism forsakes the wish – without denying the depth of its motivation – to find a “scientific” methodology that would give us an unchallengeable place to stand outside our own experience. It is a central tenet of American transcendentalism that such a place must always be illusory: We cannot arrive at objective truth without consulting our experience.

Feeling legitimized by the latest “postmodernist critical methodologies,” too many academic film critics today deny their experience of classical Hollywood films, refuse to allow themselves to take instruction from them. Predictably, the resulting criticism reaffirms an attitude of superiority to the films and their audiences. Echoing a long-familiar strain in American cultural life, such criticism furthers rather than undoes the repression of these films and the ideas they represent.

We critics can play our part in undoing that repression only if we perform our acts of criticism in the spirit of classical Hollywood films. Like the Cary Grant character in The Philadelphia Story, we need the sagacity to demand to determine for ourselves what is truly important and what is not.* Equally needed is the capacity Grant reveals in Bringing Up Baby when he makes up for his lack of worldliness by announcing to Katharine Hepburn, in the final moments of the film, the truth of his experience of their day together: He never had a better time in all his life. We cannot play our part in reviving the spirit of the films we love without testifying, in our criticism, to the truth of our experience of those films: We never had a better time in all our lives.

* For an appreciation of the relevance of this example and the example that follows, I am indebted to Marian Keane’s “The Authority of Connection in Stanley Cavell’s Pursuits of Happiness,” Journal of Popular Film and Television, 13(3):139–50 (Fall 1985), the most insightful and reliable essay concerning Cavell’s writing about film.
Film was not invented to make movies possible. The Lumière brothers' first public screening in 1895 was the culmination of innumerable technical developments that finally allowed films to be made and projected, but the invention of film did not immediately give rise to movies as we know them. Within ten years, film had become a sizeable industry and medium of popular entertainment, but news films, travelogues, films of vaudeville acts, trick films, and gag films were the dominant forms. Even as late as 1907, dramatic narratives constituted only one-sixth of the "product."

The turning point came in 1908. With the sudden growth of nickelodeons, respectable theaters intended primarily for the screening of films, producers turned to such "legitimate" fare as adaptations of novels and stage plays, and the dramatic narrative became the dominant form of film, as it has remained to this day. It was at this critical — and rather mysterious — juncture that the technology of film decisively linked up with the incipient idea of movies. Not entirely coincidentally, it was in 1908 that David Wark Griffith directed his first film.

Griffith was a struggling actor from Kentucky, no longer young, with fading dreams of attaining immortality as a playwright. In desperation, he accepted work with the American Biograph Company as a movie actor. When Biograph needed a new director, he stepped in.

In the next five years, working for Biograph, Griffith directed over five hundred short dramatic films in every imaginable genre — an inexhaustible treasure trove for students of film.

In 1913, Griffith took his next fateful step, breaking with Biograph when the company refused to release his *Judith of Bethulia* as a feature-length film. Striking out on his own, he produced as well as directed a series of extraordinary features culminating in *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), the film that definitively demonstrated to the world how powerful movies could be.

*The Birth of a Nation* was an astounding commercial success, but controversy surrounded it from the beginning. It was embraced by the
resurgent Ku Klux Klan, and the NAACP rallied opposition, attempting to have the film banned. Griffith was shocked at the accusations that his film inflamed racial hatred; by all accounts, that was not his conscious intention. As if in defense against such charges – some would say in atonement – he sank all his profits from The Birth of a Nation into Intolerance, a colossal, majestic film, but a commercial debacle.

Deeply in debt, Griffith struggled the rest of his life to regain financial independence. In the years after the end of World War I, he made a number of his greatest films, Broken Blossoms, True Heart Susie (my personal favorite), Way Down East, and Orphans of the Storm among them. Yet he never reclaimed his position and power in the film industry.

Movies had become a giant corporate business, centered in Hollywood, with a rationalized system of studio production to which Griffith never fully adjusted. It became increasingly difficult for him to find backing for his projects, and by the last years of his life he was a pathetic figure haunting Hollywood, abandoned by the industry that owed him so much. But this is not the place to dwell on the melancholy denouement of the Griffith story.

Griffith's years at Biograph were like Haydn's years at Esterhazy. Churning out two films a week for over five years provided endless opportunities for experimentation. If an idea didn't work the first time, he tried it again – and again. To study the evolution of Griffith's Biograph films from 1908 to 1913 is to witness movies being born – year by year, month by month, week by week.

Film students once were taught that Griffith single-handedly invented what is loosely called "the grammar of film" – continuity cutting, close-ups, point-of-view shots, iris shots, expressive lighting, parallel editing, and the other techniques and formal devices that movies have employed for over seventy years. Recent scholarship has made it clear that Griffith did not actually originate any of the inventions that once had been credited to him. Precedents have been found for all his innovations. Although his films were intimately involved in that complex process, Griffith was not the "prime mover" in the development and institution of the set of rules and practices that constitute the grammar of the movies.

Yet the more I ponder film's mysterious history, the deeper my conviction of Griffith's centrality. Without Haydn, the symphony would have developed, but without the examples of Haydn's symphonies and quartets and sonatas, and without the ideas about music manifest in those examples, Beethoven would not have become the Beethoven we know. Without Griffith, movies would have developed their grammar, and Hollywood would have become Hollywood but Chaplin would not
D. W. Griffith and the birth of the movies

have become Chaplin, nor Hitchcock Hitchcock, nor Renoir Renoir. The same can be said for Murnau, Dreyer, von Stroheim, Eisenstein, Ford, or von Sternberg. Griffith’s centrality does not reside in a legacy he left to all subsequent movies, but in the inheritance he passed on to the greatest filmmakers of the succeeding generation. To them, Griffith was inescapable. From the period in which movies as we know them were born, it was Griffith’s work alone that fully demonstrated the awesome power of the film medium, and it was Griffith’s ideas about the conditions of that power that demanded – indeed, still demand – a response.

What movies are and what gives them their power are questions that vexed society at a time when the movies were fighting off their first attacks from would-be censors. Griffith’s Biograph films are affirmations of the power of movies – and veiled (sometimes not so veiled) allegories justifying his unleashing of that power.

Consider A Drunkard’s Reformation (1909), for example, a fascinating early Biograph film. It tells a story about the power of theater, but movies are what Griffith really has in mind. A young girl persuades her alcoholic father, who beats her whenever he is intoxicated, to go with her to a temperance play called A Drunkard’s Reformation. At the theater, Griffith cuts back and forth between the actors on stage and the father and daughter in the audience. Gradually, the father begins to recognize himself in the drunkard on stage. As the stage father takes a drink and begins to beat his little girl, the father in the audience watches in fascination. His daughter views him warily out of the corner of her eye. Conscious of the play’s intoxicating hold over him, she is afraid that theater, like whiskey, will release the monster within him. With the grace of God, this does not happen. Rather, the unfathomable power of theater brings him to his senses and saves his soul.

Griffith’s Biograph films declared their innocent intention: to tap the awesome power of film in the hope of saving souls. By the time of The Birth of a Nation, however, Griffith’s vision had grown darker, as is revealed in the remarkable sequence in which Mae Marsh, ignoring warnings, goes out alone to draw water from the spring. In a natural setting that dwarfs the merely human, Gus, a “renegade Negro,” views Mae Marsh as she is absorbed in viewing a squirrel playing in a tree. Griffith cuts from a long shot of the girl to an iris insert of the squirrel. (This is not, strictly speaking, a point-of-view shot, but our view and hers do not essentially differ.) He cuts back to the delighted and unselfconscious girl, then to a shot, notable for its expressionism, of Gus coming into the foreground to get a better view of something off screen that has struck his attention.
The shot of Mae Marsh that follows is closer than the preceding view of her, registering the menace of Gus's gaze, although, again, this is not literally a shot from his point of view.

Griffith cuts again to the playful squirrel and then back to the girl, delectable and frighteningly vulnerable in her unselfconscious absorption. In this context, the cut to the expressionistically composed tight close-up of Gus is deeply disturbing.
Gus is intoxicated by his views of the innocent girl. The twisted branches turn the frame into an expressive metaphor for the monstrous forces within him that his intoxication threatens to liberate.

In Griffith's dramaturgy, deeply indebted to Victorian melodrama, innocence and monstrousness are eternally at war for possession of the human soul. In the present sequence, Griffith explicitly links the act of viewing to both these opposing forces. But is our viewing, and Griffith's, innocent or monstrous?

The innocent girl is vulnerable to Gus — and vulnerable to the camera. In affirming innocence, the camera violates innocence; this is the most disquieting discovery Griffith passed on to his successors. However innocent their intention, movies emerge out of darkness.

Monstrousness threatens to possess Gus; yet he is not a villain. A dupe of the ambitious mulatto Lynch, himself a victim of Stoneman, the twisted, hypocritical carpetbagger, Gus is a figure of pathos, like the lunatic in *A House of Darkness* (1913).

In this late Biograph film, one of Griffith's most transparent allegories about art's powers of redemption, a lunatic is intoxicated by his views of an innocent woman (Griffith's expressionistic framing of Gus's viewing recalls his framing of the lunatic here).
Wild-eyed, the lunatic advances on the woman. Providentially, at the critical moment, the sound of piano playing drifts in from another room. Music, like theater in _A Drunkard’s Reformation_, has the power to save men’s souls. The beautiful melody calms the lunatic and saves him – and the woman – from the darkness within. In the world of _The Birth of a Nation_, however, Providence does not intervene to avert the tragedy.

Gus steps forward from his place as a secret viewer and innocently presents himself to Mae Marsh. Heartbreakingly, he declares his love for her and proposes marriage. Reacting in horror, the terrified child flees. Gus runs after her, desperately trying to reassure her that he means no harm. She climbs to the top of a cliff, with the frenzied Gus close behind. When he steps forward again, apparently to stop her from leaping, she jumps to her death.

Moments later, the Little Colonel (Henry Walthall) comes upon his dying sister. Realizing what has happened, he stares into the camera, his face an expressionless mask.

Walthall, a magnificent actor, plays this as a scene out of Shakespearean tragedy, not melodrama. In his anguish and his despair, he dedicates himself to vengeance; this is what Walthall’s acting, under Griffith’s direction, expresses. His look to the camera calls upon us to acknowledge his guilt, not his innocence, for he knows in his heart that he has no right to condemn Gus – because he himself at this moment, with the camera as witness, guiltily embraces the dark, monstrous forces within himself.

The last third of _The Birth of a Nation_, with its nightmarish inversion of Griffith’s cherished values, follows from this guilty moment. The vengeful Ku Klux Klan, emerging out of darkness, does not and cannot restore the rightful order. All it can do is allow our nation to be born;
it cannot save its soul. The burden of *The Birth of a Nation* is that America was born with blood on its hands. Its soul remains to be saved.

Griffith’s masterpiece casts movies, as well as America, in shadow. Vanished is his faith that movies will be our salvation. How could they be, when they emerge out of darkness?

Griffith’s films after his break with Biograph no longer claim for themselves the power of salvation. Their aspiration is more modest: to help keep alive, during dark times, the distant dream of a world to come in which innocence may be restored to its rightful throne.
Judith of Bethulia (1913) was D. W. Griffith's first feature-length film. Griffith devoted extraordinary energy and attention to its making. Indeed, he broke irrevocably with the Biograph management, for whom he had directed over five hundred short films, by his refusal to shorten it or to release it as two separate two-reelers. The last film of Griffith's long and productive association with Biograph, it remained, in his own estimation, one of his very best films.

Everything points to the conclusion that Judith of Bethulia is a key film in Griffith's career. Indeed, it is a film of considerable compositional complexity, thematic directness, and cinematic artistry. In addition, it highlights a fundamental strain in Griffith's filmmaking, perhaps carrying it to the furthest extreme of any of his films. Thus, Judith of Bethulia helps provide a perspective on Griffith's work as a whole. Yet the film has received virtually no critical attention.

I shall proceed by first sketching the film's narrative (the division into sections is my own).

I. Idyllic Prologue: The film begins with a prologue depicting the life of the peaceful community of Bethulia. The first shots are of the well outside the city's walls. We see, for example, the innocent flirting of the young lovers, Naomi and Nathan (Mae Marsh and Robert Harron). Then the stout walls of the city are shown, and only then the marketplace within the walls of the city. Judith, the widow of the hero Manasses, is introduced. This prologue ends with a shot of the great "brazen gate" that guards the entrance to the city.

II. The Assyrian Threat: The Assyrians, led by Prince Holofernes, capture Bethulia's well. Naomi is among the prisoners taken. The Assyrians attempt to storm the walls, but are repelled. In the Assyrian camp, Holofernes is enraged. He is not placated by the bacchanalian revel staged to please him. There is then a renewed all-out attempt to storm the city's walls and penetrate its gate. A pair of shots (one of the defenders and one of the attackers) is repeated.
three times, then followed by a shot of Judith watching and then a shot of Holofernes waiting. Then a new pair of shots of defenders and attackers — closer and more dynamic — is intercut with the shot of Judith, now visibly more excited, and the shot of the intent Holofernes. We then get still closer and more violent shots of defenders and attackers, and a wild fusillade of shots encompassing all the setups thus far used in the sequence. Finally the shot of Judith is followed by the image of a giant battering ram brought into place against the gate. Yet the gate holds.

III. *The Siege*: Holofernes takes counsel. The Assyrians lay Bethulia under siege. There are scenes of suffering within Bethulia (for example, doling out water to thirsty Bethulians). The people come to Judith, imploring her to lead them. She is in despair, but then she has a vision of “an act that will ring through the generations.” (We are not shown Judith’s vision.) She dons sackcloth and ashes and then bedecks herself in her “garments of gladness.” At the Assyrian camp, Holofernes takes out his impatience and frustration on his captains. Judith, veiled, leaves for the Assyrian camp to carry out her mysterious plan.

IV. *The Seduction*: Judith enters Holofernes’ tent and begins the process of seducing him. Enticingly evading his touch, she finally leaves his tent (“...his heart ravished with her”). There is prayer in the Bethulian marketplace. Holofernes’ eunuch comes to Judith’s tent to announce that Holofernes is ready to see her and that she should prepare herself. A title tells us what we can in any case see: Judith is aroused by the prospect of the impending encounter. Shots of Holofernes are intercut with other shots: Judith in excited anticipation; a desperate Pickett’s Charge—like attempt by the Bethulians to reach the well, leading to renewed fighting at the walls; the separated Naomi and Nathan. Holofernes dismisses his erotic slave dancers (“...Famous Fish Dancers from the illustrious Temple of Nin”). Judith, faltering in her resolve, catches sight of her loyal old retainer and prays for strength. The eunuch summons Judith. In Holofernes’ tent, Judith seductively entices Holofernes to drink, refilling his chalice until he collapses, dead drunk. Seeing him helpless, she hesitates, momentarily cradling his head. Then Griffith cuts to images of dead Bethulians, fallen in the attempt to retake the well, and suffering in the marketplace of Bethulia. Griffith cuts back to Judith, who raises Holofernes’ sword to strike; then Griffith cuts to the exterior of the tent.

V. *The Bethulians’ Triumph*: When the Assyrians discover that their leader has been killed, there is chaos in their ranks. In the market-
place of Bethulia, Judith triumphantly unwraps the severed head of Holofernes. The Bethulian soldiers, transformed, pour out of the city's gate, defeat the Assyrians, and raze their camp. Naomi and Nathan are reunited.

VI. Epilogue: Judith passes through the marketplace. The Bethulians bow before her. She walks out of the frame.

Any discussion of Judith of Bethulia might well begin with a reflection on the character of Judith, in particular, her sexuality. In the context of Griffith's work, Judith's sexuality is noteworthy in two general ways: its "womanliness" and its "manliness." In contrast, for example, to Lillian Gish's "girls," Judith is very much a woman, although Blanche Sweet was only fifteen years old at the time. Judith's womanliness has three aspects.

1. Judith's womanly beauty. Griffith presents Judith's womanly beauty directly to the viewer. Griffith gives us images of Judith that are neither his Victorian "Madonna" idealizations nor his patented depictions of "dear" girlish behavior (jumping up and down with enthusiasm, and the like). Nor are they the "familiar" representations so common in Griffith's work (the presentation of Nathan and Naomi is, in this sense, "familiar," with the camera asserting a patriarchal authority over its subjects, exposing their tender cores, treating them as children). In the shots of Judith in sackcloth and ashes, the usual dematerializing effect of Griffith's makeup is eliminated in shots that anticipate Carl Dreyer's The Passion of Joan of Arc in their acknowledgment that a woman's face is covered with skin.

Certain shots of Judith preparing to seduce Holofernes, and engaged in that seduction, reflect a frank acknowledgment (again, rare in Griffith's images of women) that a woman has a body made from flesh that includes, say, armpits and breasts.

2. Judith's knowledge of sexuality. Complementing Judith's beauty
are her knowledge and mastery of every stage of seduction. Her womanly confidence in her own sexuality is manifest in her peacocklike strutting, dressed in her "garments of gladness" in the full ensemble, her beauty enticingly veiled, and in the knowing way she parts her veil. Judith's hands, especially, become instruments of seduction. The focus on hands, effected by the use of the frame line as well as costuming and gesture, is one of the main strategies of the film. Judith's womanhood is expressed in her hands, and Holofernes' manhood is concentrated in his. For example, when he comes to the entrance of Judith's tent, he enters the frame hands-first.

When Judith enters his tent for the first time, each stage of the seduction is registered in a pose or gesture of their hands. The erotically charged images of Holofernes' hand reaching for Judith's tantalizingly withheld hand are intercut with the Bethulians, begging for water, imploringly holding out their hands.

When Judith kills Holofernes, his death is registered by the cessation of movement of his hands (shades of Hitchcock's *Blackmail*). It is Judith's hands, now transformed, that wield the sword.

3. *Judith's desire*. When the Assyrians make their all-out attempt to
penetrate the great brazen gate, the battle is imaged in clearly sexual terms as an attempted rape: Bethulia is, as it were, a woman threatened with violent penetration. The title summing up the sequence makes the underlying parallel all but explicit: "Yet Holofernes could not batten down the brazen gate nor make a single breach." The climax of the sequence is the appearance of the terrible, revelatory image of the giant battering ram.

The shots of fighting, cut in a crescendo of intensity, are intercut with repeated shots of Holofernes waiting in his tent and Judith watching the battle from her window. The shots of Judith and Holofernes are linked in their composition.

Throughout the film, in fact, the left side of the frame tends to be dominated by either Judith's presence or Holofernes' presence, implying the bond between them.

The spectacle, climaxing in the image of the battering ram, fills Judith with ever-increasing excitement. When Judith subsequently places herself in Holofernes' hands, pretending to offer herself, but really meaning to kill him, she finds herself sexually drawn to his majestic, bull-like presence. He has inflamed her passion even before they meet.
Despite Judith's intentions, she is sorely tempted not to kill Holofernes but to make passionate love to him. It is not that, in her intoxication with her enemy, she is motivated by the idea that he is good (as is, for example, the Mountain Girl, infatuated with Belshazzar, in the Babylonian story of *Intolerance*). A title declares: "...And Holofernes became noble in Judith's eyes," but Griffith is using "noble" in accordance with the pseudobiblical language characteristic of most of the titles in the film ("Nathan could scarce refrain from going to the succor of Naomi" is among the more risible examples) and means nothing more than "splendid." In Holofernes' tempting presence, Judith does not think in moral terms at all, and it is not any idea of marriage or family that inflames her.

That the wiles of the "paint-and-powder brigade" have the power to tempt and/or deceive good men is a basic fact of life in Griffith's narrative universe. It is the strategy of these worldly women to excite eligible men, while at the same time presenting a falsely innocent face to the world. In *True Heart Susie* (1919), William is disillusioned when he learns Bettina's true nature. It is perhaps only in *The White Rose* (1923) — arguably the Griffith film that is most fully worked out thematically — that Griffith presents a good man inflamed by the erotic presence of a woman he knows to be "bad." But the presentation of the good Judith drawn to the splendid yet brutal Holofernes is perhaps unique in all of Griffith's films in its acknowledgment, and acceptance, of the dark side of a woman's sexual desire.

Judith is every inch a woman, yet the second noteworthy aspect of her sexuality is that the people of Bethulia call upon her to act as their leader — that is, as Griffith understands it, to assume a man's role. While Judith watches the spectacle of the battle, she is visibly aroused, as though part of her desires the Assyrians' penetration. But she is also racked with guilt. She wants to answer the Bethulians' call, but she feels powerless to lead them in battle. It is in this state, compounded of arousal and despair, that Judith has her first vision — a vision that, significantly, Griffith withholds from the viewer, although the presentation of holy visions is one of his specialties (as witness, for example, *The Avenging Conscience*, *Home Sweet Home*, and even *The Birth of a Nation*).

Acting on her vision, Judith puts on her "garments of gladness" and goes to Holofernes as though she were his bride. To complete her envisioned act, she must harden herself, conquering her own desire. Thus, a fateful struggle takes place in Holofernes' tent. How is the outcome of this struggle determined?

Providentally, Judith catches sight of her loyal old retainer. This is nicely presented in a deep-focus shot with Judith in the left fore-
ground, the retainer in the background, and a smoking censer in the right foreground. Visually, the censer is linked with the well outside Bethulia’s gate – directly by its shape and inversely by the water/fire opposition that runs through the film.

This shot is intercut with the representation of a simultaneous event: the ambush of a group of brave Bethulians who try to draw water from the captured well. This kind of crosscutting in Griffith’s work implies a virtual psychic connection. Although Judith cannot actually see this display of barbarism, the sight of the retainer at this moment is functionally equivalent to such a view, serving to make Judith mindful of her people's suffering. A spasm of disgust passes through Judith – disgust for her own body sinfully drawn to the agency of her people’s suffering, I take it. She prays to the Lord for strength.

Judith talks Holofernes into dismissing his eunuch so that she can be his sole “handmaid” for the night. Alone with Holofernes in his tent, she finds herself again inflamed with desire. Repeatedly, she fills his chalice and goads him into drinking himself into a state of intoxication. For a moment, she cradles his head in her arms, but then a second vision comes to her. The cinematographer Karl Brown describes this moment:

His highest objective, as nearly as I could grasp it, was to photograph thought. He could do it too. I’d seen it. In Judith of Bethulia, there was a scene in which Judith stands over the sleeping figure of Holofernes, sword in hand. She raises the sword, then falters. Pity and mercy have weakened her to a point of helpless irresolution. Her face softens to something that is almost love. Then she thinks, and as she thinks, the screen is filled with the mangled bodies of those, her own people, slain by this same Holofernes. Then her face becomes filled with hate as she summons all her strength to bring that sword whistling down upon the neck of what is no longer a man but a blood-reeking monster.*

Actually, what Griffith shows here is not, as it were, natural thought, but a God-given vision. When Judith is transformed by this second vision, the manhood passes out of Holofernes' hands and animates hers.

In Griffith's imagery, the city of Bethulia itself undergoes a parallel sexual metamorphosis. The climactic image of the rout of the Assyrians is a shot of the triumphant Bethulians pouring out of the brazen gate. In reversal of the earlier images of Bethulia as a woman, Griffith here images the city as a potent man.

*Judith of Bethulia* centers on the dramatic struggle within Judith — spiritual, yet imaged in sexual terms and mirrored by the armed struggle between the Bethulians and the Assyrians — to perform an act that appears to deny her womanly nature. How can this struggle, and specifically its triumphant and liberating resolution, be reconciled with the affirmation, fundamental to Griffith's work, of an order in which sexuality can be fulfilled naturally only through love within a marriage?

To begin to answer this question, it is necessary to reflect on Griffith's understanding of the natural history of a woman. When a woman grows from an infant and baby and becomes a girl, she simultaneously starts to play with dolls and begins to develop (at first unaware) the ability to attract men. When she comes of age and blossoms into a young woman, the change is twofold. Unless tutored in the wily ways of the paint-and-powder brigade (as is, for example, Mae Marsh in *The White Rose*; Lillian Gish, by contrast, is constitutionally unable to master the simplest wile), she continues to act in public as a girl. But she knows that her girlishness now veils her womanhood, a mystery never to be betrayed.

In defending her "trust" — her virgin womanhood — she is prepared to fight like a man. Only within the privacy and sanctuary of a mar-
riage may she reveal herself as a woman. Her mystery now revealed, what follows naturally is that she becomes transformed into a mother. Her womanhood fulfilled, her trust now passes from her own body to the walls of her home, which enclose and protect her baby, as her womb once did. Evil threatens, no longer rape, but its equivalent, violence to her baby. Now she will fight like a man to protect her home.

The paint-and-powder brigade is made up of women who display their womanhood in public, although what they reveal is not womanhood in all its mystery and beauty but only a monstrous caricature: When a woman betrays her trust, she loses her true beauty. It follows logically that womanliness in Griffith's films — unlike girlishness, manliness, or motherhood — is ordinarily invisible, or at least out of bounds for the camera. How can womanliness be filmed, without violating its sanctity? But then what makes Griffith's presentation of Judith possible?

As a childless widow, Judith is no longer a girl, and she is no virgin: She has been initiated into the life of marriage, has revealed her womanhood and given her trust. (If a Griffith virgin were granted Judith's vision, she would not understand it.) Yet she remains childless, denied that natural fulfillment of a woman.

Is Holofernes the man who can fulfill Judith? Griffith takes great pains to present Holofernes as a majestic figure. In general, Griffith's visual treatment of men, the ways in which his camera differentiates among, for example, Henry Walthall, Robert Harron, Richard Barthelmess, Lionel Barrymore, Donald Crisp, Joseph Schildkraut, Ivor Novello, and Walter Huston, is as crucial to his filmmaking as his treatment of women. It was no mean feat to transform slight Henry Walthall into such an imposing figure. This is attested to by Karl Brown. At his first meeting with Billy Bitzer, the cinematographer of Judith of Bethulia, Bitzer at first scoffed when Brown offered himself as an assistant. As Bitzer and Griffith were about to depart, Brown pleaded: "'Please, Mr. Bitzer! I know I'm not wanted, but before you go, will you please tell me how you managed to make Hank Walthall look so big in Judith of Bethulia?' He stopped and stared at me. I continued recklessly. '... If you'll please tell me, I won't ever bother you any more, honest I won't.' His face softened into kindness. 'Sure, be glad to. But it'll take a little time. Report for work at nine tomorrow and I'll show you what you have to do.'"

Holofernes' bull-like majesty and the power of his armies — crystallized in the image of the giant battering ram — arouse Judith. If Holo-

Judith of Bethulia

Holofernes is fully a man — one who can take the place of her dead husband — then he can fulfill Judith in the natural way, and she need not carry out her plan. But, of course, Holofernes does not pass this test. If he were fully a man, he would have succeeded in penetrating the gate of Bethulia.

When Judith succeeds in enticing Holofernes to drink himself into a stupor, she knows that he cannot satisfy her. (For Griffith, any man who drinks to intoxication always thereby exposes a weakness of character that is also a sexual weakness.) Her realization of her power over him shatters the illusion of Holofernes' manhood and frees Judith from her temptation.

For a moment, she cradles his sleeping head in her arms, as if her womanly nature tempts her to view him as the child she so passionately desires, or to imagine bearing his child. This temptation cannot be defeated by any display of power over him, but only by another God-given vision: a vision of the death and suffering that Holofernes has wrought on Bethulia.

Once Holofernes' monstrousness is exposed, Judith's womanhood no longer protects him from her. She becomes transformed. Wielding the sword like a man, she slays the monster and cuts off his head, symbolically castrating him. (Like Judith's first vision, this unnatural act is not — cannot be — framed by Griffith's camera.) When she displays the severed head in the marketplace, she acts as Bethulia's triumphant leader, revealing — to her people and to us — that she has assumed her dead husband's place. This revelation is the climax of the film.

By surrendering herself to her visions, Judith assumes a woman's role, as Griffith understands it, in relation to the power that grants her vision. The moment at which she unmasks Holofernes, the moment at which she gives herself completely to this higher power, is the moment of her fulfillment as a woman. Yet, paradoxically, this is also the moment at which she performs a man's act, is transformed into a man. This paradox is fundamental to Griffith's understanding of what it is to be a woman. When her trust is threatened, a true woman reveals that she possesses a man within her.

The man within Judith is Manasses. But although their marriage proves still to be alive, does it remain issueless? Is she left unfulfilled as a woman after all? The film's answer is that Judith's act gives life to the city itself. Judith has become the mother of Bethulia.

Reborn, the city is transformed. Bethulia's soldiers have at last become men: They storm out of the city's gate to rout the disordered Assyrian forces. Naomi and Nathan are reunited, their fruitfulness assured.

This rebirth in turn transforms Judith. Her transformation is reflected
in the final shot of the film. In the marketplace, within Bethulia’s walls, she passes into, through, and out of the frame. No one looks directly at her. Everyone bows before her. She no longer lives in the city, whose inhabitants are now all as her children. She dwells in a higher realm. She is no longer even the camera’s subject.

This final shot invokes the characteristic closing of a Griffith film: a family united within its home – except, of course, that at the end of Judith of Bethulia the mother and father are both absent from the frame. This final shot also completes the series of equations between Judith’s sexuality and the city of Bethulia. Bethulia is no longer a woman threatened by violation, and no longer a man; it is finally a home (whose walls are the symbolic equivalent of its mother’s fulfilled sexuality).

Thus, the film’s dramatic struggle is articulated in terms that are, after all, consistent with the laws of Griffith’s narrative universe, and the character of Judith can be accounted for in Griffithian terms. Nonetheless, the film’s drama, particularly in its resolution, remains extraordinary in Griffith’s work. This is reflected in the fact that Judith’s act, though inspired by holy visions, is in no sense Christian.

The general point that the film’s resolution is not Christian – is, indeed, specifically pre-Christian – is crucial to understanding the place of this film in Griffith’s work. Judith of Bethulia is Griffith’s major Old Testament film.

The grounding of Judith of Bethulia in Old Testament tradition and morality is everywhere manifest. The central strategy of identifying a woman’s sexuality with a city, for one thing, is familiar from the Old Testament. But also, the outcome of Judith’s struggle is not that she softens and forgives Holofernes, redeeming the tyrant through love; her act of retribution for her people’s suffering equals Holofernes’ acts in its harsh cruelty. The film’s eye-for-eye spirit may be seen, at one level, to determine the system of doubling – with symbolic equivalences and reversals – so characteristic of the film. The Assyrians cut off Bethulia from its water supply, and their tents are razed by flames. Holofernes attempts to penetrate Bethulia’s gate with his battering ram, and Judith slays him with the sword. Judith’s retainer doubles Holofernes’ eunuch. And so on. This system of doubling in turn is linked to the doubling of the Judith/Holofernes and the Judith/Manasses pairs, and by the doubling of both by the Naomi/Nathan pair, by the doubling of the city and its captured well, and, most important, by the doubling of Judith and Bethulia.

Judith’s consciousness serves as a field of battle for higher forces; up to a point, this reflects the general Griffith dramaturgy, laid out most
explicitly in *Dream Street* (1921). Under the all-seeing Morning Star, the symbolic drama of *Dream Street* unfolds, motivated by the figures of the demonic violinist (whose mask of sensual beauty hides a face only an orthodontist could love) and a beatific preacher. The former's mad fiddling has the power to whip mortals into a Dionysian frenzy, whereas the latter's calm voice speaks in Apollonian strains.

The pre-Christian world of *Judith of Bethulia*, however, has no Morning Star to oversee it. This world is ruled by the Hebrew deity, who calls upon Judith to perform an act of violence, not an act of forgiveness; to harden, not soften.

Judith's motherhood is unnatural, for Griffith, in the sense that it is not Christian. It is perhaps only in *Abraham Lincoln* (1930) that Griffith presents a heroic act true to both Old Testament and New Testament morality: The modern-day Abraham gives birth to a nation, not through a liberating, triumphant, but unnatural sexual fulfillment, but through a Christian act of sacrifice.

The presentation of an un-Christian act as heroic is unusual in Griffith's work, but it does not in itself undermine the Christian identity of Griffith's camera. In telling this story of a pre-Christian world, Griffith's camera is freed from certain constraints, because the characters are not Christians, but other constraints remain. Thus, Griffith can film Judith in all her womanliness without betraying his principles, but he cannot show us her vision of the act that will "ring through the generations," or the unnatural act itself.

Of course, by refraining from showing us that vision or that act, Griffith at the same time strongly serves the interests of his narrative, investing the film with a central enigma (What is Judith planning to do?) and suspending its solution (What has Judith done?), intensifying the film's climax.

Thus, although Griffith does not violate his Christian morality in the depiction of Judith's struggle and the resolution of that struggle, that morality does not by itself account for the film, for the nature of Griffith's implication in this pre-Christian world (and the implication of his camera) remains to be determined. But that determination cannot be achieved apart from a critical account of the relationship, in Griffith's work, between his Christian moralizing and his violent eroticism. The latter emerges in a uniquely pure form in *Judith of Bethulia*, in part because it is his major film that asserts no Christian moral. But Griffith could never, in any case, negate his violent eroticism simply by asserting a moral. The tense and complex relationship between these conflicting strains dominates Griffith's work. It manifests itself in various guises: as an opposition between the theatrical and the poetic/transcendental; between the realistic and the dreamlike; be-
tween the representation and the symbolization of events; between the extreme linearity of the parallel-edited suspense sequences and a film's organic composition as a whole. It is this tension, above all, that engenders the specific density and texture of Griffith's films and accounts for their form.
After D. W. Griffith broke with the American Biograph Company over his wish to release *Judith of Bethulia* as a feature-length film, his output was divided between large-scale epics and more unassuming productions that show him in a different and in many ways more appealing light (although Griffith's greatest films, such as *The Birth of a Nation*, succeed as intimate dramas as well as epics). Of these deceptively modest films, *True Heart Susie* (1919) and the more famous *Broken Blossoms*, made in the same year, are the most charming, the most assured, and the most lovable. *True Heart Susie* is also one of Griffith’s most prophetic meditations on the medium of film.

Susie (Lillian Gish) grows up in the small town of Pine Grove. (The film calls this Indiana, but who could doubt that Griffith is thinking of his native Kentucky?) She has been raised by her “Aunty” (Loyola O’Connor, whom Griffith loved to cast as a matronly woman bearing on her shoulders all the suffering of the ages), always expecting to marry William (Robert Harron) when the time comes. But when will he understand that she is the love of his life and claim her with a kiss? Not wishing to stand in the way of William’s making a name for himself, Susie sells her beloved cow and anonymously gives William the money that enables him to go to college (although Susie, who wins the school spelling bee, is obviously the better student of the two).

College, at once exhilarating and sobering, seduces William and fires his ambition. He gives little thought to Susie, who waits faithfully at home. When he returns from college, he falls for Bettina, a wily big-city girl who is visiting an aunt in Pine Grove. He assumes a position as the town’s minister – his real ambition is to win fame as a writer – and chooses Bettina, not Susie, for his wife.

The marriage is an unhappy one, but William suffers in silence, dedicating himself to his ministry. Suffocated in the role of minister’s wife, Bettina begins to sneak off to “wild” parties. One stormy night, Bettina “thoughtfully” goes out to get William a book he needs – but
mainly to go to a party. When she loses her key and is caught in the rain, she knocks on Susie’s door, tells her the truth, and prevails upon Susie to let her spend the night — and to lie to William for her. It turns out that Bettina, poor thing, has caught a chill. She dies, as Griffith’s title not unsympathetically sums her up, “a little unfaithful,” letting William believe that she caught her death procuring his book. In memory of this “service,” he vows never to let another love enter his life. Only later, when Aunty informs him about Susie’s sacrifice in sending him to college and one of Bettina’s friends confesses to him how guilty she feels for her involvement in the party that claimed his wife’s life, does he release himself from his vow. At last, he declares to Susie that he has loved her all his life, and they kiss.

*True Heart Susie* opens with the title “Is real life interesting? . . . Every incident is taken from real life,” followed by a dedication to the women who suffer “pitiful hours of waiting for the love that never comes.” The film’s claim for the reality of its incidents is tempered by its acknowledgment that its story departs from the romantic scenario as it unfolds in the lives of the true-hearted women (rhetorically, Griffith embraces them within his audience) whose pitiful waiting is not finally rewarded as is that of Susie. Indeed, Susie is doubly rewarded: William at last comes to know her, and all along she is known by Griffith and by us. In the face of the camera, Lillian Gish stands in for all the unknown Susies in the world to whom *True Heart Susie* offers not only pity but also a genuine, respectful appreciation.

That is, the film begins by declaring its reality to be authentically real and yet transfigured — transfigured, we might say, by the medium of film. This acknowledgment, sustained throughout the film, enables *True Heart Susie* to avoid the overblown and naive rhetoric of, say, *Intolerance* and to strike a fully satisfying narrative tone reminiscent of Jane Austen (hardly a name one usually associates with Griffith). One of Jane Austen’s central achievements is the creation of a voice for herself as narrator, at once objective and delicately ironic, that fully registers the intimacy of her relationship with her characters. In *True Heart Susie*, perhaps uniquely in Griffith’s work, indeed in the entire silent cinema, the titles consistently achieve such a voice.

In most of his films, Griffith composes at least some titles in a stilted, flowery diction that declares these pronouncements to be from "on high." Such titles are denials that the film’s author is human, disavowals of the human feelings and attachments that Griffith’s camera so eloquently expresses as well as reveals. In *True Heart Susie*, there is no conflict between camera and narrative voice: Griffith's titles declare that he is, in all essential ways, no different from the people who live within the world of his film.
One manifestation of Griffith’s intimate bond with the world of *True Heart Susie* is the transparency of his identification with the obtuse figure of William. When William’s first story, with which he hopes to make his mark as a writer, is accepted for publication, the letter of acceptance from the big-city publisher is not a little condescending in its praise of the story’s “quaint characterizations.” Through this letter, Griffith speaks volumes about the gap between William’s sensibility (as revealed by the camera) and that of the publisher, a gap of which William has as yet little inkling. There is a gap here as well between William and Griffith, who is ruefully wise to the irony that *True Heart Susie* will gain much of its acceptance by virtue of the condescension of those who will prize its characterizations as merely quaint rather than true. But the gap between William and Griffith is also a reflection of their bond. William’s naivety and foolishness once were Griffith’s own, *True Heart Susie* implies: William is a figure out of Griffith’s past, Griffith as he once was. It is as if Griffith is asking himself, What has become of me?

It is not just William whom Griffith knows this intimately. One of the unprecedented achievements of Griffith’s work as a whole is the creation of a remarkably intimate relationship between his camera and the extraordinary women who are its dearest subjects. In *True Heart Susie*, Griffith “identifies” as deeply with Lillian Gish/Susie, as with Robert Harron/William, and in this respect the film is characteristic of his work, not exceptional.

Griffith’s bond with Susie is apparent in his handling of the film’s opening sequence, the Friday afternoon spelling class. After correctly spelling the word “cry,” William has the misfortune of drawing “anonymous” (this choice of word is a nice ironic touch). Susie turns her eyes toward him, knowing he is misspelling the word, looks toward the teacher, and then steps forward to take her turn. Upset, William raises his hand as if to lodge a protest. Aware of his feelings, Susie again looks toward him, deliberating whether or not to misspell the word on purpose. (All this, the camera effortlessly reveals to us.) As the teacher looks on beaming, Susie spells the word correctly. The deflated William lowers his hand, and he and Susie switch places, her eyes fixed on his as she steps around him.

Throughout this passage, Susie’s inner conflict is perspicuous to a camera intimately attuned to her intelligence, her pride, her willfulness, her yearning for respectability, and her love of William. And Griffith gives voice to her feelings — and to his own sympathetic affection for her — with a priceless title: “Susie, like the girl in the verse: ’I’m sorry that I spelt the word, I hate to go above you. Because,’ the brown eyes lower fell, ’Because, you see, I love you.’”

Griffith’s ability to “get inside” Susie is also manifest at the begin-
ning of this sequence when he introduces her with the title "the plain girl." It is not that Griffith is asserting that Susie is plain — Griffith can see what the camera reveals to us, that this is no plain-Jane, this is Lillian Gish, one of the world’s great beauties. He is giving voice to Susie’s image of herself, invoking Susie’s inner voice. Again and again in *True Heart Susie*, Griffith’s titles voice characters’ ways of thinking about themselves and the events in which they are enmeshed. There is always a gap between the voices in such titles and Griffith’s own voice; yet these titles also seem animated from within, as if they were remembered voices, voices out of the past or out of a dream. Again, it is as if Griffith is remembering who he once was and wondering what has become of him.

Griffith’s intimate bond with Susie is no less eloquently acknowledged in those sequences in which he allows the camera’s revelations to stand without authorial comment. I am thinking, for example, of the Chaplinesque passage in which Susie walks down a country lane and sees William and Bettina together (they don’t see her) and the even more heartrending sequence in which Susie, believing that William is ready to propose to her, walks into William’s house only to find Bettina in his arms.

In the former passage, there is a cut from a three-shot to Susie, and the camera holds on her. At once drawn to the spectacle and recoiling from it, she closes her eyes, stares again, looks away, looks back, turns her gaze away, turns back.

We imagine ourselves in Susie’s place, and our heart goes out to her. We need no title to understand what she is feeling. In lieu of a title giving voice to Susie’s feelings — or his own — Griffith cuts to Susie at home that evening, alone with her diary, then to the words she is writing: "Perhaps after all will wait until spring" (to marry William). Susie’s words say all. Or, rather, they say nothing, and allow us (given what the camera has revealed to us about her) to read everything between the lines.
When, in the latter sequence, Susie opens the parlor door and sees William embracing Bettina, Griffith again frames the three in a long-shot.

Griffith cuts to Susie silently struggling with herself to pull her eyes away, then to a shot that functions like a shot from her point of view (to the last stages of his career, Griffith resisted the true point-of-view shot), then back to the anguished Susie in a closer framing.
In a reprise of the long three-shot setup, Susie lowers her gaze and leaves. Griffith cuts to her in the hallway, then frames her in an intimate medium close-up against the wall. Within this frame, which is held for what seems an eternity, Susie smiles, laughs nervously, distractedly runs her finger over her lips, anxiously casts her gaze toward the door, despairingly looks down, and, finally, before fleeing from the house, stares in panic right into the camera.

Throughout this agonizing passage and its equally grueling sequel (Aunty makes Susie return to William’s house, where she suffers through his announcement that he has “taken her advice” and is now engaged to Bettina), Griffith refrains from using any titles that do not simply relay what a character says. Again, we know Susie’s feelings by taking in the camera’s revelations and by imagining ourselves in her place. Again our heart goes out to her. Griffith breaks his silence only after the final image of this complex sequence fades out, and then only with the terse title “The merry wedding bells.” This is followed by shots of Susie sadly beholding Bettina in her wedding gown, helping the bride with her train, and finally collapsing when the newlyweds depart in their carriage.

The bitter irony in the word “merry” is Griffith’s sole verbal acknowledgment that he feels for Susie as we do. Otherwise, he allows her suffering to pass in silence, as if his feelings go without saying. This reticence is powerful testimony to the limits of language, the eloquence of silence — the eloquence of Griffith’s silence and of Susie’s, which is also the eloquence of Lillian Gish on film.

But what “goes without saying” here? Surely, it is Griffith’s wonderful love for Susie and equally wonderful capacity to imagine himself in her place. Griffith’s love for Susie also has a dark side, however (as always with Griffith, as always with film).

When she comes upon William and Bettina embracing, Susie’s suffering takes the form of a paralyzing self-consciousness, a terror of
being viewed (Is not this terror also rage?) as she now stands revealed. It is not simply the possibility of being viewed by William that paralyzes her, but of being viewed by anyone, because she is afraid to face herself at this moment, to face her terror and rage. Hence the profundity of Griffith’s strategy for conveying the nature and unfathomable depth of Susie’s suffering: He simply positions her against a wall and films her becoming more and more self-conscious. We are viewing Susie’s self-consciousness, acted out by Lillian Gish with Griffith’s direction or perhaps his withholding of direction. But at another level, this is no act; we are viewing Lillian Gish’s real self-consciousness in the face of the camera. When this self-consciousness culminates in casting a desperate look to the camera, actress and character are joined in this gaze. And director and actress are joined in the understanding that in the medium of film, self-consciousness is consciousness of the camera – consciousness of the self as the camera reveals it, consciousness of the self the camera represents. The camera not only reveals self-consciousness but also is its source: The camera represents the gaze of others that paralyzes Susie, and it also represents her inner gaze, in the face of which her naked, vulnerable self stands exposed.

Susie’s anguished self-consciousness is the camera’s visible mark – Griffith’s mark, our mark – on her: This is the darkness in what “goes without saying” about the passage. With the words “The merry wedding bells,” Griffith declares his love for Susie, which is his love for Lillian Gish, but he is speaking to us, not to her, and is also acknowledging his continuing responsibility for her suffering – the responsibility of his silence. In turn, this guilt is Griffith’s deepest bond with William.*

In a crucial sequence early in the film, William, strolling in the woods with Susie, carves their initials on a tree trunk and almost kisses her. As he leans toward her, her lips are pursed and her eyes closed in ecstasy, but William and Susie do not come together. It is as though there were an invisible barrier between them. Then, suddenly self-conscious, he hesitates and pulls back.

By flashbacks and subtle invocations of the framings within this se-

* There is an essay yet to be written, complementary to the present chapter, that mediates on Susie’s guilt as well as William’s guilt and studies the bond between Griffith and Gish not by addressing his strategies for filming her but her strategies for declaring herself to – and withholding herself from – the camera. She understands the camera as deeply as he does. Griffith is the director, but the camera is not simply “his”: The camera’s mark is on Gish, but her mark is on the camera as surely as Griffith’s is. In the face of the camera, Gish declares her love for Griffith, which is as wonderful as his love for her. Yet this woman’s love, like this man’s, also has a dark side.
quence, passage after passage echoes this moment at which William fails to cross the barrier, to claim Susie (for example, when William departs for college, when he returns, and when, knowing he has made a mistake in his own marriage, he advises Susie with a heavy sigh to be sure she chooses the right mate).

It is William's mysterious failure, which haunts the entire film, that must be undone if the lovers are to be united — and it is miraculously undone at the end of the film. Is the moment of William's failure also
a moment of Susie’s failure? Throughout the film, William’s silence bears responsibility for Susie’s suffering. Does her silence bear responsibility for his guiltiness, hence bear its own burden of guilt?

In Broken Blossoms, too, there is a kiss that does not take place, but when Richard Barthelmess refrains from kissing Lillian Gish, it is not a failure but a heroic gesture. Barthelmess consummates his sublime love in the only way open to him (he is, after all, a “Yellow Man”), by renouncing his desire. Griffith underscores the nobility of that renunciation (Does he also call it into question?) by intercutting the near kiss with a barbaric prizefight. When William does not kiss Susie, he is not being noble; he is failing to acknowledge his love. His is a catastrophic failure whose consequences are immensely cruel to Susie and to himself, and even crueler — indeed, fatal — to Bettina. Yet William’s failure does not undermine Griffith’s attachment to him. Indeed, he reserves his most affectionate title for this terrible, painful moment: “Of course, they don’t know what poor simple idiots they are — and we, who have never been so foolish, can hardly hope to understand — but —.”

Using the word “we,” Griffith steps forward, explicitly referring to himself. He ironically identifies himself — as he identifies me, as he identifies you — as someone who has “never been so foolish” and hence cannot “hope to understand” the likes of Susie and William who don’t know what “poor simple idiots they are.” Of course, Griffith really means that he has been — and perhaps still is — so foolish, that he does understand. Despite its remarkable playfulness, this title does not disavow the gravity of the moment. Rather, it delicately expresses a philosophical resignation toward the condition of being human, and toward two features in particular of this condition: the feature that human beings are fated to expose their limitations at every moment, and the feature that, for human beings, youth dies. Griffith, that monumental but forbidding founding father of the art of film, is rarely thought of as delicate, affectionate, playful, or philosophical; yet these are all qualities he possesses.

With this title, Griffith is declaring his human bond with Susie and William and calling upon us to acknowledge that we share this bond as well. We, too, were once “poor simple idiots,” were we not? And the question Griffith asks himself (What has become of me?) is a question he calls upon us to ask ourselves as well. Have we really changed?

The medium of film grants us a perspective from which we can recognize the follies to which the camera’s subjects appear blind. In Griffith’s understanding, film has a miraculous capacity to reveal truth; yet human beings have always possessed this power to transfigure reality. Susie and even the oblivious William ultimately come to know themselves as the camera enables us to know them, to see themselves
as they are revealed in film’s transfiguring light. We all have the power to recognize what we have become, Griffith is saying, to look back on the roads we have walked, to choose a new path. That human beings deny this power is, for Griffith, the tragedy, or at least the pathos, of history.

Part of Griffith’s irony, then, is that we are “poor simple idiots” like Susie and William, and part of the irony is that human beings, “poor simple idiots” though they may be, are never as blind as they appear. As revealed by the camera, Susie and William know the truth in their hearts even when they act as though they do not. For example, when William hesitates and then self-consciously pulls away without kissing Susie, he knows (as she does) that this kiss was to have sealed the pledge of eternal love signified by their initials on the tree. He knows that his self-consciousness means that he does, not that he does not, really love this woman. He knows what is at stake, which is why this moment has the power to come back to haunt him. Self-conscious in the face of the camera, conscious that his own self is a mystery to him, he – like Susie – is conscious of the camera, attuned to the mystery it represents, which here manifests itself in the invisible barrier separating him from the love of his life. In the last reels of True Heart Susie, Griffith invokes this mystery with extraordinary intensity.

Having arranged to sleep alone in the spare room, Bettina sneaks out to a party. Griffith cuts from Bettina dancing to Susie solicitously tucking in her beloved Aunty, then to William, lying alone in bed, troubled. He gets up and walks down the hall to the room where he thinks his wife is sleeping. He hesitates uneasily in front of the closed door. Deciding not to go in, he returns to his room and stares out the window, deep in thought. We know what is on his mind. He is thinking about, longing for, Susie. At this moment, Griffith cuts to the object of William’s desire. Illuminated as if by an inner glow, Susie is weeping at her window, pitifully “waiting for the love that never comes.”
Then Griffith cuts to a shot that serves to represent Susie's view (although it could just as well be William's). The only light in this frame comes from the window, a rectangle of light in the midst of darkness, the bars of the window forming a cross. Symbolically, this window, or the light that shines through it, invokes the powers of good that, in Griffith's dramaturgy, are in eternal war with the powers of evil. (Evil is personified in *True Heart Susie* not by Bettina but by the seductive, mustachioed stranger William believes to be the anonymous benefactor who pays the college tuition.) Like the "Morning Star" that presides over the world of *The White Rose*, this window represents the true love, the faith, that joins Susie and William in spirit. Of course, what joins them is also what keeps them apart: William will always be true to his marriage vows, and Susie will never step between husband and wife. The illuminated window stands in for their dream of a better world, a glorious world in which love is fulfilled and faith rewarded, but it also brings home that it is a dream, brings home the unhappy conditions of their lives as they really are. Yet in the world of *True Heart Susie*, a world transfigured by the medium of film, what keeps Susie and William apart has the power to unite them, or reunite them, in the end.
This vision of an illuminated frame-within-the-frame, crossed by shadows and surrounded by darkness, serves as a perfect emblem for the film frame and for film’s transfiguring light. It is a positive counterpart to *The Birth of a Nation’s* invocations of film’s demonic power, Griffith’s declaration that film is also divine. But this passage embeds a disquieting reminder of film’s dark side as well. The union of Susie and William requires a miraculous intervention, and this miracle exacts a human price. It is precisely at this moment, as if in ironic answer to Susie’s and William’s Christian prayers, that the heavens open and poor Bettina catches her death.

When Bettina is dropped off at home after the party, she discovers that she has lost her key. She goes over to Susie’s house, tells Susie about the party, and implores Susie to let her spend the night – and to lie for her. The title “But True Heart Susie...” is followed by a medium close-up of the two women in Susie’s bed. Bettina seems asleep, but Susie, her face an inscrutable mask, is wide awake, looking intently at this woman she has every motivation to hate. Susie’s hand clenches into a fist, and she seriously contemplates striking Bettina. Instead, she cradles her feverish rival, rests Bettina’s head on her breast, and lies awake beside Bettina, taking comfort in her presence, as if they were sisters.

In Susie’s eyes, Bettina is not a villainess, whatever her failings, but a fellow human sufferer. Susie forgives Bettina, and *True Heart Susie* calls upon us – as it calls upon Griffith – to follow her edifying example. And yet, for Susie to be happy, Bettina must die.

*The Birth of a Nation* tells the story of a nightmarish war, of cycles of revenge, of wounds that never heal. *True Heart Susie,* despite its dark side, is a film about forgiveness. Susie forgives Bettina, and in the great closing sequence, she forgives William for his years of silence.
The sequence begins with a frame devoid of human figures, the curtained window forming a frame-within-the-frame. Holding a watering can, Susie appears within this window. Griffith cuts to a more intimate framing, within which she lowers her head and weeps.

In the original longer setup, Susie bravely pulls herself together — but without looking up — and begins watering, nurturing, the flowers.
Just then a shadow — the silhouette of a man — appears in the right foreground. Susie reacts with a start to this apparition, as if she were seeing a ghost.

Griffith cuts to William, framed in courtly profile. A title presents his solemn words: “I’ve learned the truth.”

Susie clasps the watering can to her breast, then self-consciously covers her face with it, protecting herself from William — and from the camera.
The silhouette draws closer to Susie in the frame. In panic, she drops the can and withdraws, uncovering a graceful floral arrangement that turns the "empty" frame-within-the-frame into a harmonious still life. Then William enters the frame in the flesh and crosses to the far left of the screen.

A title reads "Is it too late, Susie? I know now I have loved you all my life." Then William steps closer to the window at precisely the moment she reenters the frame-within-the-frame. Her movement left to right in the background precisely matches his in the foreground, as if they were mirror images.

For a long moment, they stand face to face, staring at each other. They come so close, but do not touch each other, as if a pane of glass separated them, no less palpable a barrier for being invisible. Everything about Griffith's filming of this moment enhances the uncanny impression that William is a viewer beholding Susie projected on a movie screen.

Susie's doubting eyes are peeled to his as William leans yet closer. Still with a trace of disbelief, she purses her lips in anticipation of the kiss she has imagined all these years. Her eyes shut, and at last the barrier is bridged, the kiss happens, the dream comes true!
Susie opens her eyes, as if astonished at the miracle, but also as if conscious that someone may be watching, and Griffith tactfully cuts to a longer, more discreet frame, within which the kiss gracefully continues.

The film ends with the title "And we may believe they walk again as they did long years ago," followed by a hallucinatory vision of Susie and William, children again – even Susie’s beloved cow has come back to life! – walking down the familiar country road into the depths
of the frame. This “happy ending” is also a reminder that such happiness, in our lives, remains a dream.

When William appears before Susie as a ghostly apparition and then enters the frame in the flesh, it is as if a dead man comes to life before her eyes, a shadow assumes substance. It is also as if William steps into, or out of, the world of a film, crossing the barrier represented by the screen. When he declares his love and Susie forgives him, Griffith is saying, William is created, and Susie, too, dies and is reborn. And Griffith discovers a deep inner connection between the mysteries of creation, forgiveness, and love and the mystery at the heart of film. By envisioning creation, forgiveness, and love in terms of crossing the barrier separating film from reality, True Heart Susie anticipates the ending of City Lights and provides deep inspiration for classical Hollywood genres of the thirties and forties, such as the remarriage comedy and the melodrama of the unknown woman.
Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton, the two greatest creators of silent-film comedy, arrived at diametrically opposed strategies for discovering comedy in the conditions of film. What a sublime accident of fate!

As an actor, Chaplin is perfectly expressive, whereas Keaton is famous for his inexpressiveness (more accurately, for the rigorous limits he places on the expressions he allows himself). Chaplin seems always to be performing for an audience whose love he craves, whereas Keaton characteristically seems unconscious of having an audience. Keaton incarnates a comical character who is naturally earnest, guileless, innocent, like a Kafka protagonist. In particular, he never smiles; that is, he finds nothing funny. Chaplin on screen, by contrast, laughs often, and his laughter frequently is addressed openly to the camera. Keaton almost never declares, or even expresses, desire, whereas Chaplin's passions are always manifest, although Chaplin, unlike Keaton, is also a master of deception, a seducer. Filmically, their styles are opposed as well. The way the world appears is essential to Keaton's films, but not Chaplin's films. Chaplin the performer is at the center of his world, whereas Keaton is on the outside looking in. Keaton makes his gags with the camera, Chaplin through his performance as an actor.

Keaton's comedy, as I understand it, turns on one joke, at one level a joke on the medium of film. We might say that the Keaton character wishes for a viewer's relationship with the world. That role he finds natural, as we do. Unlike us, though, who are called upon only to view a Keaton film, he finds it impossible to view the world for more than a few moments at a time. To survive (and also to win the woman, which is always his ostensible goal), he must continually act. But human actions do not come naturally to him, although he follows all the rules. He seems not to have a native comprehension of ordinary behavior, not because he lacks intelligence, but because ordinary human beings have desires that he does not seem to have, or at least is unaware of having. Of course, the author of the film, who arranges “accidents”
The ending of *City Lights*

precisely to force him to act in the world whether he wants to or not, hence who keeps distracting him from his contemplations, is also Keaton: This is the joke, the constant irony in Keaton’s films, perhaps most profoundly registered in *Sherlock Junior*, when he steps into the world of the film-within-the-film that he is viewing. The medium of film allows Keaton to be his own straight man.

If the wish to be free to view the world is at the heart of the Keaton figure on screen, then in order to lead us to affirm our bond with that figure, Keaton the filmmaker must create images — and images of himself! — so satisfying that we will be tempted to give up the world to view them. If viewing Keaton on film were not a transcendental experience, the Keaton figure would be incomprehensible to us. Keaton’s transcendental moments do not have the moral dimension of Griffith’s transcendental moments. For Griffith, the transcendental realm is one in which our relationships with other human beings are fulfilled, not denied; Griffith must have disapproved of Keaton’s films, which are torn between fulfilling and mocking our wish to view rather than inhabit the world. They mock romance, but they are also romances. They seem profoundly skeptical about the possibility of being a dual citizen of the real world (the only world in which romantic dreams can be fulfilled) and the transcendental realm. Indeed, Keaton implies something darker: that we human beings are cut off from both realms, are not at home in the world, but also are not free to contemplate it from the outside because we are continually thrust into existence. Keaton discovers in the conditions of film a perfect medium for rendering an existential despair that is the ironic underpinning to the optimism of his stories. Life is hell, for Keaton, but for the grace of film and the epiphanies it alone makes possible.

His secret wish to be a viewer is at the heart of Keaton’s comedy. At the heart of Chaplin’s comedy is the wish to end his separation from the world. The conditions of the medium serve Chaplin as a metaphor for the barriers that human beings long to overcome in their quest to become fully human. Chaplin is not a spectator wishing to contemplate the world’s design; he is a performer who takes pleasure in the applause of his audience. Viewing fills him with longing, not satisfaction. What he longs for, viewing cannot provide, and neither, in the end, can contact with an audience.

Yet it is complicated. Chaplin is a performer, but he performs for audiences within the world of the film, and he also performs for the camera, for us, for himself as audience. Chaplin the performer, his camera’s inescapable subject, is a mask for Chaplin the director, the man behind the camera, and vice versa. Chaplin controls the camera, and this is something to be declared not to an audience within the world of the film but to us. But what are his real feelings about us,
and ours about him? He wants us to love him, but is this only an expression of his disdain for us? (In *The Circus*, for example, he has disdain for all audiences but one — the woman he loves — and perhaps — if so, even the camera is not in on this secret — even for her.) And do we really love Chaplin, or would we reject him if he stepped forward into our presence and declared himself to us? Not despair, but a passionate wish and a palpable terror are at the heart of Chaplin's films: the wish and terror of overcoming the barrier for which film is a metaphor, the wish and terror of making or allowing a dream to become real. In the ending of *City Lights*, as I understand it, he declares this wish and faces this terror by, in effect, calling upon us to imagine that no screen separates him from us.

Keaton's films declare themselves to be transcendent, heavenly designs, as though only the pleasures offered by film, not ordinary human satisfactions, make life worth living. Chaplin, by contrast, dwells on the impossibility of being perfectly satisfied, or giving perfect satisfaction, by film. To Chaplin, film does not, even ironically, represent salvation. In heaven, Chaplin will not cross the street to see — much less to make — a film. Yet it is no accident that film is his medium. Reflecting on himself, Chaplin reflects on film as surely as Keaton does. Although his films may not be "cinematic" in the usual sense of the term, in the ending of *City Lights*, made when the silent film was given up for dead, Chaplin creates one of the profoundest of all meditations on the nature of the film medium.

To the accompaniment of a bittersweet melody (composed by Chaplin himself), the sequence opens with a shot of "the Girl" (Virginia Cherrill) in a flower shop — her flower shop — busily putting together a floral arrangement. (Evidently, her eyesight has been restored.) Her back is to the plate-glass window behind her, which dominates the background. She is oblivious to the world we view through that window,
the busy street with its traffic and its pedestrians going about their business. In her absorption, she is vulnerable to being viewed without her knowledge by someone on the other side of the window (as she is vulnerable to our view).

There is a cut to the street corner outside, a location and framing already filled with resonance in the film. The Little Tramp rounds the corner and enters the frame, walking without the customary Chaplin élan. Having served his time in prison for a crime he did not commit, having resigned himself to never again seeing the woman he loves (whose sight-saving operation he had secretly made possible), he is melancholy.

We return to the unsuspecting Girl, framed in a longer shot, her back still to the window, through which we now view a limousine pulling up in front of the shop. An elegantly dressed young gentleman steps out and walks through the door. Only then does the Girl turn away from her floral arrangement to greet the customer. For a moment, they face each other at opposite ends of the frame.

Framed in medium close-up, she stares at his handsome face with a look of hopeful expectation, but all he says is, "I'd like to order some flowers." She is brought back from her reverie – her fantasy that he is the one, the Prince Charming of her dreams, whose chivalrous gift enabled her sight to be restored. Her grandmother appears – she works with the Girl in the shop – and takes from Prince Charming the slip of paper on which his order is written, and he leaves.

In a medium long-shot, the Girl, breathing deeply, stares blankly toward the camera. Concerned, her grandmother goes to her side. "Why, what's the matter, child?" The mood of her reverie still lingering, the Girl sits down. "Nothing, only I thought he had returned." The grandmother hugs her a bit (consolingly? encouraging the dream? resignedly?) and goes off to begin filling the order, leaving the Girl alone to dream in the face of the camera.

Meanwhile, on the street, a crowd of pedestrians is massed at the traffic light, waiting for it to change. When they begin to surge across the street, the camera pans right, going against the grain of this movement in a declaration of its autonomy. It continues moving on its own until it frames the window of a pawnshop. The Tramp, still deep in gloom, enters the frame and looks into the pawnshop window.

The two newsboys who have been tormenting the Tramp throughout the film (perhaps not entirely unaffectionately) spot him and grin. One of the boys loads up a peashooter.

The Tramp, hit by the pea, looks down, rubbing the back of his head, then sees the boys – but he is too dispirited to take chase.

Still staring in the direction of the boys, and thus not noticing
where he is, the Tramp approaches the flower-shop window, which has a large arrangement on display (the Girl cannot be seen in this frame). Another pea strikes him in the head, and he angrily shakes his finger, but the boys only laugh.

There is a cut to a longer framing. The boys in the foreground, in combination with the lamppost and the pedestrians, obscure the Tramp from our view.

But as he moves screen left and the pedestrians move off to the right, the Girl is revealed through the window, absorbed in her floral arrangement and her dream.

One of the boys shoots another pea and then returns to his pal's side, affecting innocence (and eclipsing the Girl from view). Again the Tramp wags an ineffectual finger at them. Then, his eyes to the ground, he resumes his morose walk, the boys staring mischievously after him, waiting for their next opening. Suddenly, the Tramp freezes. The music soars to a new height of sentiment, and there is a cut to the Tramp's point of view: a rose lying in the gutter, discarded and forlorn.
As the Tramp stoops and picks up the rose, one of the boys snatches a piece of cloth protruding through a split in his pants. Almost upended, the Tramp wheels around and grabs it back. The boy and his pal scamper off. The Tramp takes two leaping steps after them, the camera reframing with his motion, but then he gives up the pursuit. But by its movement, the camera reveals the Girl, who has been watching this scene with great amusement, an amusement that momentarily pulls her out of her longing. (Perhaps this is the first time since her operation — the first time in her life? — that she gives herself to laughter.) Unknowingly, then, the Tramp wins the Girl as an audience, exactly as he wins the audience under the big top in The Circus. The circus audience laughs at the Little Tramp’s “antics” without realizing that he isn’t being funny at all, that he is in dire distress. In Chaplin’s work, this myth of the origins of comedy in a clown’s broken heart and the blindness of his audience plays a central role. It is complemented by his frank admissions (as in The Pilgrim, for example, when the Tramp-turned-minister acknowledges his parishioners’ applause after a rousing rendition of the David-and-Goliath story) that he loves to perform, to win an audience’s heart by making it laugh.

In a quintessentially Chaplinesque bit of business, the Tramp pulls off something that had just gotten stuck to the sole of his shoe, and
the Girl, laughing, expresses her appreciation to her grandmother at her side.

Framed at a slightly different angle, the Tramp keeps moving screen left, all the time staring back at the boys, toward whom he gestures futilely. Through the window, we see the Girl’s attention divided between arranging the flowers and watching the antics of this clown, who delicately blows his nose with the cloth, folds it neatly, and inserts it into the pocket of his tattered evening coat. Then, to the great glee of his audience on the other side of the glass, he crowns his “act” with another quintessentially Chaplinesque gesture: As the music cadences, he gives his smartly folded handkerchief a pat worthy of a Beau Brummel. Having performed this affirmation that his dignity is intact, he is ready once more to venture forth into the world.

There is silence as we cut to a remarkable shot framed from within the shop. The Girl is in the lower foreground, her face turned away from the camera, so that all we see is the back of her head (which initially blocks the Tramp’s rose from our view). Through the window, she views the Tramp as we do, as though she were separated from him, as we are, by a screen.
The Tramp begins to raise his hand as though to savor the fragrance of the rose (which is below the frame line) before resuming his wandering. This is when he sees her. Between the almost imperceptible movement of his hand and the ever-so-slight motion of her head as she recoils from his strangely intense stare, the rose is revealed in the frame.

At just this moment, too, the bittersweet music again starts up. The Tramp's eyes widen, and a gloriously dopey grin spreads over his face.

The Girl is transfixed by his gaze, but as she tries to make sense of what she is seeing, bewilderment takes over as the dominant strain in her reaction. Then she pulls her hand away and, deliberately denying the mystery, turns back to her grandmother and says "I've made a conquest!"

When we cut back to the previous framing, the Girl is now turned toward the camera and away from the Tramp, who is still standing motionless, flower in hand, grinning.

In effect, the Girl has directed her scoffing remark to us, has made us her confidants. (Although we do not share her position, at least we are located at her side in the flower shop, separated from this man by a
sheet of glass.) She turns back to face him just as a petal falls from his rose. Then another petal drops. Then another.

Seeing the falling petals, she gestures to the Tramp (this glass is also a barrier to speech) and, holding up a fresh rose, indicates that he should enter the shop. She says something to her grandmother, who hands her a coin, which she holds up along with the rose.

As the Girl rises and heads for the door, the Tramp suddenly panics. He wheels around, meaning to make tracks, his movement and hers perfectly synchronized in the frame.

There is a cut to outside the shop, where the camera reframes with the Tramp as he tries to get away before the Girl reaches his side. But then he stops and turns toward her. The scene freezes into a tableau. The Tramp is on the left, his body poised to flee, but his face expressing his desperate longing to stay and make the woman he loves fall in love with him as he really is. The Girl is on the right, holding up the coin, which occupies the center of the frame. When the coin fails to entice him to return, she tries the rose. Dancing its part in an enchanted ballet, his hand moves with infinite slowness, reaching gracefully across the frame to accept the gift of the flower.

Then she again holds up the coin. When he still shows no interest in it, she steps toward him, closing the distance between them. Taking his arm, she pulls him into the center of the frame.

In an oblique shot of the Girl viewed over the Tramp’s shoulder (the framing clearly differentiating his perspective from that of the camera), she places the coin in his hand, closes his fingers over it, and pats them with the affection due a child. All the while, she chatters away like a Griffith ingenue, yet looks deeply into his eyes. Whether her eyes recognize the look in his eyes or her hand (for so many years, her only eyes) remembers the touch of his hand, suddenly the Girl knows, her knowledge expressed both in her eyes and in the tender way
her hand begins stroking his. A close-up isolates their hands in the frame.

For a moment, her hand closes his in its grasp. Then, tenderly, but with heartbreaking tentativeness, it follows the path of his arm toward his shoulder. The camera, taking its lead from her knowing hand, re-frames until we view the Tramp’s face — famously, he is holding the rose between his teeth. His eyes betray his excitement and his dread.

Terrifyingly, her hand withdraws, momentarily breaking contact, and she asks, “You?” The Tramp nods. She touches her hand to her heart. Pointing to his eyes, he asks a question, which is really an answer: “You can see now?” She nods her head. “Yes, I can see now.” Choking back sobs, she presses his hand against her heart and smiles bravely.

We cut to a medium close-up of Chaplin, with only the edge of the Girl’s hair visible in the frame; it feels very much like a shot from her point of view. His hand is still raised to his mouth, his rose still between his teeth, his gaze still locked with hers, his eyes still filled with dread and terror. And yet — he beams, he smiles, he laughs, as though struck by the realization of how irresistibly funny this wonderful, terri-
ble moment is. Then the scene fades out, and his face is engulfed in darkness.*

In describing this last moment, I am no longer willing to refer to his human figure as "the Tramp." It is Chaplin, this human being of flesh and blood, who stands exposed in this frame, revealed in his mortality and his desperate longing to be loved. This revelation by the camera is also a declaration of the camera, a declaration by the film's author that he is the pathetic Little Tramp. Chaplin completes his design by stepping forward.

With this gesture, Chaplin calls upon us to imagine something very specific: that he has stepped out of the world of the film and into our presence, that no "window" separates us, no screen. Chaplin calls upon us to imagine, in other words, that the medium of film is no barrier. (Viewed in these terms, this moment is the exact counterpart to the great passage in Buster Keaton's *Sherlock Junior* in which Keaton literally steps into the world of the film-within-the-film he is viewing.)

* Woody Allen models the ending of *Manhattan* on *City Lights*. When Mariel Hemingway says that he has to accept the fact that people change and has to learn to trust people, we get a sustained close-up of Allen, grudgingly admitting that she is right. But his rueful admission is to himself, by extension to us, and not to her. Her reaction to this acknowledgment is not at issue, as though there were no question of her love for him, the only question being whether or not, when she changes, she will fall out of love with him. But what entitles Allen to take this woman's love for granted? (That they have "great sex," as he puts it, is not sufficient grounds. Besides, how can he be so certain that their sex is "great" for her too? How can he know that she is not an actress?) Even at this moment, Allen remains the center of his universe. This shot frames Allen's judgment on his own persona and proclaims the birth of a new Woody Allen. Yet despite its apparent self-deprecation, it reaffirms, it does not question, Allen's old claim to be the sole authority (even though it appears to invest that authority in a woman). In other words, he has not really changed. *Manhattan* is his impassioned plea to his audience to let him change, to let him cast off his comical *shlemiel* persona. If we keep him from changing, he tells us, that is no laughing matter. Yet he remains maddeningly blind to what we can clearly see: that his genius, like Chaplin's, is for comedy, and that his comical persona is an inescapable and inexhaustible subject for him, indeed his only subject.
To envision this in the medium of film is to envision — this is a utopian fantasy and a terrifying one — the overcoming of all the barriers that human beings have created to ward off the knowledge that human happiness rests in human hands.

Why does Chaplin not follow this shot with a shot of the Girl’s reaction? To show her reaction here would be to speak for her on the subject of what is in her heart about him. In part, Chaplin refrains from doing this because he cannot say what this shot reveals about his nature, about who he really is. Is he worthy of love?

This is a real question, and a deep one. The Tramp is not merely a pathetic victim. After all, he has exploited the Girl’s blindness, deceiving her into fostering a dream that he knows cannot come true — unless he is the lover of her dreams. (That Chaplin is not guileless is part of what it means that he is a mime. Innumerable Chaplin gags involve sudden transformations designed to make guilty behavior appear innocent.)

Chaplin has every reason to believe that by revealing himself in this way, he is cruelly disillusioning this woman, destroying her dream. It may be said, in his defense, that he did not engineer this revelation, which is the product of a series of accidents. Yet if he is a victim of these accidents, he is also their perpetrator. He is the author of the film who has presided over all these “accidents” with this end in view.

The Tramp, in his sensitivity, his noble spirit in the face of suffering, his humanity, is someone we love. But this figure is also Chaplin’s mask, created through his performance and also his control over the camera. He presents himself as the Little Tramp, but all the time he is the director in control — manipulative, cold, inhuman. That the Tramp himself has a murderous aspect increasingly becomes of interest to Chaplin, whose films come to dwell more and more on this split in his self. (That the Tramp is also a monster is the central point of The Great Dictator, for example, in which Chaplin undertakes to play not only a Tramp-like Jewish barber but also no less a monster than Adolph Hitler.)

Once we recognize Chaplin’s unfathomable power, we understand that it is not only the Girl’s love (or ours) that is in doubt. By revealing himself, he faces the risk that he has no place in her dream, but he also faces the equally terrifying risk that this real woman possessed of sight has no place in his dream. (Perhaps he loved her for her blindness.)

To show the Girl’s reaction would also be to dictate to us what we are to feel, and this, too, Chaplin refrains from doing. He chooses, rather, to allow us no way of imagining what might follow this moment — apart from imagining ourselves in her place. That is, in the same gesture by which Chaplin calls upon us to imagine that he has
stepped out of the world of the film, he also calls upon us to imagine that we find ourselves within that world, not outside and safely screened from it.

By calling upon us to imagine that film is no longer a barrier, Chaplin calls upon us to reflect on the limits of the medium of film and to ask ourselves whether or not we wish for those limits to be transcended. Do we wish for the Tramp to be real, if that means we must give our love to a human being of flesh and blood? This is a philosophical question about the human capacity for love and for avoiding love. It is also a question of the greatest possible personal concern to Chaplin: *City Lights* declares that he stakes his whole existence on our answer. In the film’s final frame, Chaplin stands in for every one of us; yet by assuming his place, he declares his separateness from us. It would not be possible for any of us to stand in for him in this frame.

Whether we accept or reject Chaplin at this moment, something dies, and something is born, in our relationship with him. In the end, perhaps, film is not funny for Chaplin. Perhaps we have failed him, and he has destroyed our dreams. Perhaps film cannot bring about salvation, but rather confirms the worst about our condition. And yet, just before the final fade-out, Chaplin does, miraculously, laugh.
Red Dust, released by Warner Brothers in 1932, and directed by Victor Fleming, opens with a kind of prologue that introduces the Clark Gable character and establishes the setting: Gable is foreman of a large rubber plantation an arduous day’s trek from Saigon (amazingly, everyone in the film pronounces it “Say-gon”). A monsoon is approaching. Gable is furious that so many of the trees have been tapped too young (good rubber cannot be made from such trees).

Jean Harlow arrives by boat, expecting to leave again when the boat does. She first manifests herself as an offscreen voice, and then is seen from Gable’s point of view. Gable is sullen in her presence. His elderly friend and confidant chides him for not recognizing a natural playmate in this beautiful young woman. This sets the stage for the most entertaining scene in the film, Harlow drawing upon her repertoire of techniques of wit to break down Gable’s sullenness: for example, by relating how Roquefort cheese is made (by slapping the sheep – “Ewes, don’t you call them?” – around the udders), although she never gets the full story out; by mocking Gable for his sulking (“I’ll go peacefully, officer,” she says, as though she were a prostitute and he a censorious cop).

Harlow takes it as her task to make Gable laugh, and when she finally succeeds, he pulls her toward him and opines that she is not so bad after all. Then the camera pans to a shot of a squawking parrot, an invocation of a sexual act not explicitly shown. (Red Dust, made two years before rigid enforcement of the Production Code in 1934, need not hedge the issue whether or not an act of sexual intercourse takes place. Contrast, for example, the famous cut to the airport tower in Casablanca.)

The next day, as Harlow boards the boat, she tries to coax from Gable some acknowledgment that he feels something for her. Thinking that she is hinting that she wants to be paid, he hands her money. The sequence concludes with a glorious image of Harlow that represents her reaction to Gable’s dismissive gesture. This shot both captures –
The "I" of the camera

in soft-focus, idealized, haloed form – Harlow's great beauty (a beauty that, it is a point of the shot, does not awaken Gable's desire) and confirms her humanity, accords her a psychology grounded in a sense of alienation with which we may identify.

First introduced from Gable's point of view, Harlow's own point of view is now authorized by the film. This shot does not impute carnal desire to her, nor is it designed to arouse the viewer erotically, although she is, as I have suggested, posed, lit, and framed so as to bring out her beauty to the full – a beauty that is here declared to be spiritual. Harlow's reaction reveals, for example, her awareness that Gable does not even understand that his gesture constituted a slap in the face. She refrains from returning Gable's cruelty in kind. She simply wants this man to acknowledge her.

It might be noted that the Production Code was soon to undermine the basis of Harlow's screen persona. This persona is crystallized in her famous identifying feature: her platinum hair. A Photoplay feature on Harlow's beauty secrets notes that "Jean's platinum halo has probably aroused more comment and curiosity than any one feature of any star." Naturally described as a "halo," it is an emblem of her purity of spirit and her longing for love and acceptance. But as platinum, bleached, it marks her as a fallen woman. She is, at the very least, no virgin, and the world is inclined to treat her as a tart. One way she responds to this treatment is by deliberately acting vulgar, making herself ugly. This is the dominant strain in her performance in Dinner at Eight (1933), for example. Harlow's alienation is the basis of her wit.

Why won't Gable acknowledge Harlow, and why does she fail to excite him? A clue arrives on the next boat. The new assistant foreman (Gene Raymond) arrives, and we share Gable's immediate reaction to him: This is a mouse or a boy, not a man – such a wimp will never make it on the plantation. Then we also share Gable's initial view of
the figure implicated in Raymond's lack of manliness: Raymond's wife (Mary Astor), who is an intolerable, snobbish bitch.

Raymond plunges to his nadir when he is stricken with fever. Up to the point of crisis, Gable continues to speak and act in ways contrived to shock Astor, calling her to task for being there, uninvited, and indeed for existing at all. (Only later are we given the skeleton of a psychological explanation for Gable's excessively harsh treatment of Astor: His mother, unable to take the robust life here, died on the plantation.) But when the crisis comes, Gable nurses Raymond through his fever.

Witnessing this, Astor apologizes for failing to recognize Gable's altruism. Gable renews his provocative tack, implying that her apology is itself a product of her spoiled rich-girl attitude. Further, he asserts that his act was not really altruistic, but was motivated by the perception that she was attracted to him. She slaps him hard in the face, and their relationship is transformed.

That this slap gives birth to Gable's passionate desire for Astor is confirmed by what follows: As a tiger roams on the edge of the compound, Astor prepares for a bath, while Gable secretly spies on her. His desire is aroused, and he knows it; she desires him, but she has no knowledge of such matters, does not recognize the passion welling up within her.

Thus we read the following sequence, in which Gable takes Astor on a tour of the plantation, as his deliberate seduction of her. As part of their tour, he shows her various stages in the production of rubber (for example, showing through a microscope how raw rubber, when assaulted by chemicals, "stiffens into an indignant mass"). The tour is interrupted when the monsoon suddenly breaks. Astor's bewildered reaction is clearly double: Her "What's happening?" refers to the monsoon, consistently referred to as "she," but it also refers to the storm within, the inner tempest of her passionate desire. The storm is both an agent of Astor's sexual arousal and a metaphor for it. (This is, of course, conventional enough.) She may be married, but Astor now finds herself erotically aroused for the first time. And Gable, her first real man, literally sweeps her off her feet and carries her to the compound.

Here we are given our second reaction shot of Harlow, who watches as Gable carries Astor into his room. With her platinum hair blown by the storm and rendered luminous by the lightning, Harlow is once again radiantly beautiful. But this soft-focus, idealized, yet humanized, image of Harlow (one that is given to us, but is available to no one in the world of the film) again represents no one's desire, nor is it designed to convey an erotic charge to the viewer. It stands opposed to our next view.
In the next frame, Gable is very much in the background, setting off Mary Astor, who is seen, as it were, from within the bounds of decency. This transgressive image solicits our gaze to pass pleasurably over the perfect form of her features (her nose, ears, and lips), her smooth skin, her taut neck and arms, her swelling breasts. Her movements further accentuate the sensation the image gives us of her body as made of flesh, and her face a fleshly part of her body, its features carnal regions rather than instruments of expression. In this image, she seems entirely consumed by sexual desire. Astor's carnality, and not her soul or her mind or her heart, is what the shot declares and embodies. Astor's earlier snobbish behavior is at least for a moment cast off, leaving not an individual, but an object and subject of desire.

Typically, Mary Astor plays, in movies, characters who act aloof, although these characters often have so little self-awareness that they are unaware that this is an act. When Astor's act is exposed on film, she is typically interpreted — as she is in *Red Dust* — as a woman whose only wish is, to paraphrase Kenneth Anger's quotation from Astor's real-life diary, “to have the living daylights fucked out of her.”* 

Astor's aloof act is declared, in films like *Red Dust*, to mask a terrifying, all-consuming sexual desire. *The Maltese Falcon* pierces through to a further intuition about Astor: that her displays of insatiable lustfulness, masked by her aloof act, are themselves theatrical. Yet instead of meditating on the mystery of this woman's nature (in particular, her motivations in so theatricalizing her sexuality), *The Maltese Falcon*, anticipating film noir, regressively explains this theatricality away, interpreting it as villainy. It fails to appreciate (and *Red Dust* even fails to recognize) the spirit of irony and the wit with which Mary Astor participates in the animation of her screen persona. Jean Harlow's wit is about alienation in the face of the world; Astor's wit is about alienation from oneself.

The Mary Astor figure is the object of Gable's desire, but *Red Dust* does not allow him to win her in the end. The remainder of the film chronicles the events in the course of which Gable comes to renounce his desire and to accept Harlow as his mate.

Having sent Raymond to a distant part of the plantation so as to have freer access to his wife, Gable finally goes to the far-off outpost where the poor guy has been hopelessly screwing things up. Ostensibly, he goes there to shoot a marauding man-eating tiger, but his real intention is to announce to the cuckolded husband that Gable and the wife are in love with each other. Yet in the presence of this nice boy who looks up to him for being decent as well as for possessing the prowess to shoot tigers, Gable cannot bring himself to do what he came to do. Distraught by the discovery that there are limits to how low he is willing to sink, he leaves immediately upon killing the tiger, saying nothing. (After Gable's departure, Raymond is told about his wife's affair.)

Back at the compound, Gable and Harlow team up to perform a charade intended to make Astor think that he was deceiving her all along, that he was never in love, but only using her. Astor is so upset that she loses control and shoots Gable. When her husband arrives, he actually believes the story that she joins with Harlow and Gable in concocting to explain the spectacle that greets him.

Husband and wife depart together. Astor, for so long unaware of desire, has become disillusioned by desire. And the very gesture by which Gable frees Astor to leave with her husband at the same time denies his desire. It also declares his knowledge and acceptance of his bond with Harlow. Whether he likes it or not, he now knows, she is the right mate for him, desire or no desire. What is their bond, if it is not grounded in desire? Their relationship is like that between innocent children who have fun playing games together. This is confirmed in the film's epilogue.

Gable, wounded, lies in bed while Harlow reads to him a bedtime
story about a bunny rabbit. When his playful fingers hop a little too suggestively for the spirit of the story, she jestingly chastises him. This depiction of their relationship is stripped of any suggestion of sexual desire between them. If they are to make love, the film allows us to imagine it only as an extension of their childish play, their playful denial of desire.

There are two conceptions of sexuality that *Red Dust* sets in opposition. The first is embodied in the relationship between Gable and Astor: sexuality as a brute passion, a storm arousing and aroused by violent nature. All of the animals that appear or are alluded to in the film (the tiger that leaps as Astor's passion wells up within her; the tiger Gable shoots; the parrot; most comically, the "ewes, don't you call them" that the makers of Roquefort cheese slap around) invoke this conception of sexuality as animalistic. The monsoon itself, a "she," has already been described in its link to Astor's passion. Perhaps most extreme, there is the link between the process of arousing human erotic passion and the processes by which rubber and cheese are produced. All three processes are described in identical terms; in each, "slapping around" and the consequent indignant stiffening are crucial steps. And, of course, Gene Raymond, who will never grow into a real man, has been, like so many rubber trees (if this isn't stretching a point), "tapped too young." Such repetition and structuring of motifs, though almost never discussed in the critical literature, is an entirely characteristic aspect of Hollywood films of the thirties. (This aspect is polished to its greatest brilliance in the work of Howard Hawks.)

The second conception, embodied in the Gable—Harlow relationship, is the contrasting idea of sexuality as good clean fun, an innocent child's game untainted by desire.

It seems plausible to speculate that the rigid enforcement of the Production Code in 1934 suppressed the depiction of sexuality as a brute passion in Hollywood films, and with it any explicit representation of sexual desire. The positive aspect of that repression was the creation of conditions favorable to the development of the remarriage comedy, initiated in 1934 by Frank Capra's *It Happened One Night*, also starring Clark Gable. The Gable—Harlow relationship anticipates Gable's relationship to Claudette Colbert in the Capra film, except that Colbert, like the heroines of all the remarriage comedies, harbors a Mary Astor within her. (Or perhaps we might say that Colbert is an Astor figure who harbors a Harlow within her. After all, like Astor in *Red Dust*, Colbert in *It Happened One Night* starts out, in her relationship with Gable, acting the part of a snobby bitch.)
Sexuality is not only represented on film, of course; movies are themselves sexy, incorporating forms that excite the viewer sexually or quasi-sexually (the latter qualification is intended to register the intimate links between eroticism and violence on film). Understanding the ways in which movies have been charged erotically and the ways in which these erotic forms may be, and have been, used by viewers (for example, as material for private erotic fantasies, themselves variously integrated into viewers' forms of life) is essential for any complete account of the movie both as a social institution and from the perspective of the evolution of its forms.

It might be assumed that rigid enforcement of the Production Code inhibited the practice of creating erotic screen images, but matters are not that simple. For one thing, representations of explicitly sexual relationships may or may not be filmed erotically. Miriam Hopkins's pre–1934 films emphasize and articulate her sexuality. Her persona on screen is that of an idealist who is also a lustbox; her consciousness of her dual nature is poisoned by her loathing for her own fallenness, which is what, to her, her body signifies. Hopkins's body functions as a sign of her sexuality, but she is virtually never filmed the way Mary Astor is in Red Dust; images of Miriam Hopkins on screen are almost never rendered erotic.

On the other hand, erotic images can be placed within a narrative context that disavows their connection with sexual arousal. (Such a distinction may readily be brought to bear on the photographs in any issue of Playboy.) My impression is that such is indeed the rule in those Hollywood films of the late thirties that employ erotic images. The most intensely erotic Hollywood screen figure of the late thirties is Simone Simon, Jean Renoir's first choice for the role of Christine in The Rules of the Game. But Simone Simon's Hollywood films characteristically declare her erotic presence to be presexual (as, for example, in the thirties remake of Seventh Heaven). I cannot think of a single Hollywood film made between 1934 and 1940 that employs erotically rendered images and declares them to be representations of sexual desire. In this sense, Red Dust is very much a pre–Production Code film.

Part of the importance of this line of thought is that it calls into question, or raises a new question about, the idea that the "classical" Hollywood movie developed as a clear-cut extension of "bourgeois" nineteenth-century realism (as though we already knew how to think about that). The truth is that, from Griffith on, movies have been and continue to be no less intimately involved with the rendering of erotic images than they are with processes of "identification."

Traditional accounts of the "sex symbols" in Hollywood's history, like everything else about the private history of the public institution
of movies, stand in need of revision. If we continue to pursue this subject, we should expect surprises. After all, who would surmise, or remember, that in *Red Dust* the camera possessed carnal knowledge of the prim Mary Astor, but not the legendary sex symbol Harlow?
The idea of photographing actions and stories came about with the development of techniques proper to film. The most significant of these, you know, occurred when D. W. Griffith took the camera away from the proscenium arch, where his predecessors used to place it, and moved it as close as possible to the actors.

– Alfred Hitchcock*

For Hitchcock, “pure cinema” was born when Griffith’s camera crossed the barrier of the proscenium. This transgression freed film to discover a natural subject in theater, in the interpenetration of theater and the world reflected in the familiar ambiguity of the English word “acting.” Theatricality is theater’s natural condition; the candid or unselfconscious can be depicted, in theater, only by performance on stage. But when Griffith’s camera broke the barrier of the proscenium, it assumed the capacity, as a matter of course, to depict theatricality. In movies, the camera routinely distinguishes between the candid and the staged, between gestures and expressions that are sincere and those that are theatrical.

Film’s opposition between the theatrical and the nontheatrical is grounded in, and grounds, its conventional ways of presenting human beings in the world. Typically, the camera alternately frames its human subject within public and private spaces. The frame of the “objective” shot is a stage on which a human being performs, subject to view by others in his or her world. Within the frame of the reaction shot, the subject views the spectacle of the world, expresses a private reaction, and prepares the next venture into the public world. Point-of-view and reaction shots together combine to effect the camera’s penetration of his or her privacy. The human subject of the camera alternates

tensely and hesitantly between acting and viewing in preparing en¬
trances onto the world's stage, performing, and withdrawing again into
a privacy to which only the camera has access.

To sustain its opposition between the theatrical and the nontheatri¬
cal, movies developed a mode of acting that is distinct from stage tech¬
technique. In the face of the camera, the movie actor must appear un-
selfconscious; no way of acting in the theater corresponds to this look
of unselfconsciousness, and no audience can stand in for a camera in
registering it.

Film's massive appropriation of nineteenth-century theatrical forms,
most importantly melodrama, must not blind us to its fundamental
break with theater. Griffith's films owe almost everything to theatrical
melodrama; yet they are not melodramas. Indeed, they undermine the-
atrical melodrama by placing the viewer in an intimate relationship,
unavailable to a theater audience, with human beings who inhabit a
world and hence cannot in themselves be pure exemplars of virtue or
villainy. And they also bring to the fore the encounters between the
camera and the human subjects whose privacy it penetrates, encoun-
ters for which theatrical melodrama knows no equivalent.

In the theatrical melodramas of the nineteenth century, Peter Brooks
argues in *The Melodramatic Imagination*, the nightmare struggle for
the liberation of virtue is won when innocence is publicly recognized
in a "movement of astonishment," and evil – with its own lesser power
to astonish – is driven out. Melodrama is a drama of recognition, and
acts of what Brooks calls "self-nomination" play an essential role.
"The villain... at some point always bursts forth in a statement of his
evil nature and intentions."* The heroine, too, announces her moral
identity by declaring "her continued identification with purity, despite
contrary appearances."†

In theatrical melodrama, good and evil can and must declare them-
selves. How can good and evil be declared in films? This is the ques-
tion I address in what follows. My motivation is to gain insight into
the conditions under which, in movies, human beings are presented
and present themselves, that is, to gain a deeper understanding of
what becomes of human beings on film.

In *Double Indemnity*, there is a moment at which Barbara Stanwyck's
evil is meant to be unambiguously declared. As Fred MacMurray is
struggling to kill her husband, she sits silently in the front seat of the
automobile. The camera frames her closely, capturing a clear view of
the look on her face.

* Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press,
† Brooks, op. cit., p. 38.
This is the one moment in *Double Indemnity* when we are privileged to view the look that Stanwyck’s stepdaughter saw years before, the look that stamped her stepmother as evil in her eyes. It is a serious weakness of the film that at this moment it comes up with no more definitive way of demonstrating that this woman is evil. Stanwyck looks almost toward the camera, but her eyes are vacant, as if she were absorbed in a private reverie. It may not be nice that she is in a trance while her husband is being murdered in a plot she instigated, but it does not make her a villain. How could this look — how could any look the camera might capture — show that this woman — we know Barbara Stanwyck as a noble heroine (*Stella Dallas*), a lead in romantic comedy worthy of marrying Henry Fonda (*The Lady Eve*), and a decidedly admirable professional actress from Brooklyn — is absolutely evil?

What is missing at this moment is an act of self-nomination. Stanwyck does not declare her moral nature here; indeed, she never does so in the film. An example that immediately springs to mind of a villain announcing his moral identity — and this is surely a moment of astonishment — occurs in *The Thirty-nine Steps* when the villainous Professor Jordan raises his hand to reveal that the top joint of his little finger is missing.
Note that just before the moment of revelation, Hitchcock frames the Professor and Hannay in such a way that we see – and see that Hannay does not see – the Professor give a start on Hannay's words "I believe she was coming to see you about some Air Ministry secrets."

Hence, when the Professor turns to face Hannay and says, calmly, "Did she tell you what the foreign agent looked like?" we know he is dissimulating like a villain.

But not only villains dissimulate. It is a running joke, and more than a joke, in The Thirty-nine Steps that the innocent Hannay must put on act after act, must slip into role after role, in order to assert his innocence.

It is only at the moment he shows his hand that the Professor unmasks himself. Then the astonishing view the Professor authors and presents to Hannay is matched by an equally astonishing view Hitchcock authors and presents to us.

The implication of these matched gestures is that there is a link between the villain and Hitchcock (both are authors of views), as there is a link between Hannay and us (both are viewers). We might also say that the gesture is the camera's. It is this view framed by the camera that shows Hitchcock's hand. The camera is revealed at this moment as an instrument of villainy.
In Hitchcock’s films – and not just in films by Hitchcock – there are incessant suggestions that the camera is an instrument of villainy. This passage from *The Thirty-nine Steps* exemplifies one form these suggestions take: the assertion of a link between the villain’s gesture and a gesture of the film’s author. Two passages from *The Lodger* exemplify a second form: the camera’s assumption of the villain’s literal position.

First is the film’s opening shot, a view of a terrified woman from the perspective of her murderer, a villain we never get to view. Second is our introduction to the lodger (Ivor Novello), who may or may not be a murderer. Before we view his face, the camera assumes his perspective – one that has, from the opening, been associated with the villain – as he approaches the front door of the house and reaches his hand into the frame to grasp the knocker.

Closely related to these two examples are those passages in which Hitchcock frames a human figure in such a way as to make him a kind of symbolic stand-in for the camera. This occurs, for example, when the lodger first enters the house. In this frame, Novello is the
The "I" of the camera

camera's subject, but he also stares into the depths of the space, possessing it with his gaze.

When the Professor unMASKS himself, he authors a view that declares his moral identity, and Hitchcock matches this with a view that reveals his bond with the villain. When the camera assumes the villain's place, by contrast, it is not the camera's status as an instrument of authorship but its passive aspect that is revealed. At such moments, villainy is invoked, all right, but it is linked with the act of viewing, not with the authoring of views. Hence, these moments are akin to the passages in Hitchcock's films — and again, not just in Hitchcock's films — that portray guilty acts of viewing (for example, the crofter in The Thirty-nine Steps or Norman Bates in Psycho).

These have, as their ancestor, the extraordinary shot in The Birth of a Nation of Gus, the "renegade Negro," mad with lust, guiltily viewing the innocent Mae Marsh as she, in turn, is absorbed in viewing a playful squirrel.
These are not examples of a villain's self-nomination. At these moments, the human representative of evil within the world of the film stands revealed not by his own gesture but by the camera, which links his villainy to his guilty act of viewing.

There is a third general way of revealing the camera's link with villainy. I am thinking of those moments when a villain unMASKS himself, or appears to unmask himself, by looking directly into the camera. For example, at just the moment in The Lodger when our suspicion is at a height that Ivor Novello is a murderer, he gives the camera a look that appears to confirm that he is guilty.

When a villain meets the camera's gaze, he presents himself to be viewed by the camera. We view him without his "false face," and we are astonished. He reveals himself to be an author of views like the Professor, but the view whose authorship he claims is presented to us, not to someone within the world of the film – and it is our view of him.

Yet this gesture is also akin to the camera's suggestions that the act of viewing is villainous. Meeting the camera's gaze, he reveals his
knowledge of our viewing; this look by which he unmasks himself denies our innocence. And what is perhaps most significant about this double-edged gesture is that it appears to be at once a gesture by the camera and a gesture by the camera's subject. Their gestures appear not only to match but to be identical.

In speaking of a gesture that appears to be both the villain's and the camera's, I have in mind such passages as the ending of *Psycho*, when Norman Bates/Tony Perkins raises his gaze directly to the camera and grins.

Hitchcock and Norman/Perkins appear to be conspirators of such intimate complicity that a distinction can hardly be drawn between them. In effect, the film's author has become one with the human subject of his camera. Norman/Perkins has become a mask for Hitchcock, one of Hitchcock's stuffed birds; in turn, the grinning Norman/Perkins has been impressed indelibly on our idea of who Hitchcock is.

But consider a passage from *The Beloved Rogue*, a silent film starring John Barrymore as François Villon and Conrad Veidt as the king of France.*

In this scene, Villon succeeds in making the king his dupe, convincing him that he has such magical powers that the king dare not execute him. But Barrymore goes beyond the dramatic needs of the scene by presenting a knowing, villainous look to the camera.

This look to the camera is astonishing, and it is easy to imagine that it equally astonished the film's director, Alan Crosland. Crosland's camera nowhere performs a gesture that matches Barrymore's suggestion here that the film's hero has a capacity for evil. Barrymore has appropriated — and undermined — the director's — and the camera's — authority.

* For introducing this passage to me, and showing me how to think about it, I am grateful to Marian Keane, who has been studying this film in the context of her doctoral dissertation on John Barrymore, which I am awaiting with eager anticipation.
There are, in turn, cases in which the camera undermines the authority of a figure who appears to nominate himself as a villain. For example, when the lodger looks at the camera, he appears to be unmasking himself, but this is followed by a shot from his point of view that places him within the audience at a fashion show. Here a look we took to be a villain's self-nomination is given an innocent explanation: This is only a spectator; this is only the look of a spectator. (Then again, perhaps this spectator is not innocent. Perhaps no spectator is.) Thus, a view that seemed clearly legible has turned ambiguous and enigmatic. Indeed, the sequence leaves us only with a question about the camera's motivation, coupled with a demonstration that, for all we know, this human being — and perhaps any human being — may be capable of villainy. That is, the passage confronts us with the limits of our access to the world of a film: We cannot take for granted that the camera will reveal to us — even that it can reveal to us — innocence or guilt in human beings. The role of the camera undermines the very basis of theatrical melodrama.

At the end of Psycho, as we have seen, Norman Bates/Tony Perkins fixes the camera in his gaze and grins: Again, a villain appears to be unmasking himself, with the camera's complicity. But then, "mother's" mummified face is momentarily superimposed over (surfaces from under?) his living face.

Whoever or whatever we take Norman Bates/Tony Perkins to be, Hitchcock's extraordinary gesture declares, he is no villain of theatrical melodrama. In The Murderous Gaze, I interpret this composite figure, this being possessed by death, as emblematic of the condition of all human beings on film:

The camera fixes its human subjects, possesses their life. They are reborn on the screen, creatures of the film's author and of ourselves. But life is not fully breathed back into them. They are immortal but they are always already dead. The beings projected on the screen are condemned to a condition of death-in-life from which they can never escape. What lures us into the world of a film may be a dream of triumphing over death, holding death forever at bay. But... the world of a film is not a private island where we may escape the conditions of our existence. At the heart of every film is a truth we already know: we have been born into the world and we are fated to die.*

For Hitchcock, film ultimately turns out to be not a medium of melodrama but the medium perfectly suited to express a vision of human existence as an imprisonment from which there is no imaginable escape. Hitchcock's films are no more tragedies or comedies than theat-

rical melodramas are, but they are also not melodramas. Their underlying vision undermines melodrama, for there are no villainous human beings responsible for creating what it is this film lays bare that is intolerable in the human condition.

Villainy is integral to Hitchcock's vision, but it emerges from and expresses a perfectly human dream of escaping from the real conditions of human existence. The camera can "nominate" a villain only by nominating itself. The camera becomes evil's only real exemplar, but theatrical melodrama requires that evil manifest itself perfectly in human form. Villains in melodrama are the creation of an occult force; in films they are, in part, the creation of the camera.

Perfect human representatives of evil are not real; human beings wish for them and create them, and melodrama is motivated in part by that wish. But the camera reveals that human beings are only human. When they appear inhuman, as they often do in films, the camera (which human beings also wished for and created) participates in creating that inhumanity. Evil, understood as an occult force that exists apart from human beings and their creations, has no reality in the face of the camera.

What I am suggesting, as I wade through these deep waters, is that film not only undermines theatrical melodrama but also provides a particular way of understanding its motivation. Of course, melodrama has its opposing vision, which provides in turn its own interpretation of film – its interpretation, that is, not of film's motivation but of its nature: Film is evil.

But now it is time to turn to virtue or innocence and how it might be declared – or declare itself – in films.

In Pursuits of Happiness, Stanley Cavell invokes Matthew Arnold in elucidating the claim that in remarriage comedies like The Philadelphia Story film has found one of its great subjects:

There is a visual equivalent or analogue of what Arnold means by distinguishing the best self from the ordinary self and by saying that in the best self class yields to humanity. He is witnessing a possibility or potential in the human self not normally open to view, or not open to the normal view. Call this one's invisible self; it is what the movie camera would make visible.*

A film like The Philadelphia Story stakes itself on the claim that the camera has the power to reveal virtue or innocence in any human subject – to participate in making it visible. In the comedies Cavell studies, the camera's power to reveal the "invisible self" enables romance

to contain the threat of melodrama. The remarriage comedies, like the Hitchcock thrillers, discover in the camera — film's instrument of villainy — the means to undermine theatrical melodrama, for melodrama demands the conviction that there are persons whose exemplification of good or evil is absolute, human beings who know their moral identity and have the power of naming it.

We have seen that the camera can single out a human subject as a villain, an exemplar of evil, but only by revealing (in the same gesture) that this figure's villainy cannot be separated from his or her bond with the camera. Then can the camera also compellingly single out a human exemplar of virtue, and, if so, what does this reveal about the camera?

In *The Birth of a Nation* sequence we have considered, Gus's guilty viewing is contrasted with Mae Marsh's innocent viewing. Her absorption in her views of the squirrel reveals her girlish innocence, her guiltlessness, but it hardly makes her the astonishing heroine of melodrama who knows and declares her moral identity. What the sequence establishes, rather, is her vulnerability. But is the camera, in this sequence, innocent like Mae Marsh or guilty like Gus? True, the camera does not exactly assume Gus's point of view, does not exactly present to us his guilty views, the way it presents to us views of the squirrel that are effectively indistinguishable from her girlish views. In this sequence, the camera frames no views that are fully charged with Gus's desire. When it frames Gus's staring eyes, the camera links villainy with the act of viewing, but not with its own viewing. Griffith's camera attempts to disavow its implication in villainy; yet to us this implication — this connection between Gus and the camera — is manifest.

In sequences like this, "virtue" is really vulnerability, or we might call it "virginity." The camera's revelations of Mae Marsh's innocence are also violations of that innocence. It is a small step from such violations to the pornography of those Griffith passages in which the camera, in effect, acts as the very instrument of a woman's terrorization (for example, the famous scenes in *Broken Blossoms* in which Lilian Gish, framed closely, hysterical from fear of her brutal father, appears brutalized by the camera itself). Then it is another small step to films like *Stella Dallas*, which are often called melodramas, although there is no villainous human figure responsible for the noble heroine's suffering. Such films are examples of what becomes of melodrama on film, with the camera appropriating the villain's role, serving as agent — as well as observer — of the heroine's anguish. Yet in *Stella Dallas*, the camera at the same time plays an essential role in her liberation, her transfiguration.

In general, it seems clear to me that when the camera designates a heroine as virtuous in the same gesture by which it reveals, yet disa-
vows, its own implication in villainy, this declaration has no authority. The woman designated, however "noble," is not a heroine, but a victim. As in Double Indemnity, what seems missing is an act of self-nomination, in this case performed by the heroine.

There is a problem, however, in conceiving of such acts on film. A heroine cannot unmask herself, because she wears no mask. Then how can she declare herself to the camera? What can she do, in the face of the camera, that will reveal her virtue, other than enduring the camera's gaze?

"Enduring the camera's gaze" is how I think of our final poignant vision of Margaret, the crofter's wife, in The Thirty-nine Steps. She does not confront the camera, and indeed she gives no outward sign that she knows she is being viewed. Yet she is not absorbed like Mae Marsh nor oblivious; I view her as knowingly bearing the burden of the camera's gaze, the way she knowingly bears the burden of her husband's brutality.

A less inhumane way the camera can declare an exemplar of virtue is by designating representative human beings as judges and letting these representatives' judgments stand as conclusive. In such a case, the camera need not claim the authority to recognize perfect virtue; all it need claim is the power to nominate qualified witnesses. To be qualified, one need be no hero or heroine; all one need be is manifestly human. To declare its subject human, in this sense, all the camera need do is make visible that subject's invisible self, and this is something the camera does have the power to do.

A textbook example of this strategy occurs in the James Whale Showboat. In the sequence I have in mind, Helen Morgan, now pathetically reduced in station, is auditioning. As she begins the song "Bill," the camera frames her squarely and holds this framing, compelling her to endure its gaze for a painfully long time.
Finally, there is a cut to the once skeptical impresario, who nods approval — to our great satisfaction — to someone offscreen, and a cut to the piano accompanist, who firmly nods his agreement. The tension broken, we cut to an “objective” three-shot. When we now return to the original frontal framing, its effect is completely transformed. We are now Helen Morgan’s appreciative audience, not her judges; the verdict is in. For the remainder of the song, Whale cuts back and forth between ever closer and more ravishing views of this woman and shots of all the people in the theater, from janitors to dancers, gathering around the singer one by one — a community joined in astonishment at the beauty of her performance, sign of the beauty of her soul.

A second relatively humane way the camera can declare an exemplar of virtue is by paying its respects by withdrawing its gaze. Films abound in gestures of this kind: for example, the camera’s withdrawing to satisfy Thomas Mitchell’s wish to die alone in Only Angels Have Wings; the camera’s cutting away from Emil Jannings at the climax of his humiliation in The Blue Angel; the camera’s respecting the privacy of Frank Morgan’s suicide in The Shop Around the Corner; the camera’s withdrawal from the heroine at the end of Carl Dreyer’s Gertrud.

Can an exemplar of virtue declare himself or herself by meeting the camera’s gaze? Here I think of the moment near the end of Dinner at Eight when Marie Dressier, hearing the news of John Barrymore’s suicide, looks right into the camera.

It is not that Dressier presents herself to the camera, like a villain; at this moment, she endures the camera’s gaze, like a heroine. She is in no trance, but perfectly clear-eyed. Then what does she see in the face of the camera? (What she sees, I take it, is essentially what we see when we view Norman Bates at the end of Psycho.) We are viewing no perfect exemplar of an occult moral force here, no heroine of theatrical melodrama; we are viewing a human being mindful of a mortality
we can see stamped on Marie Dressler's face. This moment of her recognition of her humanity is also the moment of our recognition of it. It is a moment exemplary of the camera's capacity to render the invisible self visible. Like the ending of Psycho, then, this moment undermines the basis of theatrical melodrama.

Perhaps the most astonishing of all examples of this power of the camera is the passage from Jean Renoir's Grand Illusion in which a kind old German prison guard gives a harmonica to Jean Gabin, who is near the breaking point from solitary confinement.

The sequence opens with the camera framing only the wall of Gabin's cell. The camera tilts up and pans left until it holds on Gabin's face, which reveals a look of anguish and despair such as belonged, in the films of the thirties, only to this beloved French star.

Having demonstrated this man's capacity to endure its gaze, the camera humanely withdraws, reframing to take in the guard's entrance. The guard immediately reveals his humanity, shows he is qualified as a judge. Seeing the haunted look on Gabin's face, he vainly tries to offer solace, settling on the gesture of giving the prisoner a harmonica on the outside chance he might comfort himself with music.
In the face of the guard's efforts, however, Gabin bursts into a violent rage. The guard is stunned; when the camera reframes to exclude him, this underscores the fact that he has momentarily become a horrified spectator, and Gabin a spectacle.

At the same time, this gesture reveals that the camera has the calm assurance to wait the storm out. When the guard quietly leaves, he passes through the frame on his way to the door, and the camera does not even mark his exit. Has this human being simply been forgotten? It is unimaginably satisfying when Renoir's camera withdraws from Gabin and cuts to the guard outside the door awaiting a sign. And it
can make life seem worthwhile that the camera now reveals that the guard – starving for music – is immediately transported by the tune Gabin plays.

When he recognizes the song ("Frou-frou"), he knows that Gabin – whose nature is to pursue women – has come back to life. The guard is satisfied – satisfied that his own capacity for happiness is still alive and that he has lightened this stranger’s burden. And Renoir shows how much he respects this human judge by allowing him to speak for the film when he says, to another guard who was wondering what was going on, "The war has gone on too long."

My point about this sequence is that Renoir’s camera employs all the strategies available to it for rendering respect for its human subjects without falsely denying the camera’s capacity for inhumanity. Perhaps part of Renoir’s point is that melodrama has gone on too long.
In *The Melodramatic Imagination*, Peter Brooks argues that in melodrama, human exemplars of good and evil can and must declare themselves.* In the original theatrical melodramas of the early nineteenth century, heroine and villain declare their moral natures. Announcing themselves to be human exemplars of the occult forces of good and evil, they perform acts of "self-nomination." But in films, human beings never stand revealed by their own gestures alone. They are always revealed by the camera.

As I show in the preceding chapter, the camera can "nominate" a human subject as an exemplar of evil only by revealing at the same time that this figure’s villainy is inseparable from the camera’s bond with him or her – that is, only by nominating *itself* as well, and thereby implicating the film’s creators and viewers. When human beings appear inhuman in films, as they often do, the camera is instrumental in creating their inhumanity. Understood as theatrical melodrama understands it, as an occult force existing apart from human beings and their creations, evil has no reality in the face of the camera.

If the camera is an exemplary instrument of villainy, how can it single out an exemplar of goodness? Starting at least with Griffith (and perhaps this has a precedent in American theatrical melodrama as opposed to the French examples Brooks studies), “virtue” in films is typically reduced to innocence and in turn to vulnerability. The assertions of Mae Marsh’s “virtue” in *The Birth of a Nation*, for example, are the camera’s demonstrations of her innocence. They are also violations of that innocence, despite Griffith’s strenuous attempts to disavow his own implication in villainy. However “noble” the “Little Sister” may be, she is a victim, not a self-knowing, powerful heroine in Brooks’s

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Reprinted: See "Notes on the essays."
sense. She is pathetic, and nothing exemplifies her pathos more than her violation by the camera.

In King Vidor's *Stella Dallas* (1937), there is no evil character responsible for the suffering of Stella (Barbara Stanwyck), although there is all too much cruelty in Stella's world, much inhumanity in which the camera is implicated. Consider, for example, the extraordinary sequence at the posh resort frequented by her daughter's college classmates and their families.

Looking for the mother of the young man Laurel has been dating, Stella enters the hotel shop, all dolled up like a floozie, but—as always—thinking herself dressed in high style. Laurel and her date are sitting together at the counter of the adjoining ice-cream parlor, sipping sodas, but mother and daughter do not see each other. Stella, deporting herself in an outrageously affected manner that she takes to be genteel, unknowingly makes a spectacle of herself.

Stella is too oblivious to hear, and Laurel is too wrapped up with her date to attend to, the wisecracks the other students exchange about this vulgar woman "dressed like a Christmas tree." Only when one of her classmates says whom the woman had been looking for does Laurel look up at the big mirror behind the counter and see her mother, who still does not notice her.

Laurel rushes out, unable to face an encounter. She is upset because she understands her own vulnerability, in the world of such privileged snobs, but also, I take it, because, for the first time, she sees her mother through others' eyes. Recognition of her own vulnerability coincides with a terrifying onset of knowledge of her mother's vulnerability, hence of her own power over her mother. Laurel is terrified of revealing to her mother that she appears vulgar not only in the eyes of these contemptible strangers but also in her own daughter's eyes.

In this sequence, then, we "identify" not with Stella but with the
gazes that cruelly expose her. Much of the sequence is filmed with Stella in the background, reflected in the mirror. This striking composition underscores the status of this mirror as a "surrogate screen" like the movie screen early in the film and the window at the end. (In *The Lady Eve*, reversing and perhaps parodying this sequence, Preston Sturges puts a mirror in Barbara Stanwyck's hands and gives her sole access to – and control over – what it reflects.) The camera mercilessly frames a vision of Stella that would mortify her were she to possess it herself. (I am leaving aside the alternative interpretation that her self-presentation here is calculated.) Later she will, in effect, gain access to this vision, and she will, symbolically, die, although she will also come to life again.

Stella's vulnerability here is inseparable from her obliviousness of how others see her, and it is exacerbated by her conviction that no one has a surer grasp of appearances than she. Her lack of self-consciousness, crystallized in her perfect obliviousness of the camera, is a condition of that "vulgarity" that is inseparable from her innocence. Exposing her vulgarity entails violating that innocence, and the camera is instrumental in this villainy.

Positing Stella as noble while violating her innocence by rendering her pathetic is the cornerstone of this film's strategy for moving its audience to tears, but this by itself is not sufficient. Pathetic, lower than we, and noble, higher than we, Stella is not a figure with whom we identify. Because her feelings are not ours, the film needs a way of incorporating feelings we can share and communicating those feelings to us. But whose feeling is to be communicated to us? In films, feeling to be communicated to the viewer can be expressed by the camera; more typically, as I argue in the preceding chapter, it is expressed by an inhabitant of the film's world, who is, in effect, designated as a representative of humanity.

After the debacle in the ice-cream parlor, Laurel insists – with no explanation – that her mother take her home. As Stella and Laurel lie in their separate berths on the train, voices filter in from the next compartment: Two of Laurel's classmates are joking about the vulgar woman who made such a spectacle of herself. Laurel is sick with dismay at the possibility that her mother may have overheard these words. Stella has indeed overheard, but when Laurel leans into her compartment, she pretends to be asleep. Not knowing if her mother really overheard the voices, Laurel snuggles up to her, receiving comfort and revealing her desire to give comfort. This is a touching gesture through which Laurel emerges neither as noble nor as pathetic, but as human. Yet what underpins the film's communication of Laurel's human feeling to us is, again, its exposure of Stella's vulnerability. It is in the face of this pathetic figure that we affirm our
community with Laurel — a community in which poor Stella has no place.

In the following sequence, too, we are moved to an affirmation of community from which Stella is excluded. Stella visits Helen, the woman her husband Stephen now loves. Pretending that she finds Laurel an "inconvenience," she offers to give her up. Helen is not taken in and recognizes what she calls Stella’s "selflessness." We perceive Helen’s emotion less in her face (much of the time she is turned away from the camera) than in her voice: Behind the "excessive" evenness of her tone and precision of her choice of words we can discern her effort to keep from breaking down, an effort that reveals itself in tiny hesitations. Tenderly, Helen reaches out to offer comfort, but this contact makes Stella uneasy, and Helen holds back. She hesitates in part because she knows she is implicated in Stella’s pain — is, indeed, its source. What crowns Stella’s astonishing selflessness in Helen’s eyes is precisely, I take it, that Stella shows no sign of hating her.

In judging Stella to be selfless, Helen views her as being better than she is. In the presence of this exemplar Helen feels humbled, and Helen’s, feeling, not Stella’s is communicated to us. We are moved that Helen appreciates Stella, and moved as well that Helen grieves to be unable to reach Stella, to comfort her. Helen’s attunement with the camera only underscores Stella’s obliviousness of how she appears in Helen’s eyes, and our eyes. Yet again, underpinning Helen’s emotion and ours is the camera’s violation of Stella’s innocence, its rendering of her as pathetic. This rendering culminates in the film’s ending, which also radically undermines it.

The closing sequence is prefaced by an exchange between Laurel and Helen. Just before the wedding, Helen comes upon Laurel at the window, sees that she has been crying, and divines what is troubling her. Laurel had always imagined that even if distance prevented her mother from attending the wedding, she would at least send word. Helen, her faith in Stella’s selflessness intact, asks Laurel if she can really believe that any distance in the world would keep her mother away if she knew about the wedding. Laurel, accepting Helen’s implication that her mother does not know, repeats, in a whisper, "No distance in the world...."

As if motivated by these words invoking the mystery of Stella’s absence, there is a cut to a magisterial shot of the street in front of the house, the camera craning down and in. The effect of this declaration of the camera is extraordinary; it is as if a higher power manifests itself. Stella makes her appearance only in the next shot (it is on a more human scale) of the hubbub in the street. It takes us a moment to pick Stella out of the crowd, but the camera unhesitatingly follows her as
she makes her way to the fence, from which, through a large window – Helen has seen to it that the curtains are open – she can view the ceremony as though it were projected on a movie screen.

Once she assumes this station, the body of the sequence begins, alternating shots of Stella viewing and shots of what she views. All the family – except Stella, of course – is in place: Stephen, Helen, Laurel, and the young stiff she is marrying. Everyone is absorbed in the ceremony, which means that no one looks at the camera, no one sees Stella looking. Stella is spellbound, but shows no expression, as the wedding begins.

Helen seemed to speak for the film when she reassured Laurel that her mother loves her so much that if she only knew about the wedding, nothing would keep her away. We are called upon to accept her judgment that Stella is noble and to share her view of Stella as pathetic. (“Couldn’t you read between those pathetic lines?” she asks Stephen when he takes at face value Stella’s note announcing her intention of marrying her old friend Ed. Stephen, like every character incarnated by John Boles, is singularly incapable of reading between any lines.) When Stella bridges all earthly distance and finds her way to the window, this appears to confirm her nobility and her pathos. Surely it breaks Stella’s heart to remain outside at her daughter’s wedding, but she makes this sacrifice because she is selfless. If we take this loving mother’s exclusion to be unnecessary or misguided, that only intensifies her pathos.

This phase of the sequence, in which Stella does not express what she is thinking or feeling, is brought to a close when a policeman orders her to move on. She implores him to let her stay a little longer. He looks through the window, sees what she is viewing, and lets her continue. With Stella, we view the conclusion of the ceremony, culminating in the couple’s kiss.
This kiss – the happy ending – is what Stella was waiting to see, and it provokes her, for the first time, to a reaction. As a tear rolls down her cheek, she diverts her gaze, looking down and away. The tear reveals that she is moved; yet her lowered gaze also veils her feelings, as though from someone watching. She gives what can be described only as a secret smile – a smile that guards its secret source. Then she looks up, her face transfigured. Her smile now openly shows her happiness. Yet this smile that announces her feeling also keeps her secret.

As she walks jauntily away from the window and toward the camera, we get a clear view of the look of happiness on her face. It is on this look that the image fades out and the film ends – and we, as satisfied as Stella, file out of the theater and into the night.

No doubt, were Helen magically empowered to view what we have viewed, she would take Stella's happy look to confirm that motherhood is a woman's highest (indeed, only) calling, and she would take Stella's transfiguration as a sign – miraculously granted by the unearthly power that presides over this world – that acts of sacrifice bring their own reward. To Helen, Stella’s happiness would signify the all-
importance of being inside. Helen would deny the possibility that Stella is happy *not* to be inside, happy to be free from marriage and motherhood, to be free to view this world from outside as we do. Then, too, Stella’s secret smile anticipates her turning away from the window, as though what makes her happy is not viewing the world rather than living in it but feeling free from all attachments to the world, even the attachments of a viewer.

Expressively, the final fade-out, which engulfs Stella in blackness, can be viewed as figuring her death, but Helen would also deny the possibility that Stella is happy to be free to die.

There is a mystery to Stella’s transformation. Her jaunty walk now is the walk of the “old” Stella! Yet we thought she had shed that identity, that it had died for her after she overheard Laurel’s classmates’ derisive talk about the “painted woman.” The last time we saw this “old” Stella it was really a “new” Stella putting on a performance intended to make Laurel think that her mother did not really love her. The Stella who has the power to enact her old self as a role could, perhaps, play any role, but now this Stella, too, has died and been reborn. Does the jaunty walk reveal that Stella has been transformed back to her original identity, or is she *playing* the old Stella again?

If Stella is acting, who is the woman performing this act, why has she chosen this role, and for what audience is she performing?

One possible answer to the last of these questions is that she is performing for herself. Another possibility: for no audience in her world; that is, for the camera. When Stella lowers her gaze as though she were being watched and smiles her secret smile, she is acknowledging the camera, acknowledging the “higher power” that manifests itself in the commanding crane shot that echoes Laurel’s whispered “No distance in the world...,“ and acknowledging how she appears in our eyes. Thus transfigured by the power to acknowledge the camera, hence to acknowledge herself, she is no longer the innocent woman vulnerable to the camera’s violation.
But perhaps Stella never really was the pathetic figure we took her to be: perhaps she always knew herself better than we knew her, and perhaps all along we have failed to acknowledge her. Perhaps when she presented herself at the hotel, for example, she knew perfectly well that her outfit violated "respectable" taste and was deliberately affronting snooty sensibilities, although without weighing the consequences for Laurel of this theatrical gesture. (After all, the "old" Stella made all of her daughter's dresses, and no less an authority than Helen is impressed by Laurel's wardrobe.)*

At this moment, in other words, we must recognize that we do not know Stella and have never really known her. We have no more grounds for judging the "new" Stella to be noble than we had for taking the "old" Stella to be pathetic. We do not know what has brought her back to life. We do not know what makes this woman happy, and in the face of her happiness we do not know what to feel. Then why does this ending give us such a deep satisfaction?

Most “tearjerkers” center on the suffering of a noble heroine. *Stella Dallas* is among those that tell the story of a woman who has to choose between the pursuit of her own happiness and the happiness of her daughter. The original version of *Imitation of Life*, directed in 1934 by John Stahl, is a roughly contemporary film of this type in which the heroine gives up the love of her life for the sake of her daughter's happiness. In *Stella Dallas*, by contrast, for the sake of her daughter's happiness the heroine gives her daughter up — an even higher sacrifice, if motherhood is understood as women's highest fulfillment. But both films appear to assert that a heroine must sacrifice her own happiness for the sake of something. This claim that there are things more important than a woman's happiness has something to do with why such films seem to us so problematic, even offensive, why there may seem to be something wrong with them not only aesthetically but also morally.

I have not, in my remarks about *Stella Dallas*, explicitly addressed this moral revulsion, but my reading is, in part, a response to it. It is generally supposed that films like *Stella Dallas* glorify a woman's submission to a system that unjustly deprives her of her equal right to pursue happiness. These heroines embrace their suffering in gestures posited as noble. Their gestures of self-sacrifice are meant to move us. We are meant to affirm our community with all who endorse them.

Perhaps such a description is accurate for Stahl's *Imitation of Life*, although I do not wish to prejudge this issue here. What can be said

* Stanley Cavell helped me to recognize that Stella's behavior can consistently be interpreted in these terms.
unequivocally is that *Stella Dallas* declares itself not guilty of such villainy. The film's mysterious and ambiguous ending leaves us not knowing what the heroine has become and not knowing what to feel in the face of her happiness. Stella has been transformed — or has transformed herself — before our very eyes, unveiling at last that power and mystery the camera discovers in Barbara Stanwyck in *The Lady Eve* and *Double Indemnity*.

Understood in these terms, *Stella Dallas* reveals its especially intimate relationship to the genre Stanley Cavell calls "the remarriage comedy," whose underlying myth is also about the creation of a new woman. There are differences, of course, that would have to be accounted for in any full study of these matters. One feature of the remarriage comedy is that the woman's relationship with her father is of great importance, whereas her mother is literally or figuratively absent. Cavell argues that this feature derives from the genre's source in Shakespearean romance, especially in *The Winter's Tale*. Another feature is that the central couple is childless. *Stella Dallas* negates both of these features, but perhaps a more fundamental difference is that no man in *Stella Dallas* plays the role of, say, Cary Grant in *The Philadelphia Story*: No man presides over Stella's creation. Stephen tries to tutor Stella, but she rejects his instruction. What she comes to learn is something he cannot teach and indeed does not know. It is a private matter between this woman and the camera.

In *Woman and the Demon: The Life of a Victorian Myth*, Nina Auerbach argues that there is one central, although unacknowledged, myth that underlies all expressions of Victorian culture: a myth about woman's astonishing powers of metamorphosis or rebirth. Everywhere in Victorian culture she finds fragmentary reflections of this myth, but nowhere a full and explicit statement of it.* The Victorians aspired to create and yet recoiled from creating (or even compellingly representing) a "new woman" who would freely express the divine and demonic powers Victorians fervently believed that women possessed. Cavell suggests that the remarriage comedy reveals a historical stage in the development of the consciousness of women. Auerbach's book suggests a way of interpreting this stage as a response to the innermost concerns of nineteenth-century culture.

Speculating on the fate of this Victorian myth in the twentieth century, Auerbach uses Marilyn Monroe as a paradigm of movie stardom and concludes that movie audiences are obsessed with the mortality of stars rather than their divinity. But it is a mistake to turn directly to the era of the breakdown of Hollywood without considering the period

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of the movies' greatest flourishing, when stars were viewed as human and immortal, and film's inheritance – and transformation – of Victorian culture was most manifest.

Putting the Auerbach and Cavell theses together, it seems plausible to suggest that when remarriage comedies envision the creation of the "new woman," or when Stella Dallas/Barbara Stanwyck smiles her secret smile in the face of the camera, film is inheriting a Victorian faith in the marvelous and terrifying powers of women. Beyond this – and however this assertion may ultimately need to be hedged or qualified – the medium of film at last allowed perhaps the deepest of all Victorian aspirations to be fulfilled. By placing the "new woman" on view, films awaken us from the Victorian dream or nightmare and close the book of the nineteenth century.
In an excellent piece on Howard Hawks's *Man's Favorite Sport?* Molly Haskell argues that innumerable details of the film fall into place the moment it becomes obvious that fishing stands in for man's true "favorite sport," the pursuit of women.* The dialogue takes on a quality of persistent double entendre. Situations, gestures, and images disclose a graphic sexual underside, and a whole reading of the film as sexual allegory is invited.

*Bringing Up Baby* has a comparable structure of doubleness. Thus the film's opening: Cary Grant, atop a brontosaurus skeleton, is thinking. He is pondering the correct placement and function of the bone he is holding, but he is thinking about something else as well. He is about to marry Miss Swallow, to enter a state that brooks "no domestic entailments of any kind." The brontosaurus will be their only baby: Marriage to Miss Swallow means no sex. Cary Grant is pondering the correct placement and function of another "bone."

Line after line refers to Grant's "precious" bone, his "rare" bone, the bone which, Katharine Hepburn tries to impress on the terrier George, they so badly need. All of this reaches one absurdly logical conclusion when Grant finds himself unable to shake the name "Mr. Bone."

The mythical term "intercostal clavicle" itself conspires with this doubleness. This reconstructed brontosaurus is a creature with a clavicle — hence presumably its head, even its mind — between its ribs. Grant is pondering a gap between the ribs (the one from which Katharine Hepburn no doubt springs) that calls for a bone to fill it. Then, too, Hepburn has a leopard in something like the way in which Grant has a bone.

Dialogue, names, situations, gestures, even formal compositions are motivated by the demands of this doubleness. *Bringing Up Baby*, like *Man's Favorite Sport?* presents a story "straight," but it also exhibits a

systematic doubleness, clustering around key equivalences or principles of substitution that invite an allegorical reading. Part of my claim here is that the same can be said about every Howard Hawks film.

Critical writing on Hawks remains dominated by the idea that he is a "functional" director: Hawks pared down his cinematic technique and subordinated it to the service of telling a story. This idea is frequently allied with a picture of the director that limits even Robin Wood's insightful book on Hawks's films: Hawks as the paradigm of the unselfconscious American action director. Viewed in this light, Hawks's films appear straightforward, unintellectual, of value because they spring from a simple vision of the world presented with integrity and professional skill, but a vision held unselfconsciously, instinctively.

Yet early in his career, Hawks was on record as believing that there were only two important filmmakers in Hollywood: Hawks and von Sternberg. From the first, Hawks thought of his work as standing above nearly all other American films in ambition and achievement. My own sense is that Hawks's films are, as a group, perhaps the most cerebral and specifically brilliant in the whole Hollywood canon.

Hawks's early sound films, such as Scarface and Twentieth Century, bear the mark of a man who is brilliant and knows it. The celebrated device in Scarface of marking each murder sequence with an "X" approaches the status of a gratuitous display of cleverness and virtuosity. The bowling-alley execution, with its perfect strike and "X" on the scoresheet, is Hawks's as well as Tony's coup.

Hawks does eschew Hitchcock-like "identification effects," as well as conspicuously expressive lighting and compositions, complex montages, elaborate camera movements, Fordian pictorialism, and flashbacks and elaborate narrative devices. Most Hawks films, composed of frames nearly all of which are flat, cluttered, and dark, avoid pictorialism to the point of courting ugliness. The incipient antipictorialism of Bringing Up Baby eventually leads to Gentlemen Prefer Blondes, with its deliberate clashing of garish colors.

John Belton and others have persuasively demonstrated Hawks's attentiveness to the externalizations of the dramatic or comic events acted out in front of the camera. Clothing, bodily bearing, details of social groupings in a spatial environment, and the most minimal nonverbal gestures all disclose dramatically significant details to Hawks's camera. If Hitchcock's camera asserts its presence and its independent power (for example, to "get inside the character's head"), Hawks's camera appears neutral. Yet it consistently picks up dramatically significant, expressive details and renders them perspicuous.

Hawks's discernment of significant detail is never clearer than in
his handling of reactions. A reaction shot discloses to the viewer a character's response to what he has just seen. The response framed in the conventional reaction shot is transparent and unambiguously identifiable.

Hitchcock developed his own alternatives to the conventional reaction shot, such as what might be called the "reactionless" shot. For example, James Stewart in *Rear Window* and *Vertigo* repeatedly discloses no visible response to what he witnesses; these reaction shots do no more than testify to the fact that he has borne witness to what we too have seen.

One characteristic Hawksian reaction shot, by contrast, reveals such a complex of emotions that although we can readily identify the constituents of the character's reaction, we cannot sum up that response and give it a name. (Sometimes, particularly in *The Big Sleep*, Hawks places such a complex reaction within a deep-focus framing, not cutting to a separate shot.) Such a reaction shot implies a total intimacy between character and viewer. Yet despite, or perhaps because of, that intimacy, the character retains a privacy in the face of the camera.

This technique can be observed in as early a Hawks film as *A Girl in Every Port*, and we see it in *Bringing Up Baby*. I am thinking of the close-up of Hepburn (the first close-up in the film) responding to Grant's revelation of his engagement ("Engaged? To be married?").

How could we hope to sum up the welter of emotions that cross her face in the brief duration of this shot, in the course of which she resolves to pursue this man until he catches her? Despite our intimate understanding of her feelings at this moment, she retains her independence and her air of irreducible mystery. The importance of this moment is underscored by its contrast to the close-ups of Grant that Hawks gives us (for example, covered with feathers after Baby's attack on the chickens, or resigned to being unable to get a word in edgewise). Grant's face reveals not an impenetrable free resolve but an all-too-identifiable impotence.
Hawks, like Griffith, Hitchcock, and Renoir, has a whole repertory of signs that continually reappear, deepening in resonance, in film after film. And Hawks sustains his practice of composing each film around a single central symbol or cluster of symbols.

Fire. The lighting of cigarettes is a much-commented-on ritual in Hawks's films whose sexual underside has been noted. Fire, in general, and heat are linked with this motif: the fire in *Only Angels Have Wings* and *Ball of Fire*; the hothouse in *The Big Sleep*; the spark of electricity that destroys the Thing; the attempt by Marilyn Monroe and Jane Russell in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* to humiliate Elliot Reed by turning the heat up in his stateroom.

Flowers. In *Twentieth Century*, John Barrymore sticks Carole Lombard in the ass with a hatpin in order to inspire her to drop her stiffness and act. The hatpin, whose sexual equivalent is not hard to imagine, is a central symbol in the film. (When she walks out on him, she takes the hatpin with her, enshrining it in a jewelry box. Barrymore loses his power to make another star and remains in that condition until he finally retrieves Lombard — and the hatpin.) Barrymore first picks up the pin by pulling it from a corsage. Hawks presents this in a close-up insert, a key image in the film.
As the pin is pulled out, the flower falls from the frame. Flowers are associated in Hawks's work with idealized images of women, by way of symbolizing virgin purity. Thus, this shot constitutes a kind of schematic portrait of Barrymore's act of taking possession of Lombard, and he christens this star who bears his mark "Lily Garland." In *His Girl Friday*, Grant's decision to pursue Rosalind Russell until she remarries him is synchronized with his gesture of putting a flower in his lapel. *The Big Sleep* has its wonderful dialogue about the foulness of orchids. *Rio Bravo* has Angie Dickinson courting John Wayne by throwing a flowerpot through a window. *A Song Is Born* has the "nuptial hut bedecked with flowers" so enticingly described by Danny Kaye. And so on.

**Birds.** In *Bringing Up Baby*, Cary Grant is, in one of his biological transformations, covered with chicken feathers. Birds, of course, play a variety of roles in *Only Angels Have Wings*. Monroe and Russell are festooned with feathers at the opening of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*. There is *The Big Sky*’s character "Teal-eye," *Rio Bravo*’s "Feathers," and *Bringing Up Baby*’s "Miss Swallow." *A Song Is Born* finds Virginia about to change her name by marriage from Swanson to Crow. And there is a central question posed by *Barbary Coast*: Is Miriam Hopkins a swan (Edward G. Robinson calls her "Swan") or a Siren? Lauren Bacall, in *The Big Sleep* and *To Have and Have Not*, very much invokes the figure of the Siren who lures sailors to doom on the rocks. Marilyn Monroe in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* is named "Lorelei"; in her opening song, she vows to send men to their doom over rocks. But "Lorelei" is also "Laurel-eye," a name comparable to *The Big Sky*’s "Teal-eye" – she is a laurel to the eye and also has an eye for laurels, for diamond tiaras and such. In *Monkey Business*, after all, Monroe goes by the name of "Lois Laurel" or simply "Miss Laurel."

**Water.** The motif of water takes many forms in Hawks's work. For one thing, it relates to the recurring metaphors of the sailor and the ocean voyage, for example, in *A Girl in Every Port*. At sea, sailors live a form of life that denies their sexuality. Figuratively, they are surrounded by water, but do not plunge in. In *Twentieth Century*, Barrymore compares working together on a theatrical production with being shipmates on a long ocean voyage, a comparison complicated by the fact that he and "Lily Garland" share a bed shaped like a boat. *Only Angels Have Wings* has its airships, always filmed bouncing through water on takeoff and landing. In *Red River*, the cattle drive is repeatedly compared to an ocean voyage, a metaphor literalized by *The Big Sky*. There is the ocean voyage in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, the trip by boat in *I Was a Male War Bride*, and the boat designed to carry the Pharaoh to his afterlife in *Land of the Pharaohs*. *The Thing* has again its arc/ark, a multifaceted symbol. An arc of electricity (a projector,
too, has its arc) destroys the Thing. But the war against the Thing is interwoven with the romance of the Captain and his woman. The setting at the North Pole reminds us that Earth itself is polar – sexual – as are the human beings opposed by the alien, asexual Thing, which has arrived in a spaceship/ark, which in turn brings us back to the ocean voyage.

A key to the further resonance of water in Hawks’s films can be found in *A Girl in Every Port*. Louise Brooks plays a circus performer whose act consists in climbing a high ladder (framed by Hawks in some of the most erotic images in all his cinema) and then jumping into a tub of water.

She initiates her seduction of Spike by splashing him with water as she lands. It is only a couple of steps from this moment to the immersion of Grant and Hepburn in deep water in *Bringing Up Baby*. Only a step further is the spectacular musical number in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* in which Jane Russell, finding none of the members of the Olympic team, red corpuscles and all, in the mood for "love sweet love" ("Tennis anyone? Court's free!") jumps into the swimming pool to "cool off." And then to *Man's Favorite Sport*?

The sexual dimension of the plunge into water is sustained with bitter, almost grotesque, irony in *Red River*. The river itself is the film's central symbol. Associated with sexuality and death, it relates to the rivers in, for example, *The Big Sky*, *Rio Bravo*, *El Dorado*, and *Rio Lobo*. The river is the place where John Wayne leaves his woman behind. When Wayne plunges into the river, he does so to kill an Indian, who turns out to be wearing the woman's bracelet. Their mortal struggle in the water cruelly mocks Wayne for the scene he did not allow to take place earlier. (It is appropriate that this river is named the Red River.) The Red River also marks the place where Wayne's bull is united with Matt's cow, giving birth to the Red River D herd. Years later, when the cattle drive approaches the Red River from the south, Wayne increasingly loses control of himself. His inability to sleep is
attributable to the significance the river holds for him as a reminder that the birth of his herd is linked to his own sexual denial. If *Bringing Up Baby* had no Miss Swallow and Cary Grant had rejected Katharine Hepburn, and she had then gone on to collect a million dollars for Grant's museum and died in the process, this great herd of cattle would be the equivalent of Grant's brontosaurus. *Red River* is very close to the more or less explicitly Freudian films of the late forties, such as Fritz Lang's *The Secret Beyond the Door* and Hitchcock's *Spellbound*: Wayne's "voyage" is also a voyage into himself, in the course of which he comes to grips with a sexual trauma in his past. Wayne's specific provocations that lead his men to mutiny make sense in these allegorical terms. They include his insistence that the drive cross the river before nightfall, his refusal to allow the men to linger around good water, and his insistence on harsh punishment for the man whose sweet tooth caused the fatal stampede (regarding this last, remember that "Sugar Puss O'Shea" is Barbara Stanwyck's moniker in *Ball of Fire*).

Nor are we far from the idea of immersion in water as baptism. Thus, for example, the play on the idea of baptism in *Twentieth Century*, echoed in *Only Angels Have Wings* when Cary Grant pours a pitcher of cold water over Rita Hayworth's head.

Baptism may be by fire, of course. Hence we have, for example, the image of Tony's comical sidekick in *Scarface*, lead flying all around him, with hot water from a canister hit by gunfire pouring down in a parabola onto his thigh, as though he were pissing in his pants with fear.

*Hands*. In Hawks's films, the hand frequently serves as a substitute penis. This, too, occurs in *A Girl in Every Port*, with its outrageous close-up inserts of one hand pulling the fingers of another. Also, there are Bat's burned and bandaged hands in *Only Angels Have Wings*, Kirk Douglas's amputated finger in *The Big Sky*, and John Wayne's wounded hand in *Red River* and immobilized hand in *El Dorado*, not to mention Dean Martin's shaking hands in *Rio Bravo* – they shake so bad that he cannot roll his own cigarette (a nice example of a linkage of motifs). And consider the scene in *I Was a Male War Bride* in which Cary Grant, locked in the sleeping Ann Sheridan's room, but afraid to share her bed, tries to sleep in an easy chair, but cannot find a position that gives his hands anything satisfying to do.

Surely the most elaborate use of the motif of the hand is in *The Thing*. The Thing is asexual. As a source of disturbance (it disturbs radar, dogs, Geiger counter, the human community, radio communication) it is implicitly compared in the film's dialogue to an attractive woman (although unlike, for example, Sugar Puss O'Shea or *A Song Is Born*'s Honey Swanson, it uses sweet syrup only as bait). The Thing is
a parody man as well as a parody woman. This is reflected in the Thing's hand, which takes the form of, but really is not, a hand: it is a reproductive organ, a seedpod, in the shape of a hand. The Thing does not reproduce the way a real man does; it reproduces, in direct violation of the biblical injunction, by "scattering its seed." But, then again, if the Thing mocks the courtship between the Captain and his woman, that courtship equally mocks the Thing. He allows her to tie his hands behind his back, anticipating the Thing's later loss of its hand/seedpod. But the Captain does not really lose the use of his hand: He pretends he is securely bound, a game he plays as part of his courtship. The Thing, after all, is only a vegetable ("An intellectual carrot — the mind boggles!"), and the Captain destroys it by exploiting its impotence — he destroys it with an arc of electricity, a manifestation of the sexual principle it challenged.

I have already indicated some of the central symbols or principles of equivalence around which Hawks composes individual films. Let us consider several others.

For example, in Gentlemen Prefer Blondes, there is a key principle of substitution: For "diamond," read "penis" and also "breast." Innumerable images, lines, gestures, and situations in the film sustain this outrageous dual doubleness. For example, such lines as "Didn't you notice, his pocket was bulging," "That makes me feel all warm inside," "It can never be too big," "Looks like it ought to have a highball around it," and "I just love to find new places to wear diamonds" are among the most outrageous double entendres in all of Hawks's films. There are supplementary ones as well; for example, "She gets sick if she rides backwards," "He's the only four-letter man on the team," the magnificent "You're half sweet and half acid," and the line in the song "...Time rolls on and youth is gone, and you can't straighten up when you bend." Then, too, the song that begins, "When love goes wrong, nothing goes right," reads like a recitation of the whole catalogue of Hawksian sexual motifs: "Man takes flight..., a match won't light..., bees won't buzz..., fish won't bite...."

Land of the Pharaohs extends the central symbol of Gentlemen Prefer Blondes. Pyramids are the ultimate "rocks which don't lose their shape." The pyramid sustains the dual sexual readings of the diamond: a parody of Joan Collins's breasts parodies the way she uses them in attracting men. But it also sublimates/denies/parodies the Pharaoh's sexuality: His pyramid is like Cary Grant's brontosaurus.

The pyramid in Land of the Pharaohs, in fact, is Hawks's most elaborated symbol. If perhaps some Warner Brothers executive was sold on the project by the idea that for "land of the Pharaohs" one was to read "Russia" (the film closely followed Stalin's death), it is clear to me
that Hawks was inspired by a different equivalence: for "land of the Pharaohs," read "land of the moguls."

As the film's dialogue makes explicit, a pyramid is so designed as to be perfectly, paradigmatically unitary on its surface. After all, it must serve its exoteric religious function, must inspire the masses as an icon of simplicity and pureness. But that is the other side of its esoteric function. The state religion supports a system of slavery that enables an elite class, and at its apex one man, to amass wealth and power. The pyramid is both a monument to that man and his guarantee of being able to keep his wealth forever.

Underlying the pyramid's unitary form, it is designed as a series of traps, cunningly constructed to keep the Pharaoh's treasure chamber inviolate. The hero of *Land of the Pharaohs* is the architect who designs the perfect pyramid and supervises its construction, despite his skepticism about the Pharaoh's religion, his growing blindness, and his expectation of being buried in the pyramid, unsung, his secret dying with him, when the Pharaoh dies and the central chamber is sealed.

The architect is Hawks's fullest allegorical representation of himself as a filmmaker. And the pyramid serves as a perfect symbol for *Land of the Pharaohs* itself. (I only hope that in saying this, in opening up the film's secret chamber, I will be spared the mummy's curse.) The self-reflectiveness that I impute to *Land of the Pharaohs* is the extreme development of an aspect that can be found in Hawks's films from the beginning of his career.

A basic principle of *Scarface*, for example, surely is that for "war between old and new gangsters" we are to read "war between old and new styles of filmmaking." The film's opening, its one representation of the old gangster society, is filmed in what amounts to a parody of Germanic silent-film style, with expressionistic lighting, long camera movements, and virtual silence. The style shifts to Hawks's own—much faster, more violent, filled with talk, comparable perhaps to the machine gun, the technological base of the new gangsters' takeover—when Tony gains control. It is difficult to avoid the image of Hawks himself, young, ambitious, staking out his territory, making his mark. *To Have and Have Not* presents the war between the Free French and the fascists as a war between old-style and new-style gangsters. *Scarface's* famous "X" reappears in this film: When the fascists appear on the scene with their machine guns, a ceiling fan marks the ceiling with its huge X-shaped shadow. In the intervening decade, Hawks's identification has shifted from "new" to "old."

In some of his films, particularly those made for Samuel Goldwyn, one especially senses Hawks confronting a studio apparatus that denies him direct expression. But if, in viewing, say, *Barbary Coast*, we
hit on the principle that for "Barbary Coast" we read "Hollywood," the whole film opens up. The clash between Joel McCrea (the would-be poet poised between idealism and cynicism, a master of the ironic use of language who always intends the underside of his words) and Edward G. Robinson (a mogul type who thinks he can run California with his tainted money, and who is notable for his conspicuous incompetence in the use and appreciation of language, his conspicuous Goldwynisms) takes on an aspect of Hawks's (and, to be sure, also Ben Hecht's) plight in working for Goldwyn. The film scores its points by subverting its narrative in order to become a cutting parody of accepted Hollywood wisdom as to what makes a good film. Some lines seem entirely gratuitous, with no conceivable motivation beside putting on the studio and pleasing whatever "hip" audience the film might find. I am thinking, in particular, of Robinson's line when he offers Hopkins a drink in his ill-fated attempt at seduction: "We call it a 'Prairie Oyster.'"

In *Bringing Up Baby*, there is a radical separation between the literal and the allegorical levels, in the sense that the characters are innocent of the doubleness of their words and acts. They are like children. *Monkey Business*, which returns Grant to his preadolescent state, is a virtual sequel to *Bringing Up Baby*. Childhood restored, Grant performs the backflip of his early show-business days, Ginger Rogers dances, and Hawks returns to the style of *Bringing Up Baby*. The comedy in *Bringing Up Baby* in part derives from our perception particularly of Grant's unawareness. (Of course, it also derives from the idea that it is Cary Grant who enacts himself as sexually uninitiated.)

In *His Girl Friday*, by contrast, Grant is aware of, and consciously exploits, such doubleness. He and Rosalind Russell share a language. Better, they share a knowledge of language that enables them to communicate by indirectness, sharing access to each other's veiled meanings and unspoken thoughts. Sharing such knowledge is what unites the famous Hawksian community of professionals. This emerges clearly from those Hawks films that feature scenes of language instruction or initiation, such as *Only Angels Have Wings* and *Rio Bravo*. Complementing these scenes of instruction, there are the tests of mastery of indirect discourse, typified by Walter Brennan's recurring question in *To Have and Have Not*: "Has you ever been stung by a dead bee?" In *Ball of Fire*, Barbara Stanwyck teaches Gary Cooper the language of slang — the language in which sexuality may be expressed. These lessons also operate as lessons to the viewer, literal explications of Hawks's own favorite double signs; hence the sensual musical number in which Gene Krupa uses matchsticks for drumming until, at the climax, they ignite. (I am reminded of the way *Spellbound* literally
explicates the visual motif of parallel vertical lines that recurs in all of Hitchcock's films, or the way *Marnie* literally explicates his characteristic use of the color red.) I also see in *Ball of Fire*, in its willful insistence on making explicit what Hawks would prefer to leave open to the viewer's imagination, that note of contempt he always seems to strike in his work for Goldwyn.

For Hawks, Humphrey Bogart is the paradigm of the figure who understands that remarks and gestures have undersides that speakers mean whether they like it or not. Thus, Bogart's exchanges with Bacall are the diametrical opposite of the Grant–Hepburn exchanges in *Bringing Up Baby*. Bogart and Bacall both get the joke in "You know how to whistle, don't you, Steve? You just put your lips together and... blow" and in the maze of jokes in the famous exchange that features the lines "I like a horse that comes from behind" and "It depends on who's in the saddle."

In the Hawks films that center on characters who are masters of indirect discourse, there are possibilities and necessities that have no place in *Bringing Up Baby*. Rosalind Russell's efforts to extricate herself from Grant in *His Girl Friday* parallel Grant's efforts to extricate himself from Hepburn in *Bringing Up Baby*—except that Hepburn does not deceive Grant the way Grant deceives Russell (or the way Barrymore deceives Lombard in *Twentieth Century*).

Deception takes on special importance in *The Big Sleep*. Bogart, a private eye, speaks and acts in order to provide revealing scenes. But he has an enemy, Eddie Mars, who operates behind the scenes, weaving deceptive appearances. The conflict between Bogart and Mars is intimately implicated in Bogart's struggle to recognize Bacall's nature and pierce through to an authentic relationship with her. Mars has left his mark on Bacall, and Bogart needs to discern its meaning. The sexual fencing between Bogart and Bacall is the other side of Bogart's struggle to see through the system of deceptions by which Mars veils that meaning. In a sense, Bogart, in his capacity as investigator, is our stand-in: It is his task to perceive and interpret the signs of doubleness, chief among them that most perplexing of mysteries, Lauren Bacall. And Eddie Mars is the representative of Hawks: His work is that of projecting appearances that tempt us to take them straight, but that, if taken straight, deceive.

In *Bringing Up Baby*, perception is not the real issue, the possibility of deception does not arise, and the corollary Hawksian theme of blindness is sounded only comically. Grant's blindness is an aspect of the comic convention that deprives him of his powers of coordination the moment the "love interest" appears on the scene. (What Hepburn does to Grant, Marilyn Monroe does in spades to Tommy Noonan in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*: Her close proximity is enough to make him
all but throw up.) Another central Hawks theme is likewise barely
touched on in *Bringing Up Baby*: the power of the past to haunt the
here and now. Grant, a virgin, has no past "domestic entailment of any
kind" that he could confuse with his present entanglement with Hep¬
burn (it is not possible even for him to mistake her for Miss Swallow).
By contrast, Grant in *Only Angels Have Wings* does find his relation¬
ship with Jean Arthur haunted by his past affair with Rita Hayworth.
This contrast is reflected in a fundamental difference in formal struc¬
ture between the Hawks films that do and those that do not emphasize
memory and the past. *Bringing Up Baby*, for example, hardly avails it¬
self of the systematic repetition, and significant variation, of camera
setups that figure so importantly in *Only Angels Have Wings*. In *The
Big Sleep*, another film that relies heavily on a virtual theme-and-
variation structure of camera setups, the repetition, for example, of a
triangular composition with Eddie Mars’s door as apex can be under¬
stood as a formal anticipation of the film’s violent ending, and at the
same time a formal acknowledgment of the presence of Mars, whose
power Bogart has not yet recognized, which in turn is an expression of
Hawks’s role as author of the film.

*Bringing Up Baby* is a Hawks film whose characters do not use signs
the way Hawks does. Between the film’s literal and allegorical levels
there is, as it were, a barrier of consciousness. The two levels are bal¬
anced but separated.

*His Girl Friday* is a different kind of Hawks film: Its allegory and
its literal level are also of equal weight, but are intimately intertwined.
Grant and Russell are engaged in a struggle to assert the dominating
reading of that very struggle, which Hawks presents straight, yet also
allegorizes in sexual terms.

*The Big Sleep* takes *His Girl Friday* further, raising its allegory to a
level of self-reflection, but without destroying the balance between alle¬
gory and straight presentation.

*Barbary Coast* is a Hawks film in which the balance is destroyed.
The allegorical level dominates and betrays (but with provocation!) the
literal level. The film reflects on itself, not so much explicating as
diagnosing its narrative. *Land of the Pharaohs* goes beyond *The Thing*
and *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* in extending this dominance of the alle¬
gorical. In *Land of the Pharaohs*, indeed, this domination has become
absolute: Hawks has completely sealed himself off from the literal
narrative, and the film proves inaccessible to its audience.

When working on *Land of the Pharaohs*, Hawks spoke of it as his
most ambitious work, the film that was to synthesize all of his themes
and techniques. My sense is that the total commercial failure of this
film, which embarrassed Hawks to the end of his life, precipitated a
crisis in his career. Hawks's later films, wonderful in their way, seem reduced in ambition, as if their author had lost his sense of his work as unique and important. Ironically, this occurred at precisely the moment of his critical discovery or rediscovery in France and subsequently (almost singlehandedly because of the persistent efforts of Andrew Sarris) the United States. The interviews and public appearances that appear to confirm Hawks's lack of self-consciousness and ambition date from this period or later.

In his last films, it is as if Hawks become disillusioned about his own filmmaking enterprise, with which he had kept faith for almost fifty years, coming to regard it as only a "search for El Dorado."

_Rio Lobo_’s allegorical reading denies the possibility of the film’s meaningfulness. Its implication is that Hawks’s filmmaking seemed important to him only because he was involved in a war. But now the war was over.
CHAPTER X

To have and have not adapted a film from a novel

Ernest Hemingway and I were very good friends....I said to him, “I can make a picture out of your worst story.” He said, “What’s my worst story?” I said, “Why, that goddamned piece of junk called To Have and Have Not....”

– Howard Hawks

This chapter describes some of the ways in which Hawks’s To Have and Have Not (Warner Brothers, 1944) cannot, and some of the ways in which it can, be regarded as an adaptation of the Hemingway novel. It analyzes some important respects in which the film differs in perspective and position from the novel, indeed constitutes a critique of it. And it concludes with some general observations about Hawks’s films.

Robin Wood asserts that Hawks cheated in his demonstration that he could make a film of Hemingway’s worst story. “His movie is in no real sense a version of the novel. Only the first ten minutes – the scenes involving Mr. Johnson, the would-be big-game fisherman – have anything much to do with the original.” Although this assertion cannot ultimately be accepted, it is important to recognize its plausibility.

For one thing, the Bogart–Bacall romance at the heart of Hawk’s To Have and Have Not departs drastically from the relationship of Harry Morgan and Marie Browning as Hemingway presents it. Physically, Hemingway’s hefty, middle-aged ex-prostitute is poles apart from the young world-traveler Bogart insists on calling “Slim” (as she insists on calling him “Steve,” although his name is Harry). In the novel,
Harry and Marie are married and have children, and the protection of their shared home is essential to Harry's motivation throughout. The film's basically lighthearted courtship (which provocatively mirrors the real courtship of Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall, who fell in love during production) is not really taken from the novel at all. Hawks has suggested that the film tells the story of how the novel's Harry and Marie originally met and fell in love, but this seems facetious.*

Then, too, as Wood points out, the theme of commitment to antifascism, which the film interweaves intricately with its romance, is no doubt more influenced by the film's Warner Brothers genre predecessor Casablanca than by the Hemingway novel. For example, M. and Mme. de Brusac, the French patriots Bogart ferries to Martinique, and the heroic Resistance leader they hope to free from Devil's Island seem primarily derived from Casablanca. And nothing in the novel corresponds to Cricket (Hoagy Carmichael), whose role is clearly derivative of Casablanca's beloved Sam, although Cricket also has deep Hawksian roots.

Perhaps the most fundamental difference between novel and film, however, is that of emotional intensity and tone. To Have and Have Not is, after all, the Hemingway novel that led F. Scott Fitzgerald to invoke Dostoevsky in describing the undeflected intensity of the writing. Hawks's film is anything but tragic. Infused with the purest form of the Bogart–Bacall screen magnetism, it is one of Hawks's most easygoing, pleasurable films, despite its carefully worked-out dramatic structure. There could be no greater emotional contrast than that between Hawks's ending (Bacall's joyous departing hip-wiggle, Walter Brennan's shuffle, and the closing shot of the bopping musicians) and the widowed Marie's chorus of lamentation with which the novel closes.

On the other hand, there are many connections between the novel and the film, although some of these links reveal that the two stake out significantly different positions.

Neutral traces of the process of adaptation

A viewer familiar with the novel will discover innumerable details derived by the film from its literary source. In many cases, these details seem to have no particular significance beyond serving as artifacts of the process of adaptation. For example, Harry's boat in novel and film is the Queen Conch out of Key West. When de Brusac is wounded in the film, he is shot in the right arm, just as Harry himself is wounded in the right arm in the book. Lines of dialogue from the novel repeatedly pop up in the course of the film (for example, in the descriptions

* Wood, op. cit., p. 35.
of Eddie as a "rummy"). M. Rénard, the Gestapo chief (memorably played by Dan Seymour), is once referred to as "Beelips," the name of an important minor character in the novel.

**Action lifted bodily from novel to film**

As Robin Wood implies, the whole opening reel of the film — the scenes involving the rich American businessman Mr. Johnson, who pays Bogart to take him out on the Queen Conch so that he can live out his fantasy of being a big-game fisherman — is remarkably faithful to the book. Hawks perfectly renders Hemingway's semidocumentary account of the process of deep-sea fishing. The sequence of events and the action correspond almost point-for-point to many whole pages of the novel, and the characterization of the insensitive, mean-spirited, piggish American businessman is retained.

It might be pointed out, however, that, although this whole first reel seems lifted bodily from the novel, the scene invites a level of reading in the film that is closed to the novel, for Hawks himself stood in a relationship to his studio bosses not altogether different from Bogart's relationship to Mr. Johnson, whereas Hemingway was rarely, if ever, dependent on the financial support of Johnson-like figures. I read the film's bitter depiction of Johnson as an expression of Hawks's alienation from the Hollywood in which he worked. (To Have and Have Not's dark companion piece, The Big Sleep, is much more systematic in its indictment of Hollywood.)

**The character of Harry Morgan**

The Bogart figure and Hemingway's Harry Morgan share an essential characteristic: a potential for shocking violence. The moment when Bogart's pent-up tension is released in the gesture of shooting his gun through his desk drawer, killing one of Rénard's men, is identical in effect with the moment in the novel when Hemingway's Morgan opens fire on the group of revolutionaries he is illegally carrying on board his boat. Bogart's sadistic tactic of alternately pistol-whipping Rénard and his lieutenant until one of them breaks down and assures him safe passage out of Martinique (with relish, Bogart points out that this will mean that one of them will have suffered a beating for nothing) recalls the strong streak of sadism in Hemingway's Harry Morgan that has caused consternation among the critics. The moment at which Bogart slaps his "rummy" friend Eddie (Walter Brennan) is likewise shocking in its violence. (The novel's Morgan, afraid that he will lose his payday if Eddie talks, seriously contemplates killing his friend.)

To be sure, although the images of violence in novel and film are in
a sense almost identical, their meanings are different. Bogart’s violence confirms his commitment to love and justice, the commitment he comes to acknowledge in the course of the film. Thus, he unleashes violence on Nazi bullies, or affects violence so as to protect those he loves (he slaps Eddie hard so as to stop him from endangering himself by staying on board during the upcoming mission). But the violence that dominates the novel emotionally is much more problematic, particularly in its bearing on Harry Morgan’s character. The critical literature is divided on the implications of Morgan’s violence. Carlos Baker, for example, maintaining that Morgan, given his self-reliance, self-command, and self-knowledge, is Hemingway’s first true hero, claims that his violent acts are morally justified by his human needs (he needs money to protect his family).* Gerry Brenner takes Morgan to be a divided man of real intelligence, a heroic figure tragically flawed by his violent streak.† But the prevailing opinion is that most pungently expressed by Edmond Wilson: Morgan is a combination of a wooden-headed Punch and Popeye the Sailor – a buccaneer, a vicious thug, whose terror we may feel, but whom we cannot pity.

The romance

Although Hawks’s suggestion that the Bogart–Bacall romance is simply an earlier stage of the novel’s Harry–Marie relationship may be facetious, the two relationships have an affinity as at least limited triumphs of Eros. As Richard Hovey points out, “Marie and Harry are the only couple in all the Hemingway novels who find happiness in a marriage that works.”‡ To Have and Have Not is Hawks’s most joyous representation of an erotic relationship between a man and a woman. And Eros is represented in the novel with a positiveness unique in Hemingway, although even here the author seems to be suggesting that the love of man and woman is not enough. (Again, The Big Sleep is much darker than Hawks’s To Have and Have Not, in which no deceitful Eddie Mars has his mark on Bacall.)

Plot design

As Hemingway was working on To Have. and Have Not, the civil war broke out in Spain. Hemingway hastily completed the novel by adding

to the two Harry Morgan stories he had already published a third, much longer, story that follows Harry's career to its tragic end. This third story incorporates a complex of subplots that, among other things, contrasts the fulfilled erotic relationship of Harry and Marie to the unfulfilled relationships of several other figures, most notably the failed author Richard Gordon and his wife. (This schematic subplot is as much as anything responsible for the low esteem in which the novel is generally held.) Whereas M. and Mme. de Brusac are clearly distinct from Mr. and Mrs. Gordon (and, as was suggested, betray the influence of *Casablanca*), they serve comparably as a contrast with the central couple of Bogart and Bacall by virtue of Madame's lack of perception and tact and Monsieur's ineptness and weakness. However, his weakness is not, like Richard Gordon's, absolute. Thus, he has the power to perceive and articulate a basic truth about Bogart's character: that "betrayal for a price" is not a possibility for him. By announcing this, he plays an important role in the process that brings Bogart to self-awareness, and wins Bogart's respect.

**Theme**

The rhetorical center of Hemingway's novel is the "message" that Harry Morgan utters as he is dying: A man alone stands no chance in this world. The film, too, can be seen to revolve rhetorically around an idea that could be expressed in similar words. Hawks's *To Have and Have Not* takes the form of what was known by Hollywood pros of his time as a "delayed-conversion story": Bogart comes to realize the need to break the bonds of isolation, and the film ends with a union of three characters ("Steve," "Slim," and Eddie) who acknowledge this principle and commit themselves to each other and to the fight against fascism.

The dying words of Hemingway's Harry Morgan, which sum up the consciousness toward which he was striving his whole life, form a nexus of critical debate. Do they reflect a convincing conversion? If so, what is the precise nature of that conversion? Does this message reflect a new social conscience awakened in Hemingway after years of criticism from the Left? Or does it reflect only a generalized consciousness of the importance of love?

In the film, as already suggested, the value of commitment is very clear and has both a romantic dimension and a political dimension. The idea that a man alone stands no chance is very much the premise of both the film's political plot and its romance. On both levels, the Bogart character, in the course of the film, is called upon to declare his commitment. He is a man who acts as if he were self-sufficient, but who ultimately comes to recognize the "strings" that tie him to a
woman, to a man who is also a child, and to a cause. As the film is conceived, the patriots’ undertaking of leading Bogart to a recognition and declaration of his commitment to their cause is systematically intertwined with the development of the Bogart–Bacall relationship. Frenchy (Marcel Dalio, beloved from *Grand Illusion* and *The Rules of the Game*), Bogart’s closest friend in the Resistance, and Cricket – neither of whom derives from the novel – play complementary roles in this double process. Frenchy continually interrupts Bogart and Bacall to remind them of the urgent political situation. Cricket continually directs them toward their erotic union as he works on the song he is composing for Bacall to sing to Bogart, which he will call “How Little We Know.” The union of Bogart and Bacall takes place only when it can be blessed by both Frenchy and Cricket: Music and the spirit of liberty, in secret alliance, conspire to teach Bogart a double lesson about himself.

In the novel, Harry Morgan’s conversion comes too late. He has no chance to channel his hard-won understanding into meaningful action nor to communicate that understanding to his wife, who is left utterly bereft by his death. Indeed, his understanding comes to him in complete isolation, and he dies without communicating it to anyone; his dying words are mistaken for delirious ravings. Family or no family, Harry is a man alone, and his death confirms that, in truth, he had no chance at all in Hemingway’s world. In the film, however, Bogart is not – no one really is – alone. His self-sufficient act is precisely an act, and he does not come to drop this act on his own, but is led to do so by the concerted efforts of a community within the society at large, friends who teach him who he really is.

**Narrative technique**

*To Have and Have Not* is, perhaps more than any other Hemingway novel, an experiment in narrative voice. Part 1 is narrated by Harry Morgan. Part 2 is in the third person. In the long Part 3, the narrative point of view undergoes several shifts: first-person narration by a minor character; first-person narration by Harry; third person; third person mixed with Harry’s stream of consciousness; narration by Richard Gordon’s wife; third person; Marie Morgan’s stream of consciousness.

If we keep in mind the foregoing discussion, we can appreciate that Hawks’s film is in its own way as experimental in narrative technique as the novel. Hemingway’s experiments derive primarily from a desire to give palpable substance to Morgan’s stultifying aloneness. The film’s experiments primarily derive from Hawks’s endeavor of articulating the process by which Bogart’s self-sufficient act is exposed and broken down.
One specific strategy Hawks employs to this end is his repeated gesture of concluding sequence after sequence with a reaction shot, in the course of which Bogart, unobserved by anyone within the world of film, reflects on the scene he has just witnessed, then breaks into a laugh or at least a smile, as if in self-satisfaction at his superior detachment from the world. For example, when Bacall leaves Bogart, promising to see him later at the hotel, and sidles over to a sailor, intending to fleece him for her evening's work, the sequence ends with such a shot of Bogart, momentarily reflecting on this scene, and finally laughing to himself at the fade-out; the next sequence ends with another such shot, within which Bogart reflects on the implication of Bacall's provocative line "You know how to whistle, don't you, Steve? You just put your lips together and... blow." Even the moment at which Bogart violently slaps Eddie occurs within a sequence that ends with an image of the solitary Bogart laughing.

This strategy constitutes a real break with the Hollywood convention that accords to the "reaction shot" privileged access to a character's innermost subjectivity. The conventional reaction shot extracts the character from the social space within which he can be observed by others in the world of the film. Thus isolated, the character exposes his innermost thoughts and feelings, transparently and expressively, to the camera. But Hawks's implication throughout To Have and Have Not is that even when Bogart is placed within the sanctuary of the private space of a reaction shot, he continues to act, marshaling his theatricality in an attempt to deceive himself about his own nature.

Bogart's displays of bemused detachment when he is alone complement his visible impulse to act in the presence of others in a way calculated to make them "sore." In The Big Sleep, Bogart adopts provocative tacks in his dealings with others, but is motivated in doing so in part by professional considerations: The reactions tend to contain revelations helpful to him in his investigation as a private eye.
But what leads him to act this way with "Slim" in To Have and Have Not?

When Bacall tells Bogart the story of her life, Bogart ends by assuring her that she will have no trouble in getting the money to find her way home. In context, this remark implies that Bogart finds her to be acting at this moment; it is as an actress, a deceiver, that she is "good, really good" — she is "that kind of woman." But after she leaves his room, she figures out in private that that was not what he really meant at all: He meant that he was going to take the dangerous job so that he could give her the money to return home. She figures out, that is, that Bogart had revealed his feelings indirectly. She has come to understand a principle of Bogart's language that he himself does not yet consciously grasp. Her reading of him is confirmed at the crucial moment in the film when she sees the anguish on his face when he hears that the Gestapo is torturing Eddie.

Bacall's perception of Bogart — which complements the one M. de Brusac finally puts into words — takes precedence over Bogart's own view of himself. It accounts for Bogart's private laughter, which it interprets as theatrical. Again, it is Bogart acting for himself that the camera discloses in these recurring reaction shots.

By such strategies, Hawks presents Bogart as a figure who is led to acknowledge the inadequacy of his own conception of himself — this despite the fact that To Have and Have Not also breaks with Hollywood convention by the degree to which one figure (Bogart) dominates the shot-by-shot construction (Bogart is on screen in nearly every shot, and in most of the others his point of view is projected).

The terms in which Hawks's work is usually discussed relate directly to terms often invoked in describing Hemingway's writing. They are said to share a concern for "men without women" in life-and-death situations, facing death in conformity to a "code." The celebrated directness of Hemingway's prose seems analogous to the stripped-down "functional" camera style of Hawks, with its eschewal of fancy cutting and elaborate camera movements.

Comparison can seem strained, however, when one takes into account Hemingway's reputation as a major author and his manifest ambition. In Hemingway's writing, we see Hemingway himself, convinced of his own place near the center of modern man's aspirations. Hawks, by contrast, describes himself in interviews as an unpretentious storyteller and entertainer. Yet it would be a serious mistake to take this avowal, or disavowal, at face value. Surely, part of the motivation of Hawks's film is to put Hemingway in his place.

At the risk of oversimplifying, we may generalize some of the foregoing conclusions by saying that for Hemingway, man is ultimately
alone – tragically and nobly alone. For Hawks, man is by nature social, and human society has an erotic and political dimension, intimately linked, although human society can all too readily be poisoned by those (fascists, for example) who are ultimately unwilling or unable to acknowledge their humanity. Hawks, unlike Hemingway, continually celebrates the positive value of human social relations. Hawks celebrates, specifically, music making, wit, and making films that both celebrate and manifest such positivities. Hemingway believes in bullfights, and his literary oeuvre embodies and champions a stoical individualism.

Hemingway accepts the ideal of the macho hero, and indeed all too clearly – and pathetically – modeled his own public (and, increasingly, his literary) persona on that role. If Hemingway in this persona were a character in a Hawks film, Hawks would treat him ironically, implicitly criticizing him, perhaps placing him within a community that cares enough about him to force him to drop his self-sufficient act and rediscover his capacity for spontaneity and commitment. After all, it is by similar treatment of Hemingway's hero, Harry Morgan, that Hawks made a film we may believe in out of a "goddamned piece of junk."
CHAPTER XI

The filmmaker in the film: Octave and the rules of Renoir's game

This chapter has two parts. First, it sketches a reading of The Rules of the Game that focuses on the figure of Octave. Then it examines the significance of The Rules of the Game within the context of Renoir's work. In brief, the claim of the first part is that Octave represents the film's author, serves as the filmmaker's surrogate in his intervention in the world of the film (the most direct possible point to Renoir's gesture of choosing to play the part of Octave himself). Octave's role constitutes a paradigm for the role Renoir conceives himself as playing as creator of films like The Rules of the Game. In this way, Renoir's conception of the creation of his art—a conception manifestly the subject of Renoir's late work (for example, the trilogy The Golden Coach, French Can-Can, and Eléna at les Hommes, and The Little Theater of Jean Renoir) — is inscribed within the The Rules of the Game. The film's delineation of Octave's role, its establishment of a certain relationship between the camera and the world it frames, and its story are integrally connected. The Rules of the Game is an acknowledgment by Renoir of the conditions of his own art.

The second part of this chapter argues that the way The Rules of the Game frames this acknowledgment is crucial to its significance in the context of Renoir's work. The claim is that The Rules of the Game brings to completion Renoir's filmmaking project to that date, and in turn determines the framework for the films that follow.

Octave's role

When Octave gives his word that André will see Christine again ("If I don't see her again... I'll die," "You'll see her again... I'll make it my business"), he undertakes to bring together all the major characters of the film, setting off an as yet unspecified chain of events.

Much of the early part of the film is concerned with Octave's ingenious and persistent efforts to persuade Christine and Robert (but also the ever-skeptical Lisette, and even André, who at times falters) to al-
low him to accomplish this act of stage-setting. Indeed, at key moments in the film, a number of characters authorize Octave in his efforts (Christine: "Well, my friend, the rest is up to you.... I wash my hands of it"). The most general strategy employed by Octave in securing and acting on these authorizations is to instruct characters on the conditions of their roles. (Different characters accept Octave's tutoring for different reasons and in different spirits, however.) This makes it all the clearer that Octave's mediations, which he single-mindedly pursues, are intended to establish the conditions of a chain of events that constitutes a kind of production. He assumes a producer-director's responsibility for making a certain production take place. The relationship between the authorizations he secures and his assumption of responsibility is complex. After all, what gives these characters the power to grant Octave responsibility for this chain of events that ends in death? Their authorizations do not legitimate Octave's production, but rather implicate them all in its consequences.

The Rules of the Game, then, divides itself into (1) a backstage story of the mounting of a production and (2) the production itself (it could be called The Sacrifice of André) that opens with André's arrival at the chateau and closes with his death. When Octave enters Christine's bedroom, a bit anxiously followed by Robert, the camera suddenly tracks in through the frame of the doorway as Lisette raises a curtain, letting light stream in through the window. The sudden movement of the camera combines with the sound of the curtain to create an effect of violent disruption, appropriate to the occasion given the fact that the name "Schumacher" is about to be spoken for the first time. The curtain has risen on Octave's production.

It is hardly necessary to point out that The Rules of the Game incorporates many "productions": the hunt and the theatricals in celebration of the hunt, to name just two. That there is a bewildering array of productions helps give comic thrust to Corneille's response to Robert's plea that he do something to stop "this farce" ("Which one?" Corneille asks). It is part of my claim, though, that Octave's production, The Sacrifice of André, has a special status in the film.

Within this production, Octave plays a role that extends the one he plays in setting it up and initiating it. The necessity of playing this role is brought home to him at precisely the moment when he is poised to step out of character by thrusting into the spotlight to claim Christine in an erotic union. Lisette voices Octave's innermost doubt: "You're wrong, Monsieur Octave...." Suddenly André appears on the scene, as if at the bidding of that doubt. Octave hands André Octave's own coat and sends André to Christine in his place, setting the stage for the production's climax and conclusion: André's violent death. As the film presents this moment, the camera pans from a close shot of
Octave and Lisette (they face each other, but Octave's face is doubled in a mirror over her shoulder; Lisette is face-to-face with Octave, but he also stands apart, unseen by her) to a symmetrical, highly stylized image of André.

The gesture of sending André to Christine in his place doubles Octave's initial act of setting things up so that André can see Christine again. The earlier promise-making scene haunts this later moment. "If I don't see her again... I'll die." Now Octave fails to "see to it," despite his best efforts, and André dies. By repeating within his production the act by which he had initiated the production, Octave becomes an agent of André's death. His gesture signals the end of the production and confirms his authorship of it.

Octave's two acts nevertheless cancel each other out. The one suspends André's death, for André had convinced Octave that he was sincere when he said that he would die if he did not see Christine. The other ironically brings it about, closing the prospect the first gesture had provisionally opened. In their motivation, they are enigmatic in exactly the same way. Why does Octave make that promise to André, and why does he send André to Christine in his own place? What does he think will be the outcome of the events set in motion by André's arrival at the chateau — what outcome does he desire? Does Octave act out of a wish grounded in pity to save his friend from death or the pain of his own unfulfilled desire? Out of a wish to keep faith with Christine's dead father, extricating her from a marriage built on a lie so that he might give her as a bride to the man who convinces him that he loves her? Out of a wish to possess Christine himself? To punish André for provoking him into denying his own desire — by assuming the author's role, instead of the hero's? From a wish to be completely absorbed in the author's role? We may ask such questions about the motivation for both acts.

The enigma of Octave's motivation turns on our difficulty in saying
with certainty what Octave knows. Do we want to say that in a sense Octave knows from the outset how the events he authors will turn out or must turn out? (When Uncle Charles returns to his hometown in Hitchcock's *Shadow of a Doubt*, does he know that he is to die when he leaves it again? When Charles places a ring on young Charlie's finger, does he know that their "marriage" will be consummated only in her act of pushing him off the train to his death?)

We can say with confidence that the camera (the unseen presence the film invokes as responsible for its succession of views, thus the film's inscription of its own author, Jean Renoir) reveals that it "knows" all along that this production is to end with André's death. When Octave first makes his promise to André, they are shot in low angle, framed only against the sky.

This image of André-in-the-clouds, as though already dead but unable to rest, is linked ironically to the film's image of André's "real" death, which in turn has already been specifically imaged in the heart-breaking shot of a dying rabbit that weights the pivotal hunt sequence with its heaviest burden.

There are many small and large incidents of anticipation and/or echoing that invoke an author not dependent on the unfolding of the film for knowledge of events in the world of the film.

I want to say that upon completion of the events we have been calling "the production," Octave comes into unambiguous possession of knowledge that the film's author has possessed from the outset. For Octave, this knowledge is, at one level, of himself and the conditions of his role: knowledge that his world is complete without his bodily presence within it and that his dream of having a place in this world ends with a death. It is also knowledge of his place in this film and his identity with the film's author, Renoir. In a sense, the story of the film is the story of Octave's coming into this knowledge. This story,
The Education of Octave, frames the production of The Sacrifice of André.

The crystallization of his knowledge is registered in the pan from Octave to André at Octave's moment of doubt.

The sudden transition from a frame whose subject is Octave to a frame from which he is absent constitutes a figure for the achievement of self-knowledge. When the world wells up in the person of Lisette to give voice to his innermost doubt, and when it fixes itself in a view of André, Octave can no longer fail to recognize himself.

That camera movement expresses Octave's privacy in the face of a world that even now closes itself off to him. The expression itself, however, is the camera's. The world's disclosure of itself to Octave cannot be separated from his own being.

His gesture of sending André in his place, which authorizes the closure of the production, comes about, then, when Octave realizes what the camera movement declares. By formulating this expression of Octave's privacy, Renoir acknowledges that he and Octave are one.

This leaves one final act Octave must perform: He must banish himself irrevocably from the chateau. By withdrawing from the world of the film, Octave takes it upon himself to repeat the camera's exclusion of him from the frame by its pan to André. Octave thereby reclaims the act as his own. He acknowledges his identity with the camera by authorizing the film's ending, in particular its crucial expulsion of himself. Thus, finally the film completes its acknowledgments - at once Octave's and Renoir's - that Octave is Renoir and that Renoir is Octave.

But how can we identify Octave with the author of The Rules of the Game when part of what Octave comes to know in the course of the film is that the consequences of his actions are irremediably affected by forces beyond his control? Octave is powerless to banish Schumacher from the world of the film. Octave cannot change the course of the hunt, over which the gamekeeper presides, and which anticipates the death of André. So, too, the theatricals in celebration of the hunt are set up by Robert, not Octave - their liberation of nature's forces of death and desire is beyond Octave's control. Indeed, every major character in the film, though up to a point accepting Octave's direction of the production, also participates autonomously in determining its unfolding.

If Octave's intervention in the world of the film, his authoring of the production, was intended by him to keep André from death, still, as we have suggested, that intervention forms an integral part of the mechanism of André's death. In the world of The Rules of the Game, desire and death, forces of nature, are central and inexorable. When
Octave assumes authorship of the production, he inevitably plays into death's hands. Octave cannot deny death; he is powerless to efface the signs of mortality everywhere in his world; he cannot even escape being the agent of death.

If the camera is engaged in instructing Octave within the world of *The Rules of the Game*, Octave is engaged in a struggle with the forces of nature. Octave cannot win his struggle to keep death from that world. But our conclusion from this is not that nature, and specifically death, is the true "author" in the world of the film, with Octave only death's puppet.

When the curtain falls on the theatricals, none of the performers is prepared to acknowledge the cries of "Author! Author!" that rise from the audience. Saint-Saëns's "Danse Macabre" begins to sound on the player piano, and the figure of Death (at least a man in a skeleton costume) appears in the auditorium and dances to this music played by no human hands. The apparition occurs at the moment it begins to dawn on Octave that the events of the production, though beyond his control, nonetheless bear an uncannily intimate relationship to him. Death's gesture of responding to the audience's call suggests that there is an authorship as yet unclaimed. Perhaps Octave's anxiety at the approach of self-knowledge finds expression in this entrance of Death into the theater. At another level, Octave's anxiety takes the form of feeling imprisoned in his own body. Octave discovers that the curtain is up and that he is being viewed. He cannot get out of his bear costume; he cannot "disappear down a hole," a wish he had expressed to Robert earlier in the film. But the camera can expose him, can entrap him in the frame.

This moment of helplessness was anticipated by an earlier moment, when Octave was unable to retrieve the field glass and see what Christine saw in it. The film's power to withhold views from Octave is the other face of its power to view him against his will.

By contrast, at Octave's high points, he feels that his power is unlimited, as if even the camera must be subject to his will. We see this exhilaration, for example, in the scene where he dismisses Robert from Christine's bedroom so that he can talk to her alone. Octave allows a bit of small talk to take place before he grows impatient. At the moment he is ready to assume direction of the action once more, the camera "discovers" him on one of its trajectories. Here the camera all but acts as Octave's servant. Soon after, the moment it becomes absolutely clear that Christine will agree to invite André to the chateau, the camera assumes a slightly high-angle position. Now it reflects Octave's triumph, as though it quite naturally expressed Octave's feelings. (In fact, it is entirely exceptional for Renoir's camera to express a character's feelings in this way.)
As the film unfolds, Octave comes to recognize that his power, like that of any author, is real, but has limits. He learns that the camera must entrap him when he fails to acknowledge his bond with it, and he can subject the camera to his will only when the camera complies as a tactic in its instruction of him. The film implies that there is a necessary connection between the presence of death in its world and Renoir's incarnation in that world as a man who does not yet know himself. Death is an emblem of the bond between Octave and Renoir.

Death is not under Octave's control, and Octave is not death's puppet. Nonetheless, there are two fundamental links between death and Octave.

1. If Octave had no body, he could not be "discovered" by the camera, set to intervene in the world of the film. The fact that he is corporeal signifies his mortality. To acknowledge himself is to acknowledge that he must die. Octave's transition from a place within the frame to a place "behind the camera" is his death to the world of the film. This is part of the resonance of the film's final frame.

   It is a shot of the balustrade that Octave had used as a stage for reenacting his memory of Christine's father, at the same time enacting his own dream of contact with an audience. It is an image of an empty stage, complete with "footlights." It is also an image of a kind of bridge, a symbol of transition, all transitions connoting, for Renoir, the transition between dream and reality and from reality to dream; the transition, through death, from life to rebirth, and the transition, through life, from death to death.

Of course, if Octave is corporeal and hence mortal, so must Renoir be mortal in order to incarnate him in the frame. Fixed by the camera, the film's author is exposed as only flesh and blood.

2. Octave's authorship is death-dealing within the world of The Rules of the Game. His production constitutes the machinery of André's death. Moreover, his final banishment of himself from the world of the film reveals that Octave is death-dealing in a larger sense.
The film's ending presents Octave's death to his world and the death of that world to us. We might describe the camera's paradoxical perspective on the world of *The Rules of the Game* as belonging to the ghost of Octave. The camera haunts Octave, who sees its death mark everywhere and comes to recognize it as the sign of his own being. He frees himself from it by joining it "on the other side." Part of the force of the film's final image, engendered by Octave's self-exile, is that it shows us the death of a world from the perspective of a figure who magically survives that death. It is important to note that if the film's opening presents itself as contingent (Octave's pledge to André is not the first of his interventions in the world; the film could have opened, say, with the camera's "discovering" Octave just before or just after Christine's father's death, or just before André's flight), its ending is definitive. There is no possible sequel, no *The Rules of the Game II* in which Octave plays the same role in the same world.

Corollary to Octave's death-dealing role is Renoir's insistence on the deadly efficacy of the camera's gaze, and the equally deadly results, potentially, of a character's failing to see what the camera sees. The camera's power of appropriating views makes it a kind of gun. This is most directly declared in the hunt sequence, and most specifically in the shot of the squirrel shivering in terror, trapped in the sight of the "innocent" field glass/camera, and in all of the shots of rabbits dying.

The particular image of the dying rabbit that is echoed in the presentation of André's death, indeed, unavoidably confronts us with the shocking knowledge that Renoir authorized the death of this creature for the sake of presenting this shot to us.

In making *The Rules of the Game*, Renoir exposes his mortality before us, and also he kills. However exhilarating our experience of it, this is a film made in grim earnest.
Renoir’s game

Why does Renoir tell this story of the filmmaker’s intervention in the world of his film and his final withdrawal? Surely, part of Renoir’s motivation is personal. *The Rules of the Game* comes at a critical moment for him. In an uncanny way, it prophesies the coming turn in his life: his withdrawal from France at the Nazi conquest. Renoir’s life in the world that was his home, and indeed that world itself insofar as he would call it home, is about to end. Renoir is on the brink of exile.

But I feel that *The Rules of the Game* addresses itself not only to an impending trauma in Renoir’s life (and in the life of Europe), but also to a certain place Renoir had reached in his work. *The Rules of the Game* brings a series of films, Renoir's lifework up to that time, to completion. It is not that a certain project is arbitrarily broken off, but that *The Rules of the Game* constitutes the fulfillment of Renoir’s original filmmaking project. It articulates the logic of development in the films that preceded it and, in turn, defines the challenges that are to occupy Renoir in his remaining films.

How does *The Rules of the Game* bring to completion the work of Renoir’s French period? These films form a series of stories culminating in the story of *The Rules of the Game*. They present a series of characters summed up in the figure of Octave and a series of central symbols brought to an end in the symbol of the balustrade/stage/bridge in the film’s closing sequence. Perhaps most important, they represent a series of formal developments that find their fullest extension in *The Rules of the Game* and are never really carried over to Renoir’s later work.

In the classical cinematic narrative, the camera represents itself as “capturing” beings who thrust themselves into the world of the film. The camera’s agency — constituted by its framings, by reframings through the camera’s movements, and by cutting from shot to shot in ways that sustain an impression of continuity — establishes an analogue of a novel’s narrator. The narrator of a novel is, at one level, an inscription of the author in his work, as if the novel were the address of the author, speaking in the narrator’s voice, to the reader. The narrator is also a special kind of character (although novels in which the narrator is identified literally as a character in his own narration are, of course, not uncommon). A problem arises when we imagine a film whose camera is to be literally identified with a character visible on the screen. The camera’s presence is manifest as a series of views. the classical film’s analogue of a narrator is the unseen figure (ordinarily, he or she also has no voice) who authorizes those views. Given its prohibition against the camera’s framing views of itself (for example,
glimpses of itself in the mirror), the camera's absence from the frame is its sole mark on the frame. Thus, no being visible within the frame can be identified, in any simple way, with the figure represented by the camera. Even when the director of the film appears as an actor on the screen, the frame serves as a kind of formal barrier separating the figure who authorizes the framing from the figures framed, thus also from himself or herself.

How might a relationship of identity between a figure disclosed by the camera and the unseen figure who authorizes that disclosure be established and acknowledged in the succession of frames of a film? The Rules of the Game can be seen as Renoir's solution.

Why does this problem arise for Renoir at the moment of making The Rules of the Game? To answer this question, we must reflect on the nature of Renoir's formal innovations.

André Bazin was the first serious critic who attempted to describe the formal strategies that set Renoir's French films apart from other films of their time. He cited Renoir's tendency to dispense with the classical cutting style. Renoir replaced analytical editing (cutting for dramatic emphasis and to suggest point of view) by a certain characteristic practice of reframing. Thus, Bazin argues, Renoir respects the freedom of the filmed figures and the reality and integrity of their world. Viewed "objectively," without the classical "narrator's" mediation, these beings-in-a-world naturally reveal the inner truth about themselves.

My own sense is that the primary thrust of Renoir's formal innovations was not to dispense with narrative's process of mediation, but to give the camera/narrator a new stance: one that renders problematic, or exposes as already problematic, the camera's relationship to the world it frames and the human figures in that world.

Renoir's films up to and including The Rules of the Game create a role for the camera that breaks with its classical role. Renoir's camera denies the power of a character's interiority to motivate a framing or a cut, and it all but abandons the practice of responding to the drama of the scene enacted before it. Renoir can thereby create the impression that the figures in the frame have been freed from a stultifying mediation, as Bazin suggests — they are free to reveal their inner truth. Have we not all at some time thought, while viewing one of Renoir's great works of this period, that no one but Renoir has ever placed such movingly human beings within the frame of a film?

But Renoir's camera can create a different impression as well: not that it abandons the classical role to give the viewer unmediated access to human beings, but that it disdains to perform the classical gestures. Better, it plays the classical role with disdain. Renoir's camera can appear unresponsive, expressing indifference to the events un-
folding within and around the frame. Even while his characters move us as though they were fellow human beings, we can see that they have all but lost a human dimension for the camera. [The idea that his films' characters are puppets with no true interiors, already implicit in *The Little Match Girl* (1928), in which Catherine Hessling moves with the jerkiness of a marionette, is explicitly articulated in *La Chienne* (1931).]

If Renoir's camera expresses slight concern for the human beings before it, what motivates its framings, reframings, and cuts?

Renoir's camera is most characteristic when it seems primarily concerned with establishing the contingency of its frame. By this I mean the impression that the world of the film extends beyond the boundaries of the frame, so that any particular placement of the camera is only contingently determined by the world of the film. Further, Renoir's camera frames and reframes in such a manner as to suggest that it reserves as much interest (and as little) for what is outside the frame as for what happens within it. Hitchcock's camera in a certain mood dogs its characters, attending to the interior struggles betrayed by their movements and gestures. Renoir reframes upon the movements of his characters in the manner of a cat following the dinner party into the living room. The cat's movement is couched in indifference, as if to claim that it is the merest coincidence that she has chosen to make this move at just the time the people moved.

The Renoir frame characteristically conveys the formal indifference to what it frames that the proscenium arch automatically has to the gestures performed by actors on the stage. It is not that Renoir's camera animates no "narrator," but that the authorial figure it animates through its special strategies of reframing is one that may well strike us as specifically inhuman: The camera stands unresponsive before its human subjects as though to it they are always merely acting. Their sufferings and joys move us, although the camera frames their world as though it were inhabited by puppets, not people.

The process of developing this camera stance and reflecting on its implications engaged Renoir in the films leading to *The Rules of the Game*. This evolution could be analyzed in detail, revealing that even in the extraordinary *Boudu Saved from Drowning* (1932), Renoir's camera is not yet fully itself. By *Toni* (1934), however, the characteristic stance of Renoir's camera has fully emerged.

The central symbol of *Toni* is a bridge. Toni arrives by train across the Spanish border. Every day, workers come on this train to start a new life. The camera tracks with these workers as they make their way, singing from the station to the town nearby. Gradually, the camera slows, so that it no longer keeps up with the immigrants, who file through the frame. When all the human figures have left the frame, the
The "I" of the camera

The "I" of the camera - still haunted by the singing of the workers now unseen - continues its slow movement until it composes a perfect picture of the bridge.

This bridge functions as one of the film's main settings, but only the ending of the film declares its significance as a symbol. Toni dies just past the end of the bridge. As the camera tilts up, we see a new train arrive, a whole new potential cast of characters filled with hope. The film ends on a final camera movement that exactly repeats the first, and again it concludes by framing the bridge, as if it is in this bridge, not in any of its human subjects, that the camera finds its own likeness - this despite the fact that in Toni the film has a protagonist whose passivity matches the camera's own apparent indifference to him, as if the film is intent on denying its bond with Toni.

Out of the process of developing this characteristic camera stance emerges a closely related task: to confront the "inhuman" camera, unmasking its apparent indifference and revealing it as representing a figure who is, after all, human - who is, indeed, Renoir himself. This is the task completed by The Rules of the Game, which breaks through the camera's displays of indifference, exposing them as a natural expression of Renoir's bond with the world of his films.

In The Crime of M. Lange (1935), Toni's practice of reframing undergoes a further development pertinent to this project: The camera, while retaining and even exaggerating its attitude of indifference, is provoked to take sides for the community and against the monstrously charming Batala. Crucially here, the camera undertakes to sum up characters. It sums up the benevolent figure of Lange, for example, with a tour of his room early in the film. And it sums up the evil Batala in an incredible, perfect Renoir shot that sweeps full circle around the courtyard - the film's central symbol - passes an overflowing garbage can, and ends on the body of Batala. The camera completes its trajectory as though this juxtaposition is none of its concern; yet it
makes the point – not less surely for appearing to all but throw it away – that Batala is garbage.

*The Crime of M. Lange* reveals that at least at an intellectual level, Renoir's camera is not indifferent – it is committed to its world. The full acknowledgment of the commitment motivating its apparent indifference is only completed in *The Rules of the Game*.

Before *The Rules of the Game*, Renoir had never attributed the camera's apparent indifference to a figure within a film. In *The Rules of the Game*, Renoir mobilizes the camera to sum up Octave and attributes its stance to him. When the camera frames the balustrade for its final image, it identifies itself symbolically with it, as Renoir's camera had identified itself with the bridge in *Toni* and the courtyard in *The Crime of M. Lange*. This final image presents, emblematically, the inhuman forces of the world of *The Rules of the Game*, but at the same time it is an image of and by Octave/Renoir. The integrity of Renoir's camera is sustained. His "inhuman narrator" is disclosed to be Octave, thus, in turn, the human author Renoir himself.

With the pan from Octave to André that crystallizes Octave's self-knowledge, and with *The Rules of the Game*'s closing image, Renoir's project to that date – establishing a camera that appears enigmatic and inhuman, then unmasking the figure it invokes as, after all, the human author Renoir – is completed.

*The Rules of the Game* necessitates a new beginning for Renoir as author. Octave withdraws irrevocably, and the world of every subsequent Renoir film is one from which the author figure, who demands acknowledgment, has already withdrawn. There are no further Renoir protagonists like Toni, who does not know his bond with the camera, which in turn does not acknowledge that it sees itself reflected in him. Almost all subsequent Octave figures remain behind the camera, invisible to inhabitants of the film's world; if such an author figure does intervene in the world of the film, he now does so only on the condition that the camera reveals that he possesses from the outset knowledge of his role and his identity – knowledge that he has no possibility for permanent romantic union within the world of the film, knowledge of his bond with the camera.

The numbing depression of Renoir's American films suggests that these conditions precipitated a grave crisis in his filmmaking. In *Swamp Water* (1941), for example, the central symbol is the swamp to which the Octave figure, played by Walter Brennan, has withdrawn before the opening of the film. Unjustly accused of murder, he maintains within his swamp an exile's connection to the outside world. A young man (Dana Andrews) undertakes to clear Brennan's name and prepare the world for the return of the "dead man." The film ends with Bren-
The "I" of the camera

nan physically back in the world, but spiritually dead to it. From the outset, the camera openly identifies with the Brennan character, who in turn openly identifies himself with the swamp. For example, before we ever see Brennan in the frame, he is introduced by a shot from his point of view of a stranger penetrating the swamp. We know that this is a point-of-view shot, but when it appears, we know the bearer of that point of view only as a being linked to the swamp. The view is, as it were, the swamp's own, the view of a being who has been claimed by the swamp.

Swamp Water tests itself as a possible sequel to The Rules of the Game. It opens with the camera in the position it held there at the close. But if Swamp Water seems to follow Octave back into the world, its conclusion is that The Rules of the Game has no real sequel. Returned to the world, Brennan is only a ghost.

Swamp Water leaves Renoir still without a project, nor is one found in such films as The Southerner (1944), or in its despairing companion piece, Renoir's last American film, The Woman on the Beach (1947). All of Renoir's American films do, however, keep faith with The Rules of the Game. They meditate on the impossibility of their having the life of Renoir's great French films, and they have at their heart a deep sense of the loss of that life.

Rising out of despair, The River (1951) seems to mark the reanimation or rededication of Renoir's filmmaking. It inaugurates a series of films, in certain ways comparable to the series completed by The Rules of the Game, that The Little Theater of Jean Renoir (1969), his last film, concludes. The conditions of this rebirth are perhaps most explicitly articulated in the most perfectly realized of Renoir's late works: The Golden Coach (1953) and French Can-Can (1955).

I shall conclude this chapter with a reading of the ending of French Can-Can.

French Can-Can is about the creation of a theater. This theater, the film's central symbol, is a kind of protocinema, indeed a prototype of Renoir's own cinema. Like its historical original, Danglard's Moulin Rouge takes the shape of a windmill, a machine to reap the wind, to harness the forces of nature. It breaks down the old barriers between performers and spectators while attaining freedom from the tyranny of time.

The protagonist, Danglard (Jean Gabin), is an artist-impresario whose lifework is fulfilled in this latest and consummate creation. Clearly, he is an Octave figure, but of course Octave had no such privileged place within which his production could be framed. Danglard intervenes in a world animated by his art, and he does so already knowing and accepting his role as an author. Not only does he know
how to instruct others about their roles, as Octave did, but also he
knows what his identity as author makes of him.

The film accepts Danglard as the authority on his own role. His un-
derstanding is most explicitly declared in an extraordinary speech
near the end of the film. Nini, whom he has trained for the stage, is
about to make her first entrance. By this entrance, she will burn all
bridges to her old life. She hesitates, having just seen Danglard turn-
ing his amorous attention to his latest discovery, another girl/woman
ripe for creation. In a memorable peroration, he declares that it is the
condition of his role to pass from woman to woman, giving himself to
each only until she breaks through into the life of the theater, always
holding part of himself back. He knows that the performances within
his theater are rites of spring and that he himself can have no partner,
can enter into no marriage, can attain no permanent romantic union
either within or outside his theater. He cannot even possess the con-
tact with an audience that will be Nini's.

Danglard is set forth by the film as its author's spokesman. Indeed,
when Danglard makes his speech, Renoir has Gabin appropriate the
gesticulating manner we know and love as Octave's. Renoir so directs
Gabin as to give us the uncanny feeling that it is not Gabin, but Re-
noir himself incarnate in the frame, making manifest, and perhaps
thereby helping to exorcise, the figure who haunts Danglard through-
out the film.

From the outset, there is an identification of the camera and Dan-
glard. Early in the film, there is a scene of a Saturday night dance at a
dance hall. Danglard discovers a dancer (Nini) and rediscovers a
dance (the can-can). The dancing is viewed through Danglard's eyes.
If at the opening of *The Rules of the Game* the most significant event
is the camera's "discovery" of Octave, *French Can-Can* opens with the
camera identifying Danglard as the agent of its discoveries.

Like *The Rules of the Game*, *French Can-Can* divides into a back-
stage story and a production, both in turn placed within the larger
frame of the film. In mounting his production, Danglard openly plays
the part that Octave plays more or less covertly. Like Octave, Danglard
finds himself called upon to play a role within the production that
mirrors his role in creating the production itself. Unlike Octave,
though, Danglard knows all along how his production will end.

The construction of the theater has been completed. At the start of
the opening-night performance, Danglard, backstage, attends to the
show with the nervousness of an expectant father. As if overcome with
tension, he sits in a chair, his back to the curtain. Renoir begins to cut
back and forth between Danglard's face and the goings-on within the
theater. This crosscutting creates the impression that each view of
Danglard shows his reaction to what we just saw (for example, to little
The "I" of the camera

flirtations in the audience inspired by the animating dancing on stage) and shows his cue signaling what we are about to see. He cannot see what we see; he knows all that happens within his theater without the need to gaze upon it. Nor does any performer in the theater need to see him. Finally, he closes his eyes in satisfaction, completely possessed of the life within his theater.

The world within his theater is a projection of Danglard's imagination; so he can possess it completely. "Reality" now has no hold on him; they die to each other. This moment at which he accepts his creation as born is also a moment of death. Its equivalent in The Rules of the Game is the pan to André that crystallizes Octave's self-knowledge.

Danglard's foot now begins to tap in time with the music, and we realize that he has fallen under the spell of his own creation, which has the same power over him that it has over all human beings. He finds himself drawn from backstage into the theater. At the moment he joins the others in the theater, his separation from the camera, already signaled by the transformation of Danglard/Gabin into Octave/Renoir, is achieved. Renoir exorcised, Danglard loses his special status in relationship to the camera, which, like the music and dancing, assumes its power over him. It places him alongside all of the film's characters within a montage that declares all to be equal even as it sums up and differentiates their individualities. This is a montage of couples, save for Nini (who is married to her audience), the old conductor (who is married to his music), and Danglard (who is married to his role as the creator of stars). Within this montage, we see Danglard, who is now shoulder-to-shoulder with the audience, eye the woman next to him (who bears more than a passing resemblance to Ingrid Bergman, star of Renoir's next film, Elena et les Hommes) and begin yet again the process of creating a star.

Danglard's assumption of his role within the theater affirms the naturalness of authorship. Despite everything (the inhuman aspect of his role, for example), the author Danglard is a creature suited by nature
to membership in the human community. Indeed, it is his role to assume responsibility for the creation or re-creation of that community, a community that retains the aspect of a dream – Renoir’s dream.

Danglard’s assumption of his place within his theater crystallizes his separation from the camera, from Renoir. This is reaffirmed in the film’s final image. Renoir suddenly cuts away from the theater and frames it from the outside. An anonymous figure leaves the Moulin Rouge, staggers drunkenly to the foreground of the frame, and bows, as if acknowledging our applause for the film that is ending.

In a sense, French Can-Can repeats but reverses, undoes, the story of The Rules of the Game. It is as if Octave is reclaimed by his world, which his art brings back to life, as if the part of Renoir that is Octave dies to him as he gives life to this film. When French Can-Can ends with Danglard enclosed within a theater framed within its world, Renoir is once again alone.

It remains for The Little Theater of Jean Renoir to close out Renoir’s lifework (as The Rules of the Game closed out the series of films it culminated). Renoir once more appears on the screen as an actor, in an Octave role. But now he explicitly identifies himself as the producer-director of the four short pieces that compose the film. He casts himself as the author of The Little Theater of Jean Renoir. (Indeed, these short pieces reprise moments from nearly every Renoir film. To be the author of this film is to be the author of Renoir’s entire oeuvre. It is to be Jean Renoir.) Renoir does not intervene in the world of his last film. Standing alone before his creation, he speaks directly to us.
CHAPTER XII

The River

God dwells in the heart of all beings, Arjuna; thy God dwells in thy heart. And his power of wonder moves all things — puppets in a play of shadows — whirling them onwards in the stream of time.

— Krishna, in The Bhagavad Gita*

Hands lovingly paint intricate filigrees on the ground. A sitar plays the serene opening strains of a raga, as the narrator, a mature woman whose voice is wise and comforting, begins to speak: “In India, to honor guests on special occasions, women decorate the floors of their homes with rice flour and water. With this... we welcome you to this motion picture, filmed entirely in India, in Bengal, where the story really happened.”

Thus, The River (1951), the film that inaugurates the second great period of Jean Renoir’s career, presents the first of its interpretations of itself, its own views, its creation, and its audience: The film is a beautiful design painted by loving hands to welcome us as honored

* Juan Mascaró, translator, The Bhagavad Gita (New York: Viking Penguin, 1962), p. 120.
guests on a special occasion. (It is a magical moment when, at the midpoint of the film, this opening image is reprised on the occasion of a wedding – a wedding that is the centerpiece of the film-within-the-film that represents a story told by the narrator's past self.)

The narrator goes on: "It is a story of my first love, about growing up on the banks of a wide river. First love must be the same any place... but the flavor of my story would have been different in each, and the flavor of the people who live by the river would have been different."

It is the flavor of The River, what classical Sanskrit aesthetics would call the rasa of the film, that I wish above all to impart here, and to savor. The way I know best of doing this is by attending to the film's images, sounds, and words as they unfold, starting from the beginning. The River is an extraordinarily rich and complex work, and what follows is only a fragment of a reading, but I hope it is sufficient to convey something of the film's flavor.

An image of a singer in a boat, weaving a fishing net, fades in. A succession of documentary images follows: shots of boats and oarsmen, a man washing, a boy rolling spices, a temple. "...It was one of the many holy rivers. Its waters came from the eternal snows of the Himalayas and emptied into the Bay of Bengal....The river had its own life. Fishes and porpoises, turtles and birds and people who were born and lived and died on it."

After several shots of a jute plant and its workers, the narrator introduces the first of the film's dramatic characters, creating the first of many bridges between documentary and drama; and in saying "My father was in charge of a jute plant...," the narrator also intimates that she has a role to play in the story, has an incarnation within the film's world.

The father buys a kite at the bazaar, then walks across a bridge. "...The days followed one another in the even tenor of Bengal." She describes the Bengalis as "content in their traditions" as, on screen, we see her father give the just-bought kite to a child. This man, too, is sustained by his traditions, his Christian ways of giving. And The River itself is a gift.

There is a dissolve from the water buffalo outside the gate to a young boy. "...We were five children, all girls and my brother Bogey. ..." The camera tilts up and pulls out to frame a garden house, a group of children, and a kindly looking Indian woman with a twinkle in her eyes. "...Time slipped away unnoticed." On these words, chilling in retrospect (Bogey is going to die), there is a cut to the woman and a young boy. She commands him to come and learn his spelling. "I don't like spelling, I like turtle." But she points out that he has to learn to spell. "Imagine a man who couldn't read a newspaper." He
replies, "I don't want to be any of those men," and there is a slow dissolve to Kanu, a dark-skinned Indian boy, climbing over the garden wall.

Bogey's "I like turtle" will be echoed in his fatal "I like cobra." Indeed, every appearance of Bogey in The River inscribes a premonition of his death. For example, when he says he does not want to be the kind of man who reads a newspaper, we might take the dissolve to Kanu as implying that this is who Bogey wishes to be. But Kanu will be the sole witness to Bogey's death; hence, this dissolve suggests, darkly, that there is no kind of man Bogey wishes to be, as there is no kind of man he is fated to become – he will die without ever becoming a man.

This dissolve seals Bogey's fate, although the narrator passes over this declaration in silence. Yet we have the strong impression throughout The River (it grows with every new viewing) that the narrator's words and silences are attuned to all the camera's revelations. She speaks for the film's author, Renoir, as fully as True Heart Susie's titles speak for Griffith. In The Rules of the Game, Renoir steps forward in person to play the role of Octave; in The River, he identifies himself completely with a woman who remains unviewed, although her past self is subject to the camera's gaze. Rhetorically, the narrator and the film's author are one. Yet Renoir is also one with every other major character in the film (except, perhaps, the beautiful, wealthy Valerie, whom the narrator speaks of as not being "one of us"): Bogey; Kanu; Ram Singh, the old Sikh gateman (an incarnation of von Rauffenstein, the Erich von Stroheim figure in Grand Illusion); Nan (the "bridge... from dreams to reality, from reality to dreams"); the philosophical but secretly despairing Mr. John; the one-legged Captain John, made stranger to his own people (Renoir was wounded in World War I and suffered the rest of his life from the wound and the limp it caused); Melanie (who does not know why she was born and wishes to escape from the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth); Harriet (the young poetess...
who is the narrator’s past self); Harriet’s mother and father (who teach her, after Bogey’s death, the painful necessity of “going on,” of keeping up appearances, that is, living in the world); even Hoppity the rabbit. There is a bridge – unique in each case – between each of these characters and Renoir, a particular way of seeing each as an aspect of the film’s author or, perhaps, of whatever he is an aspect of.

On the words “…all wrapped up in Hoppity her rabbit was little Victoria” there is a dissolve to a three-year-old holding a rabbit, followed by a cut to Victoria with an older girl, about thirteen, self-conscious and gangly, who has yet to be introduced. (They are framed against the sky in trademark Renoir fashion, like Octave and André in The Rules of the Game after their automobile accident.)

The older girl asks, “What are you doing to Hoppity?” Victoria answers, “Hoppity is my baby. He’s just been born.” “But you had her born last week.” “Babies can be born again and again, can’t they?” The River presents its story as involving real people in a real setting, yet at the same time as a fairy tale in which the dead come to life, a girl is transformed by a kiss, and ordinary human beings are incarnations of legendary men and women like Marc Antony and Cleopatra and of gods and goddesses like Krishna and Kali. A human life is lived once; it begins with birth and ends with death, but the present is always also past, and the past, future.

Victoria’s remark prepares for the introduction of the beautiful, red-headed Valerie, viewed literally on her high horse in a slow dissolve to another trademark Renoir framing, a frame-within-the-frame that invokes the unreality of a painting, and even more a theater stage.

The narrator introduces her other sisters ("My sisters were much younger. The twins, Muffy and Mouse, and Elizabeth, the pianist"). The father cries out: "Good heavens, whose filthy little children are those?" There is a cut to the mother, calmly pouring tea: "Yours." The narrator introduces her simply: "Mother was beautiful. She loved music...."
We dissolve to Ram Singh, the old Sikh gatekeeper, and the camera moves in on him. "...Before being our gateman, he had been a valiant soldier...." Then there is a dissolve to Nan, the Indian woman we have already viewed, but who has not yet been introduced. "...Nan was the bridge to life, bringing us back from dreams to reality, from reality to dreams...."

In long-shot, Nan shouts, "Harriet!" There is a cut to reverse field, with Bogey and the gangly thirteen-year-old in the background and Nan in the foreground, her back to the camera, presiding over the frame-within-the-frame.

Nan is unhappy that Harriet is barefoot. "Why can't you be obedient, like Elizabeth?" Harriet replies, "It's easy for her to be good, she is good." (What is Harriet's nature, her place in The River's world?)

Nan suppresses a smile, which finally breaks through. "...Nan, always filling our heads with tales of romance, setting the stage for the arrival of love...." Nan laughs out loud, and there is a cut to Harriet, her expression impenetrable. We do not know whether she takes Nan to be laughing at her or with her, whether or not Harriet finds the mystery of her nature to be a laughing matter. To this point in the film, we have viewed Harriet, but have not been introduced to her. Perhaps this girl's awkward self-consciousness in the face of the camera may lead us to suspect that she and the narrator are one. (Even her mother, when Harriet presses for an opinion whether or not she is beautiful, cannot honestly say more than "You have a nice interesting little face.")

On the words "...and I see myself, an ugly duckling determined to be a swan...," there is a dissolve from Harriet gazing inscrutably into the camera to Harriet lying on the grass with her book of poetry in front of her (this is where she will be much later in the film when she awakens to discover that Kanu is beckoning her to follow him, and he leads her to where Bogey lies dead, bitten by a cobra).
Harriet begins to recite a poem (reading from her book? writing in it?). This view of Harriet on the grass represents how the narrator sees herself now as she was then. It corresponds to the narrator's "inner vision" of the past, her remembrance. But this view also represents how Harriet envisioned herself then as she stared ahead and, inspired to or by poetry, contemplated the disturbing mystery of her nature. That is, the narrator's inner vision comes together with the private thoughts, the imagination, of Harriet, her past incarnation, to give birth to the mysterious views projected on the screen. And as the intimate view of Harriet reciting her poetry dissolves to a panorama of the river, the narrator's voice takes over from Harriet's: "...Then, as the river brought everything, it brought a young man on the weekly steamer." *

There is a dissolve to Valerie and Harriet in the foreground and Nan in the background. Nan cries "He's come! Let's look at him!" and

* At the end of the film, Harriet recites a poem, and the narrator for the last time takes over from her, but then the narrator completes the poem. The camera moves in on Harriet, but then its continuing motion excludes her from the frame (like the singers at the conclusion of Toni), and all we see in the end is the river, now explicitly identified with the film itself.
rushes from the depths of the frame (like Robert in The Rules of the Game, when André first appears at the chateau).

On the narrator's "...We knew very little about him...," there is a cut to Nan and the girls viewing, first framed within a frame-within-the-frame and then — in a composition that will be reprised at Bogey's funeral — framed looking over the garden wall. Again and again in The River (and to a large degree this is a new development in Renoir's work) "viewers" are placed within the frames-within-the-frame that ordinarily, in Renoir's films, invoke a theater stage. The implication is that viewing is theater, acting, performance; like actors on stage, viewers play roles, participate in the theatrical spectacle of the world.

The image fades out, then fades in on Valerie, breathless with the news that the new arrival, Captain John, has an artificial leg. But this, in Nan's imagination, makes him no less eligible for the role of romantic hero. Captain John is an American back from the war who is visiting Mr. John, their neighbor. Making part of Octave's role her own, Nan suggests that the girls invite him to their party celebrating the upcoming festival of Diwali.

Moved by the moment, Harriet, addressing the letter of invitation, recites the address out loud: "The little house. Our village. Bengal. India. The Eastern Hemisphere. The world." But when Valerie claims the right to deliver the letter, Harriet quickly slips out of her poetic mood: "It's my house and it's my party!" In the course of her transformation into the wise narrator, Harriet learns to transcend her possessiveness. (The River is, at one level, the story of Harriet's metamorphosis, or at least its first stages, which call for her to plunge into the river, to die, and to be reborn, and also to recognize that no one writes poetry without help.)

As Harriet climbs over the wall separating her garden from Mr. John's, the narrator speaks: "...Since the death of his wife, a beautiful Hindu woman, India had absorbed our neighbor completely...." There is a cut to reverse field, and Harriet walks into the background as Nan and Valerie remain in the foreground, viewing. (Both these
framings will be reprised much later in the film, when, with Harriet now the viewer, Captain John follows Melanie into the grove, and he and Valerie kiss. "It was my first kiss," the narrator says, still smarting after all these years, "but received by another. I couldn't bear it.")

"...His house was full of Indian friends, Indian books and Indian music...and he had a daughter a little older than I." A coach pulls into the frame, and there are excited shouts of "Melanie!"

There is a cut to a medium long-shot of Harriet and Melanie, the open doors of the coach forming a perfect frame-within-the-frame, the curtains of the doorway of the house enhancing the invocation of theater.

Suddenly the curtains part, and Mr. John makes his entrance, as Melanie cries "Father!"

Momentarily, Melanie makes her entrance, joining her father within the frame-within-the-frame, and they embrace.

Mr. John speaks the words "Oh Melanie Melanie Melanie Melanie" like an incantation. (It will be echoed by Harriet's terrible incantation "Bogey Bogey Bogey Bogey" when she first sees her brother's motionless body on the ground.) "...We've been starving for the sight of each other!"
Inside Mr. John's house, introductions are made. Harriet cannot take her eyes off Captain John as she hands him the invitation. Painfully awkward in her forwardness, she launches into an embarrassingly impassioned speech: "We always give a party for Diwali because that's the best time. Ram Singh has brought lamps and we light them before you come and we have ice cream and fireworks in the garden and we wear our new frocks and we dance and mother makes us gold and silver crowns. Will you come?"

Captain John replies noncommittally, "That's all very nice," then turns to ask Mr. John, not Harriet, what Diwali is. He replies: "The Hindu festival of lights." Then Harriet, unfazed, takes over: "Hundreds and thousands of little lamps burning everywhere...." There is a dissolve from Harriet, gazing ahead, spellbound, to a succession of documentary views of the festival. In these views, Harriet's poetic imagination and documentary "reality" are seamlessly joined.

Equally seamlessly, Harriet's voice segues into the narrator's "...I can still see the little oil lamps. Diwali means 'garland of lights'...." The views that follow are real, but they are also what Harriet, in the face of the camera, is envisioning in her inner eye. And they are what, across the bridge of time, the narrator can "still see" even as she speaks. These views, which bridge past and present, reality and imagination, imagination and film, are views, as the narrator puts it, of lamps lit "in memory of a great war, the old eternal war between good and evil. For each life given in this war, a light is lit...." This is another of The River's interpretations of itself: This film, too, is such a lamp. (Renoir's The Little Match Girl identifies itself symbolically with the sparkling, hallucinatory flame with which the Little Match Girl attempts to keep from freezing to death.)

The documentary views of Diwali conclude with the launching of a little boat, a burning lamp aboard, accompanied by the narrator's words: "For Hindus, all the universe is God, and since God is everywhere, it is only natural to worship a tree, a stone, a river. They all declare the presence of the one supreme."
The camera follows the boat as other small boats, likewise bearing lamps, cross its path. (This precise image will be echoed when Harriet launches her own boat into the river the night she sets out, after Bogey's death, to drown herself.)

There is a breathtaking dissolve to the girls, framed by curtains, watching as Captain John arrives at the party. "...At our house, we were all excited. Captain John had arrived....Never before had Diwali seemed so wonderful."

From the father inviting Captain John to a tiger hunt, there is a cut to Ram Singh lighting a great pillar of sparks, then to a new angle on
the spectacle, an empty swing conspicuously placed in the frame. (Whose swing is this? Who is absent from this scene?)

"...It was a fairy-tale come true...." (What is "wonderful" in The River is always a fairy tale come true.) There is a cut to Nan, laughing, then to the children. "...Even the little ones were caught in the spell...."

There is a magical cut to Harriet, curtsying against a black background, to Valerie, similarly framed, and then to Captain John, a grave, inscrutable smile on his face. "...Valerie and I pretended not to be aware of his presence, but we knew perfectly well that his eyes were on us...." (This passage is strikingly reminiscent of the equally eloquent scene at the opera house in Max Ophuls's Letter from an Unknown Woman.)

There is a cut to an extreme long-shot of the whole setting, dominated by the great tree and the spectacular pillar of sparks. Ram Singh runs to and fro, gesticulating frantically; this is one of Renoir’s Wittiest yet most poignant images of the act of directing. Then there is a dis-
solve to a procession of worshipers, which effects a transition to another documentary passage: "...Hindus believe in one god, but they worship different symbols, which they regard as the embodiments of virtues and qualities of the supreme being...." There is a cut to a temple, framed to invoke a theater, an effigy of the goddess Kali "on stage," then a cut that isolates the idol in the frame.

"...And among these symbols is Kali, goddess of eternal destruction and creation, creation being impossible without destruction. In our village, on that night, the great terrifying Kali held court in all her magnificence, and the villagers gathered to ask protection. For through the destruction of the elements of evil, good is born...." On these charged words, which reverberate throughout Renoir's authorship, there is a dissolve from Kali to Bogey, who is dancing with Elizabeth and carrying Hoppity in his arms.

For a long moment, the terrifying figure of Kali is superimposed over Bogey and Hoppity. Kali "holds court," as the narrator puts it, claims center stage, but she also possesses a gaze. Her gaze singles out this innocent rabbit that has already been born again and again –
that is, has died again and again (to all viewers of *The Rules of the Game*, rabbits are a symbol of mortality as well as fertility) – and this little boy who is about to die. In *The River*, Bogey's death is the most shattering exemplification of the principle, incarnate in Kali, that creation is impossible without destruction.

Bogey and Victoria exit, Melanie asks her father to dance, and Harriet pulls Captain John to his feet. But his "I shall be honored, little kitten" stings Harriet with its condescension, and she angrily sits down. Then Mr. John asks Melanie to entertain Captain John, who rises when she enters the frame. The music stops and, ill at ease, Captain John and Melanie sit down. Elizabeth winds up the phonograph, and the music starts again, animating the scene (as music always does in Renoir's work).

A shadow appears in the frame; then Valerie enters in the flesh, eclipsing Melanie. (This expressive device, like so many others Renoir employs in *The River*, is also a staple of Hitchcock's technique.)

Saying "Captain John, you must dance," Valerie grabs his hand, and they join the other dancers. There is a cut to Melanie, Harriet, and Nan, who are watching, then back to the dance floor. The music stops. Valerie goes to "put it on again." Captain John, alone in the frame, gingerly flexes his artificial leg. Unwilling to endure again the painful and humiliating ordeal of dancing, he retreats to the verandah. Excited, Nan says, "Let's go!" Harriet follows her, but Melanie stays behind.

Captain John enters the verandah, viewed in extreme long-shot from Harriet's and Nan's point of view in yet another framing that invokes the stage. So, too, does the counter shot of Nan and Harriet viewing from within a frame-within-the-frame (one of the film's recurring visions of the theatricality of viewing itself).

Valerie joins Captain John in the extreme long-shot frame. There is a cut to a conventional "objective" medium two-shot that breaks with the longer perspective of Nan and Harriet, the two "viewers." As waltz
music filters from inside, Captain John warns Valerie to be careful ("Because you're a little beautiful."). There is a cut to a new, closer shot of the two "viewers" – another "objective" view, no longer a frame-within-the-frame that invokes theater. (The camera passes effortlessly back and forth between the perspective remembered from the past and the perspective representing the narrator's inner vision. The medium of film bridges past and present, inner and outer, as it bridges acting and viewing.)

Harriet repeats in disbelief, "Beautiful!" There is a cut to Valerie, in close-up, stroking her hair. "Maybe I'm dreaming...," Captain John says, and there is a cut from the two "actors" to the two "viewers," then back again, as Captain John hands Valerie a cigarette. "She's smoking!" Harriet says in shock and dismay. "She's growing up!" Nan exclaims with a delighted smile.

At the moment Valerie's cigarette is lit, we are returned to the extreme long-shot that represents the point of view of the two "viewers" and places the "actors" on stage, then to the original view of Harriet and Nan, again framed within a theatrical frame-within-the-frame. The next cut – a reprise of the "objective" framing of Captain John and Valerie – further pulls the ground from under us. As Valerie takes her
first daring puff, there is an even more disorienting cut (this is one of the most privileged moments in the film) to Melanie, framed in the window, viewing.

This is followed by the "objective" framing of Captain John and Valerie, who cannot keep from coughing, then by the two "viewers" who laugh at Valerie's discomfort, as we do, and then by a reprise of the mysterious vision of Melanie, accompanied by angry-sounding Indian music. Then Melanie slowly dissolves into the figure of Kali.

Melanie has not literally seen the exchange between Captain John and Valerie, but in her heart she knows what has taken place, I take it. This knowledge springs from the powers of imagination normal for a girl who feels rejected by the man she wishes to be her first lover, but it also has a supernatural aspect, as if it springs from the powers of the goddess Kali (as all knowledge does, perhaps). We may take this dissolve to identify the two figures, to declare that Melanie is an incarnation of Kali; but we also may take it rather as a declaration that Kali possesses Melanie, that Kali pulls Melanie's strings.

From Kali, there is a cut to an overall view of the temple, again framed as a theatrical space. Fire dancers are "on stage." Then there is a cut to the dancers' audience: a sea of inscrutable faces, as impassive
and impenetrable as the commedia dell'arte's audience of Incas in *The Golden Coach* (or as *The River*'s audience of Americans?).

There is a cut to Kali, presiding over the scene, then a dissolve to a small boat bearing a clay effigy, which is being cast into the river. The next day, at the setting of the sun, the symbols of Kali are taken to the water for the final ritual, made of clay taken from the river, carefully shaped and artfully painted. The goddess has accomplished her manifold tasks. Pious worship, sweet incense and generous offerings approach their end. On the river and on its banks, young and old, rich and poor pay their last homage to the goddess. . . .

There is a cut to Melanie and Mr. John, among the throngs viewing the ceremony from the riverbank, then to the boat as it glides silently into the water, then back to father and daughter. "...Arisen from the bed of the river, Kali returns to the river. Clay goes back to clay...."

Mr. John casts his eyes toward Melanie, then looks away with a solemn expression, and the image fades out with exquisite slowness. The terrible wish inscribed in this look, passed over in silence by the narrator, yet poetically expressed in the engulfing of the frame by blackness, is that Melanie find release from the life her father unforgivably gave to her — that Melanie die, like her mother in the past, like Bogey
in the future. It is also the wish that Mr. John’s own dead love, the mother of Melanie, return to life.

When the image fades in, we view Mr. John reading a newspaper. Somber chords played on a sitar — these are like the tolling church bells in Toni — awaken him from the unreality of the newspaper stories. He looks up, and the camera pulls out, disclosing that Captain John is present with him in the room. The two men walk toward a curtain, and there is a cut to reverse field. Mr. John opens the curtain, and, from his point of view, we see the resplendent vision of Melanie dressed, for the first time, in a sari.

Mr. John says, “For a moment, I didn’t recognize you!” Then he takes her hands and stares at her in wonderment, and she announces that she will wear a sari always.

When Melanie’s own father fails to recognize her, who do we imagine that he thinks she is? Surely, one answer is his dead wife, Melanie’s mother; another is Kali. The goddess Kali presides over all creations of life out of death, which are also creations of death out of life. This is yet another of The River’s interpretations of itself: The camera’s gaze is the gaze of the goddess Kali, who incarnates the principle that creation is impossible without destruction.

As we have seen, The River, like Renoir’s Toni and Griffith’s True Heart Susie before it, begins with a claim that its story is literally true, that it really happened. But in The River’s meditation, as in classical Indian philosophy, what “really happens” cannot be separated from what is dreamed, fantasized, remembered, acted on stage, or, for that matter, projected on a movie screen. "Reality" itself is theater, a spectacle through which alone the truth reveals itself to human beings, a spectacle whose creator and audience are, ultimately, one, even as they are separated by a boundary.

The boundary between imagination and reality, like the boundary between India and the West, is itself a creation of the human imagina-
tion. Paradoxically, this means that nothing is or could be more real to human beings.

*The River* takes up and literalizes the fantasy (which goes back to Griffith and Chaplin and to Renoir's own earlier work) that the medium of film is no barrier. And it broadens that fantasy into an all-encompassing metaphysical vision – a vision that is indigenous to India, but which has always been at the heart of Renoir's work. "Reality" is illusion, "illusion" is real, and to suppose otherwise is "the grand illusion." This idea is India's teaching; it is what *The River* takes from India. But it is also what Renoir brings to his encounter with India; it is Renoir's understanding as well.

*The River* is Renoir's meditation on his oneness with India. It is also his meditation on what separates him from Indians, what makes him the particular human being he is. In meditating on India's teaching that diversity is the expression of oneness, Renoir discovers his own civilization, the civilization of the West, as his subject. Hence, *The River* is followed by the dazzling reflections on European culture of *The Golden Coach, French Can-Can, and Eléna et les Hommes.*
In "A Closer Look at Scopophilia: Mulvey, Hitchcock and Vertigo," Marian Keane contests the view that in Vertigo the camera allies itself exclusively with the male position.* She argues that Vertigo, like all of Hitchcock's films, concerns a search for identity and what Stanley Cavell has called "the identifying and inhabitation of a feminine region of the self." If this is true, Vertigo has a close affinity to so-called women's films, in particular to the genre Cavell terms "the melodrama of the unknown woman."

At the end of Vertigo, Scottie (James Stewart), like the Louis Jourdan figure at the end of Letter to an Unknown Woman, awakens to the realization that he has failed to acknowledge the woman he loves. In both films, this realization comes poetically too late. Then are we to count Vertigo as a member of the unknown woman genre? If not, what does its exclusion from the genre, or rejection of the genre, reveal about the unknown woman melodramas, about the Hitchcock thriller, about the concepts of genre and authorship as instruments of film criticism, about the conditions of being human (Cavell's deepest concern, and that of the films we both study)?

In the chapter that follows, I address such questions obliquely, letting my thoughts emerge out of detailed "readings" of two sequences in the film. In contemplating Vertigo's relationship to the melodrama of the unknown woman, a personal motivation was my wish to reflect on the relationship between Cavell's writing about film, guided by and to the discovery of film's major genres, and my own, drawn to meditate on film as a vehicle of authorship. Thus, I follow the method of Hitch-

* Marian Keane, "A Closer Look at Scopophilia: Mulvey, Hitchcock and Vertigo," in Marshall Deutelbaum and Leland Poague, editors, A Hitchcock Reader (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1986), pp. 231–49. Although there are significant points at which they diverge, my understanding of Vertigo and Ms. Keane's exemplary essay are in such close sympathy that I shall not attempt to note all the places where our readings are congruent.
cock – *The Murderous Gaze,* in which I “read” five Hitchcock films from opening to closing.

The first sequence directly precedes the grueling passage in which Scottie, overcome by vertigo, fails to make it to the top of the bell tower and witnesses what he takes to be the death of Madeleine (Kim Novak). It opens on an extreme long-shot of Scottie in his apartment, lost in thought, perhaps dozing, on the sofa. At the sound of a buzzer, he looks up and goes to the door, the camera reframing with him. There is a cut to a shot in which Scottie, in shadow, is in the far left of a frame almost entirely occupied by the featureless expanse of the door. (This setup will be repeated, but reversed, when Scottie first visits Judy’s hotel room in the second part of the film.)

His hand below the frame line, Scottie opens the door, creating what I call Hitchcock’s “curtain-raising” effect and opening a bracket that will be closed at the conclusion of this sequence. (*Vertigo’s* most celebrated curtain-raising effect occurs when Scottie, trailing Madeleine down a dark alley, opens the door through which she disappeared – and a flower shop full of brilliant color fills the screen.)

As always in Hitchcock, when a curtain is raised, theater is invoked. Scottie is the audience – we are too, of course – for this theatrical entrance. But whose entrance is it? We see only a silhouette, a shadow among shadows.

In *Psycho’s* famous shower murder sequence, Hitchcock films the murderer’s entrance in this way. However, Marion Crane is turned away when the shower curtain opens – she does not open it herself – so that we alone see the knife-wielding killer framed in silhouette. Rhetorically, the *Psycho* sequence’s identification of the shower curtain with the movie screen – that “safety curtain” we assume will separate

us from the world of the film — presents this silhouetted figure not simply as a denizen of a world safely cut off from our own but as real, as though we were face-to-face with our own murderer.*

The filming of the woman at Scottie's door in silhouette, by contrast, intimates that she is not fully, or not exactly, real, as though we are seeing not a woman of flesh and blood but a ghost. Indeed, this silhouette prefigures, among other moments, the ghostly apparition that rises into Judy's view at the climax of the film, precipitating her death. Hitchcock understands that in the face of the camera, the future as well as the past may haunt the present. And it is one of his abiding insights that there is an aspect of the supernatural, a ghostliness, in all human beings on film, all subjects of the camera.

Scottie believes, or desperately wishes to believe, that human beings create their own destinies: If ghosts are real, human beings are not free, and he is condemned to his vertigo. Throughout the ensuing dialogue, Scottie is intent on proving that Madeleine's possession by Carlotta reveals no supernatural agency. Hence, it is expressively appropriate that he immediately flips a light switch, causing the silhouette to be fleshed out: It is Madeleine (the eminently palpable Kim Novak).

For Scottie (at least, this is what he tells himself), Madeleine's mystery is only an enigma: How is Carlotta Valdes's hold over her to be explained and thereby overcome? In his role as investigator, but also as therapist, Scottie (the "hardheaded Scot," Gavin Elster calls him with veiled irony) undertakes to solve this riddle, to explain everything.

But Scottie makes a mistake: He falls in love. By a series of stages that Hitchcock precisely plots, Scottie's project in the first part of the film, which casts him at once as investigator/therapist and as roman-

* For an extended analysis of this sequence, see Rothman, Hitchcock — The Murderous Gaze, op. cit., pp. 288–312.
tic hero, becomes a calling – some would say an obsession – on which he stakes his entire being. By explaining everything, he will prove to Madeleine that she is free, will save and win this damsel in distress. But who is this woman to him? Scottie is intent on denying the Carlotta in Madeleine, but what if it is Madeleine’s fatedness that really draws him, the doomed Carlotta with whom he has fallen in love? Is Scottie, untutored in the ways of the heart, embracing her mystery, not denying it?

Scottie does not know, nor do we, seeing Vertigo for the first time, that the woman at the door is not Madeleine, Gavin Elster’s wife, but Judy Barton from Salina, Kansas, who is acting the role of Madeleine – more precisely, acting the role of Madeleine possessed by Carlotta Valdes – in a piece of theater authored by the diabolical Gavin Elster. What Scottie cannot know, but Hitchcock calls upon us to acknowledge, is that Elster, despite his aspirations to authorship, is no less than Judy a creature of the real author, Hitchcock. Then, too, we know, as Scottie cannot, that Judy is Kim Novak acting the role of Judy. That is, Kim Novak is possessed by Judy, who is possessed by Madeleine, who is possessed by Carlotta Valdes, who is... Then who is this woman we know as Kim Novak? Who is she in the face of Hitchcock’s camera? And who is Hitchcock, that he, like Scottie, has fallen in love with her? Who are we, that we, too, have fallen?

"Madeleine!" Scottie says after switching on the light. "What’s the matter?"

"...The dream came back again."

Scottie reassures her, a trace of a smile playing on his lips. "It’s going to be all right... You’re awake...."

She stares at him as he concludes. "You’re all right now."

His eyes narrow as he scrutinizes her closely, searching for a clue on which he might hang an explanation. "Now can you tell me?"

She turns away and walks across the room. The camera reframes with her as she begins to relate her dream of a tower in an old Spanish village. Then Hitchcock isolates Scottie and Madeleine in separate frames.

As Madeleine speaks, Scottie narrows his eyes, an explanation dawning. As she goes on, he moves left, the camera reframing with his gliding movement. Then he interrupts, gesturing in the inimitable James Stewart manner: "...It’s no dream. You’ve been there before. You’ve seen it."

She looks away and sits down. "No, never!" she says with all the petulance of disavowal.

"Madeleine, a hundred miles south of San Francisco there’s an old Spanish mission. San Juan Bautista, it’s called. It’s been preserved exactly as it was a hundred years ago as a museum. Now think hard,
The "I" of the camera
darling. Think hard. You've been there before. You've seen it.... Now go on about your dream. What was it that frightened you so?"
To frame Madeleine telling the end of her dream, with its chilling anticipation of the nightmare that precipitates Scottie's breakdown, Hitchcock alternates a pair of close-ups, Scottie and Madeleine each framed almost in left profile, that are perfectly expressive of the intimacy and the separation of analyst and analysand.

"I stood alone on the green, searching for something. And I started to the church. Then the darkness closed in. I was alone in the dark being pulled into the darkness. I fought to wake up."
The camera moves with Scottie as he goes to Madeleine's side. On his words "You're going to be all right now, Madeleine," the lamp momentarily eclipses Scottie in the frame, a quintessentially Hitchcockian effect.

Finally framed with Madeleine in a normal two-shot, Scottie takes charge: "I'm going to take you down there to that mission this afternoon, and when you see it you'll remember when you saw it before and it'll finish your dream. It will destroy it. I promise you."
As Scottie speaks, Madeleine's eyes shift to the left, to the right, and then down.
Who is the figure of mystery on view in this frame? Are we viewing Judy acting in character as Madeleine – that is, playing Madeleine thinking about her dream, haunted by Carlotta’s fate – or Judy stepping out of Madeleine’s character to think about her own dream, her dream of happiness with Scottie (a dream that Scottie’s plan, unwittingly crowning Gavin Elster’s grand scheme, is indeed destined to “finish” and “destroy”)?

Silently, Judy meets Scottie’s gaze and then looks down, at which point Hitchcock cuts to a high-angle shot (cutting to a high-angle shot at the moment a human fate is sealed is another quintessential Hitchcock gesture). The camera glides with Scottie as he leads Madeleine to the door and announces, with an air of calm assurance, “You’ll come back here around noon.” [Scottie’s manner brings to mind the penultimate sequence of Notorious. This is how Devlin (Cary Grant) leads Alicia (Ingrid Bergman) to safety.]*

The cut to the high-angle shot is succeeded by yet another Hitchcockian declaration of the camera, actually a conjunction of Hitchcockian signature gestures. As Scottie opens the door and Madeleine passes through it, the door fills the frame, closing the bracket opened by Madeleine’s entrance and creating a blinding white flash. (Another such white flash will occur within Hitchcock’s presentation of Scottie’s nightmare.)

There is a dissolve to an extreme long-shot of Scottie’s car on a mountain road, then to the two in the car, framed frontally. Scottie and Madeleine are looking at the road ahead, wrapped in their private thoughts. She turns to look out of the side window, which cues a shot from her point of view: trees hurtling by overhead, framed against the sky.

This is a significant moment. Hitchcock has presented us innumer-

able shots from Scottie’s point of view, but except for the enigmatic view of flowers floating on the water that precedes her leap into San Francisco Bay, this is the first point-of-view shot granted to Madeleine, the camera’s first direct acknowledgment that she possesses her own separate consciousness.

This shot, devoid of human countenances, represents Madeleine’s view, what she literally sees, but it is also expressive and evocative, a vision: at once a terrifying vision of nothingness (Judy is hurtling blindly into the unknown) and a meditative vision of a higher, but inhuman, realm that “takes no notice” when human beings are born or die.

Scottie, Vertigo’s protagonist, intent on denying the mystery that also draws him, is an object of study to Hitchcock’s camera: Scottie’s thoughts are perfectly legible to us. The camera’s relationship to Kim Novak/Judy/Madeleine/Carlotta is more intimate and ambiguous: She is an object of desire to the camera, but they are also attuned. This point-of-view shot and Madeleine’s reaction to it do not allow us to read this woman’s thoughts; they reveal only that she is meditating, as Scottie is not, on the mystery – the mystery of birth and death and freedom and love and entrapment – that lies at the heart of Hitchcock’s films.

With a trace of a smile, Madeleine looks screen right toward Scottie, then left and down at the road going by, then quickly past the camera again, only then raising her eyes to look at Scottie. All this time she avoids, and appears to avoid, the camera’s gaze. Sensing her eyes on him, Scottie looks with concern to Madeleine. When he sees the brave expression with which she meets his gaze, he returns his eyes to the road, a pleased smile coming over him (this is not a smile intended to be seen). We read Scottie – as does Madeleine – like an open book.

Looking away from Scottie, Madeleine breathes deeply and stares ahead. No longer avoiding the camera, she stares now directly into it, or through it, as if absorbed in a scene she is envisioning.
What follows is a series of hypnotically slow panning movements linked by equally slow dissolves, a series uncannily expressive of this woman's entrancement. But their effect goes beyond this: Coming in response to the shot of Madeleine staring into the camera, they affect us virtually as point-of-view shots, as if the views framed by the camera, our views, are projections of what she is imagining, as if what follows, perhaps all of *Vertigo*, represents Madeleine's meditation.*

The key shot in this series starts on a strikingly composed frame-within-a-frame. (Such compositions, which I take to be, at one level, invocations of the film frame, echo through *Vertigo* and indeed all of Hitchcock's films.) Slowly, the camera pans to the right until stone wall finally gives way to archway, and another curtain is raised, a curtain that will be lowered only in the final shot of the film.

The long duration of this movement combined with its elegiac slowness make this shot an *image* of the traversal of space and time, as if raising the question how human beings ever get from there — from Ma-

* For pointing out the uncanniness of this passage, I am indebted to James Shapiro, whose doctoral dissertation on the role of the artist in the films of Hitchcock (among other matters) is studded with such discoveries.
deleine staring into the camera as Scottie’s car hurtles through the trees, for example — to here, and the question of where "here" is. How can human beings possibly exist in space and time? This movement echoes the camera’s exquisitely slow traversal of Scottie’s apartment that prefaces his first conversation with Madeleine and, before that, its traversal of Ernie’s preceding Madeleine’s entrance into the film. This latter shot is itself repeated in the second part of the film when Scottie returns to Ernie’s, this time with Judy. And at the end of the present sequence, this movement will be reprised, and then echoed in the beautiful slow pan across the San Francisco skyline that affects the transition to the second part of the film.

Another slow dissolve takes us to the outside of the livery stable. The camera continues its movement until it frames the doorway in another perfect frame-within-the-frame. For a long moment, the camera holds this framing, through which the tiny, distant figures of Madeleine and Scottie are on view.

Finally there is a cut to the interior of the livery stable, as Scottie asks, "Madeleine – where are you now?" Madeleine replies, with a smile, "Here with you." Then where has she been, and where have we been, while the camera was "away"? And what commits the camera — what commits Hitchcock, what commits us — to return to these human subjects?

"It’s all real," Scottie says, as if convinced that Madeleine will now come to her senses. But as he speaks, her eyes slowly turn toward the camera.

"Think of when you were here," he implores, taking her arm. As Madeleine begins, she stares into the camera, which moves in slowly toward her. "There were not so many carriages then. There were horses in the stalls. A bay, two black and a gray. It was our favorite place, but we were forbidden to play here, and Sister Teresa would scold us." Her words come ever more haltingly, as if it is an effort to keep from being engulfed by her memory.

Realizing that Madeleine is slipping away, Scottie impatiently looks all around him until he discovers a wooden horse: "Here’s your gray horse. He may have a little trouble getting in and out of the stall without being pushed [the story of Scottie’s own life], but even so.... See, there’s an answer for everything."

Scottie’s claim occasions a memorable Hitchcock brilliancy, as he cuts to a shot that sums up everything that Scottie has no answer for: Madeleine framed with her back to the camera in a charged frame-within-the-frame, within this world, yet viewing it from the outside, attuned to the mystery Scottie cannot explain.

Madeleine stares into the frame as if possessing it: She is the camera’s subject, yet also its stand-in within the frame, its embodiment.
Dropping his pretense of being the detached investigator/therapist committed only to finding rational explanations, Scottie pleads with her, revealing his desire: "Madeleine, try. Try for me."

Yet her eyes remain fixed on the camera even as she lets him pull her into his arms and kiss her. Then suddenly she closes her eyes and joins with him in the passion of this romantic, heartfelt kiss. But she is allowed, or allows herself, only the briefest moment of ecstasy. Her eyes drawn to something offscreen, she pulls out of the kiss just as Scottie at last declares himself: "I love you, Madeleine!"

Still looking off, she says, "Too late. Too late.... There's something I must do."

"No, there's nothing you must do," he says, trying to kiss her again. "No one possesses you. You're safe with me." But she pulls away and leaves the frame.

He runs after her, catching her on the green. Looking into his eyes, she says, "You believe that I love you?"

"Yes."

"And if you lose me then you'll know I... I loved you and wanted to go on living with you?"

"No, I won't lose you."

"Let me go into the church. Alone."

She kisses him, and he lets her leave. When she pauses to look up at the tower, Hitchcock cuts to Scottie's view as he follows her gaze. Alarmed, he cries out "Madeleine!" and a chase begins. It is, of course, Scottie's vertigo that prevents him from making it to the top of the tower before Madeleine disappears behind a trapdoor and a body plummets to the roof of the church far below.

There is no denying the violence in Scottie's entire project, in the second part of the film, of making Judy over into the semblance of Madeleine. Yet before condemning Scottie, it is best to keep a number of points in mind.
The "I" of the camera

First, Judy is Madeleine. Although Scottie cannot bring himself to touch Judy until she acknowledges the Madeleine in her, from the outset he glimpses the woman he loves in Judy ("No, Judy, there's something in you...."). When Judy writes the note she never sends to Scottie – and what a remarkable gesture it is for Hitchcock to let us in on Judy's secret, apparently breaking all the rules of the Hitchcock thriller – she contemplates staying and lying and making him love her "for herself" and thus "forget the other, forget the past." She may think that the Judy persona – Judy's way of dressing, making herself up, carrying herself, speaking – is her self, at least is her own creation. (But whose creation would she then be?) Yet "Judy" is unfinished, uncreated; surely it is her longing for creation that draws her into the role Elster creates for her. Once she is transfigured into Madeleine, there is no bringing Judy back. She may act the part of Judy, but only by repressing the Madeleine within her, only by theatricalizing herself. In any case, who is "she" at this point? Who is the agent of this repression? Who is acting? This line of thinking leads to the understanding that no matter how violently Scottie treats Judy and however little self-awareness he may possess, his goal is to liberate this woman's self, not suppress it. Furthermore, he is acting out of love for this woman. If Judy were some other woman who simply looked like Madeleine, would he treat her – and would she let him treat her – like this? I take it that Scottie knows in his heart – and in her heart Judy knows that he knows – that Judy and Madeleine are the same woman.

Second, Scottie promised Madeleine that he would not lose her, which means, in part, that he would not let her be lost, that he would keep her safe. His desperate project is undertaken not only for himself but also for Madeleine's sake, hence Judy's sake. Again, were Judy any other woman, it would be wrong – although psychologically understandable, in principle forgivable – for him to treat her only as a means to keeping a promise to Madeleine. But Judy is not another woman, she is who Madeleine is. Vertigo is the story not of the creation but of the re-creation of a woman.

Third, although we tend to think of Judy as an innocent victim, like Carlotta Valdes, of "the power and the freedom" of men, Judy is party to a murder (even if she tried to prevent it when it was too late) and to a diabolically cruel plot against Scottie. How can Judy make Scottie love her "for herself" if, even now, she lies to him, denying who she is? The deepest interpretation of Judy's motivation for "staying and lying" is that she wishes for Scottie to bring Madeleine back (which means that it is no accident when she puts on the incriminating necklace). Judy wishes for Scottie to lead her to the point at which she can reveal who she is – but without losing his love. As cruel as Scottie is
in "changing" Judy, he would be crueler if he failed to fulfill the role Judy calls on him to play. Scottie himself desperately needs healing; yet he heeds Judy's plea and becomes her therapist.

Fourth, Scottie promises to love Judy if she lets him change her. And he keeps his promise, as James Stewart always does in his truest movie incarnations. This is a point at which Marian Keane's reading and my own diverge. Hitchcock indicts many of his ostensible heroes, such as Sir John in *Murder!* , but I do not believe that he indicts Scottie's project, although *Vertigo* insists on its monstrous, inhuman aspect and also insists that it cannot succeed. What gives rise to Scottie's monstrousness is his heroic refusal to let his love be lost and his equally heroic willingness to plunge into the unknown. His failure is a tragedy.

The second sequence I would like to examine is the film's ending, starting with the completion of Judy's "change." Within the frame of Scottie's point of view, Judy/Madeleine steps out of the bathroom, suffused in a green haze (ostensibly from the neon sign outside the window). Then she steps forward, desire in her eyes, and becomes "real."

Their kiss is rendered in a glorious 360-degree camera movement in the course of which, famously, the background changes to the livery stable. Scottie notices this and (like Buster Keaton in *Sherlock Junior*) momentarily bewildered — this is an inspired touch — yet he lets himself be absorbed again by the kiss. There is a fade-out; presumably, they make love for the first time.

When the view again fades in, Scottie has undergone a transformation: This is a man blissfully in love, and the "real" James Stewart, boyish and chipper, has come to life. (This is like the moment in *Notorious* when, in peril down in the wine cellar, Devlin finally stops sulking and becomes the "real" Cary Grant.) But then Judy puts on Carlotta's necklace.

This occurs within a conversation about where they will go for dinner ("Ernie's?" "You have a thing about Ernie's, don't you?" "After all, it's our place.") that is interrupted for a digression that is studded with ironies ("C'mere." "Oh no, you'll muss me." "That's what I had in mind, now c'mere." "Too late, I've got my face on."). Judy says, "I'm suddenly hungry." "Would you rather go somewhere else?" "No, no, Ernie's is fine. I'm gonna have — I'm gonna have one of those big beautiful steaks. Let me see, to start, I think I'll..."

At this comical revelation of the enormity of Judy's appetite, she turns to him for help with her necklace. "How do you work this thing?" "Can't you see?" Finally he does see, and we cut to his view, the camera moving in on the necklace reflected in the mirror.
The "I" of the camera

This provides an occasion for another of Hitchcock's virtuoso declarations of the camera. There is an "invisible" cut to the portrait of Carlotta, the camera continuing its movement in, then pulling out until it frames Madeleine in the museum, spellbound in front of the painting.

As the image slowly dissolves back to the present, for a lingering moment the portrait's frame perfectly frames Scottie's eyes.

Knowing now (But what does he know?), and without Judy knowing he knows, Scottie's manner changes ominously. Saying "First muss me a little," she puts her arms around him, but his lips will not meet hers. Less claiming possession than seeking reassurance, she asks,
"Oh Scottie, I do have you now, don't I?" But he suggests they drive out of town for dinner, withholding his answer.

There is a dissolve to the car on the road. In this passage, Hitchcock repeats shots from the earlier drive to the mission, crucially including the shot of trees and sky from Madeleine's point of view. This makes us conscious of Judy's consciousness that what is happening is a repetition and renews our sense of her attunement to the camera.

Finally Judy asks, "Where are you going?" Scottie replies mockingly, "One final thing I have to do . . .," and Hitchcock cuts to Judy's point of view: Scottie's face chillingly turned away in profile. (Using such a profile shot to signify withdrawal or withholding is yet another Hitchcockian signature.) "...And then I'll be free of the past."

There is a dissolve from Judy's troubled face to the car pulling onto the mission grounds. When she asks Scottie why they are here, he replies that he has "to go back into the past...for the last time. Madeleine died here, Judy. I need you to be Madeleine for a while. And when it's done we'll both be free."

Judy is reluctant, to say the least, and makes several attempts to break away, but Scottie makes her go with him to the church, all the while relating what happened the fatal day Madeleine ran into the tower. (Throughout this passage, and in the grueling ascent of the tower, Hitchcock repeats shots from the earlier sequence.)

At the base of the tower, Scottie says, "One doesn't often get a second chance. I want to stop being haunted. You're my second chance, Judy. You're my second chance. You look like Madeleine now. Go up the stairs!"

"No!"

He pushes her. "Go up the stairs!"

As Scottie follows Judy up the stairs, waves of vertigo assault him. Hitchcock again reprises shots from the earlier sequence, including Scottie's famous views down the stairwell that vertiginously combine zoom and pan, creating the illusion of a space at once receding and
unmoving. *What* recedes in Scottie’s vision is the bottom of the stairwell, which forms another emblematic frame-within-the-frame, another invocation of the film frame. The shots that express Scottie’s vertigo are also Hitchcockian declarations of the camera: Scottie’s vertigo is his intimation that he is condemned to the gaze of Hitchcock’s camera.

Finally Scottie reaches the point at which, the first time, his vertigo made him stop. “This was as far as I could get.” He looks at her. “But you went on.”

She stares at him in alarm.

“...The necklace, Madeleine.... I remembered the necklace.”

“Let me go!”

“No, we’re going up the tower, Madeleine!”

“Now we’ll see. We’ll see. This is my second chance....”

“No, please!”

“But you knew that day that I wouldn’t be able to follow you, didn’t you? Who was up there when you got there? Elster and his wife?”

“Yes.”

“Yes, and she was the one who died. The real one, not you. You were the copy, you were the counterfeit, weren’t you?”

Scottie’s hands on Judy’s throat, he is in a terrifying fury. “Was she dead or alive?”

“Dead. He had broken her neck.”

“He had broken her neck. He wasn’t taking any chances, was he?”

He drags her bodily up the stairs.

The power of *Vertigo*’s climax turns on our conviction that Scottie really has it within him to strangle Judy, to break her neck, to throw her off the tower. And James Stewart’s enactment of rage and Kim Novak’s enactment of terror are so compelling that I have found myself fantasizing that at this point in the filming, Stewart lost control, that what the camera then recorded was no longer acting, and hence that Hitchcock, himself carried away, continued shooting anyway. (Or had
he anticipated Stewart's breakdown?) This fantasy brings out a crucial
t feature of Vertigo's climax: Once Scottie drags Judy to the top of the
tower, no human being on earth can know what he will do. (Frank Cap¬
ra's It's a Wonderful Life first plumbed Stewart's capacity for rage, the
dark side of his unequaled willingness to stake his entire being on a
wish.)

"So when you got up there he pushed her off the tower. But it was
you that screamed. Why did you scream?"

"I wanted to stop it, Scottie. I ran up to stop it. I...."

"You wanted to stop it. Why did you scream? Since you'd tricked me
so well up to then? You played the wife very well, Judy. He made you
over, didn't he?"

"Yes."

"He made you over just like I made you over. Only better.....And
you jumped into the bay, didn't you? I'll bet you're a wonderful swim¬
mer, aren't you? Aren't you?"

Her "Yes" is barely audible.

"Aren't you?"

"Yes."

"And then what did he do? Did he train you? Did he rehearse you?
Did he tell you exactly what to do, what to say?"

She nods.

"You were a very apt pupil, too, weren't you? You were a very apt
pupil. Well why did you pick on me? Why me? I was the setup, wasn't
I? I was the setup. I was the made-to-order witness. I was....."

Suddenly realizing that he has reached the trap door to the top,
Scottie becomes strangely calm. "I made it. I made it."

"What are you going to do?"

"We're going up and look at the scene of the crime. C'mon, Judy."

When finally Scottie pulls Judy to the platform on top of the tower,
he flings her to the far end. (They are framed in a charged setup that
repeats the key shot of the flashback sequence.)
“So this is where it happened. And the two of you hid back there and waited for it to clear, and then you sneaked down and drove into town, is that it? And then – you were his girl, huh? Well what happened to you? What happened to you? Did he ditch you? Aw, Judy, with all of his wife’s money and all that freedom and that power....”

Scottie moves toward Judy, the camera following him to the left. Recoiling from him, she desperately presses herself against the wall.

“And he ditched you. What a shame. But he knew he was safe. He knew you couldn’t talk. Did he give you anything?”

“Some money.”

“And the necklace. Carlotta’s necklace. There was where you made your mistake, Judy. You shouldn’t keep souvenirs of a killing. You shouldn’t have been.....” Almost overcome with the memory of his love, Scottie takes a deep breath, choking back sobs. “...You shouldn’t have been that sentimental.” He rears his head back, rolls his eyes, takes another deep breath, and pours all of James Stewart’s longing into his next words. “I loved you so, Madeleine!”

“Scottie – I was safe when you found me. There was nothing that you could prove. When I saw you again, I...I couldn’t run away, I loved you so. I walked into danger and let you change me because I loved you and I wanted you.” She inches forward. “Oh, Scottie...Oh Scottie, please.... You love me now. Love me....”

Hitchcock has filmed this part of the dialogue as an alternation of shots that isolate Judy and Scottie in separate frames. Still coming forward, she enters the frame of “his” shot and throws her arms around him: “Keep me safe!”

“Too late, it’s too late,” Scottie says, echoing Madeleine’s words. “There’s no bringing her back....”

“Please!”

Scottie looks at Judy, stares at her, and then...kisses her passionately as he had in the hotel room, and before that the livery stable. He does not ask for proof of Judy’s love; he believes her, as he had the first time. Whatever the woman in his arms has done and whoever she is, he loves and forgives her. As far as he is concerned, their kiss is forever. He has overcome his vertigo and fulfilled his quest. But Scottie, worthy romantic hero though he may be, exists within the frame of a Hitchcock film. He does not have the power or the freedom to keep Judy safe.

As at the stable, Judy pulls out of the kiss, her eyes drawn to something offscreen. This time Hitchcock cuts to her point of view. Judy sees a frame devoid of human figures, like the repeated point-of-view shot of trees and sky. Then within this haunting vision of nothingness, a silhouette appears, barely discernible in the shadows.

Judy’s eyes widen in horror, but Scottie, not granted her vision, is
unaware that anything is wrong, until, crying "Oh no, no!" she slips
screen left out of the frame. Then Scottie turns and, moving toward the
camera so that his face is magnified in the frame, looks screen right
as a woman's offscreen voice speaks the words "I heard voices." There
is a chilling scream, and Scottie wheels around with a look of horror
and dread.

The scream still reverberating, the silhouetted figure steps into the
light. It is a nun, and she is looking straight into the camera. Crossing
herself, the nun intones "God have mercy" and begins tugging on the
bell rope.

As the great bell tolls, the camera pulls out and twists counter-
clockwise so that the white wall of the tower fills the frame, creating
yet another of Hitchcock's blinding white flashes and at the same time
imaging the lowering of a curtain. The nun, pulling on the rope, rings
down the final curtain, signifying the end of the performance. Yet
Hitchcock's final virtuoso turn remains to be completed.

The movement continues, now revealing the camera to be — all
along to have been — outside the tower chamber, occupying a position
inaccessible to any human being on earth.
The camera keeps pulling out until it frames Scottie, looking down, his hands at his sides in mute anguish and supplication, as the bell continues to toll. It is with this declaration of the camera that Hitchcock ends his film.

What vision impels Judy to plunge to her death? Who or what gives rise to this vision that Scottie does not, and perhaps cannot, share? And whose vision is it?

Surely, Judy thinks she sees a ghost. But whose ghost will not rest until Judy takes her own life? And why would any ghostly apparition have such power over her? Is it the ghost of the real Madeleine, Gavin Elster's wife, seeking to avenge her murder? The ghost of Carlotta Valdes, passing on her curse to Judy, calling upon her to take her life? Or is this Judy's own ghost, her vision of herself as already dead? (Here in Scottie's arms, Marian Keane suggests, the arms of the man she loves, Judy is forever condemned to be the ghost he loves.)

This ghostly apparition is "really" a stern mother superior. Perhaps Judy also sees this figure as exactly who she is: agent of God's law and representative of the world of women. In the nun's religion, Judy is a sinner who has not earned the happiness that seems within her
grasp. But if Scottie can forgive Judy, why can’t she forgive herself? Why should the nun’s religion have such a hold over her? Or is it to the mad Carlotta Valdes’s eyes that this vision is given? Is it Carlotta, possessing Judy, who sees the shadow and jumps to her death?

Or is it the specter of Gavin Elster that Judy sees?

To this characteristically Hitchcockian thicket of ambiguities and paradoxes another complication must be added: In Judy’s vision, the author also steps forward – Hitchcock is the ghost, Hitchcock the God whose law has been transgressed, Hitchcock the stern mother superior, Hitchcock the diabolical Gavin Elster.

In plunging to her death, Judy acknowledges the conditions of her existence, the conditions of any being condemned to the gaze of Hitchcock’s camera. Scottie has banished his vertigo, shaken off his intimations of the truth that stares Judy in the face. Kissing Judy, he genuinely believes that happiness is within their grasp – and Judy loves him for his innocence. But Scottie has no access to Judy’s vision, no idea of what haunts and ultimately claims her. Vertigo’s author is as diabolical, as murderous, as Gavin Elster and as much a victim, as much unacknowledged, as much a woman, as Judy.

Vertigo is not a melodrama of the unknown woman, although an “unknown woman” in precisely Cavell’s sense – a woman who apprehends her condition more deeply than the men in her world, who possesses deeper vision, intelligence, and depth of feeling – plays an essential role in the film and in the Hitchcock thriller generally.

Judy’s and Carlotta’s stories are the very stuff of the unknown woman melodramas; yet they can seem to lack connection: Why should Judy be haunted by Carlotta’s tragedy? It helps to think of Judy’s bond as being not only with Carlotta Valdes, the mother whose daughter was taken from her, but also with Carlotta’s daughter, the little girl whose mother failed to keep her from becoming lost.* This provides a key to Judy’s psychology – she keeps a photograph of herself with her mother, who, after her first husband’s death, married a man her daughter did not like, precipitating Judy’s move to the big city in search of a man who would love her for herself, followed by her ensnarement by Elster. Much critical attention has been given to the relationships between mothers and sons in Hitchcock’s films, but none to the tragedy that befalls women when the love between mother and daughter is thwarted, although this is a central theme in The Birds and Marnie, Hitchcock’s last masterpieces, and is a thread that runs through the films that precede them. I am thinking, for example, of an extraordinarily suggestive line in Stage Fright. After her guilt is ex-

* Charles Warren helped me to appreciate the significance of this point and offered a number of helpful suggestions on an earlier version of this chapter.
posed, Charlotte (Marlene Dietrich) tries to tell the respectful detective Mellish how it is with her, to describe the feeling that gives rise to murder: "When you give all your love and get nothing but betrayal in return, it's as if your mother had slapped you in the face."

At one level, it is the figure of Gavin Elster — the man who gets to Judy first and, with her participation, first changes her into Madeleine — that separates Vertigo from the unknown woman melodramas. Of course, Judy's past with Elster, which haunts her, is also her guilty secret. The woman's guilt is another aspect of what separates Vertigo from Cavell's genre. If it were not for Judy's guilty past with Elster, Vertigo would be very much like Letter from an Unknown Woman or Random Harvest: a melodrama about a woman in love with a man who fails to recognize her. Then nothing would keep the film from ending with the kiss on the tower.

But without Elster and Judy's attendant guilt, Vertigo would not be a Hitchcock thriller. Part of what this means is that the film would not call for the declarations of the camera through which, as we have seen, Hitchcock claims his authorship, for in a sense it is the Gavin Elster in Hitchcock who declares himself in these signature gestures.

In the genres Cavell studies, the camera is a machine that transfigures human subjects independently of human intentions. In the Hitchcock thriller, as Psycho explicitly declares, the camera is an instrument of taxidermy, not transfiguration: The camera does violence to its subjects, fixes them, and breathes back only the illusion of life into these ghosts. (The camera is an instrument of enlightenment as well for Hitchcock, although its truths are also blinding.) It is this murderous camera, mysteriously attuned to the unknowness of women, that is the instrument of authorship in the Hitchcock thriller, the truest expression of who Hitchcock is.

Thus, it is also the whole panoply of Hitchcockian signatures — the curtain raisings, eclipses, white flashes, frames-within-frames, profile shots, symbolically charged objects, and so on, that mark every Hitchcock sequence — that excludes Vertigo, or by which Vertigo excludes itself, from the melodrama of the unknown woman. Hitchcock's signatures are expressions of his unwillingness or inability ever to forsake his mark, ever to absorb himself unconditionally in the destinies of his characters, ever to leave his own story untold.

Yet these gestures, as we have also seen, at the same time reveal Hitchcock's affinity, his identification, with the unknown woman desperately longing for existence. Hitchcock never gets beyond his own case, his own longing for acknowledgment. Hitchcock is the unknown woman, and this, too, separates Vertigo from Cavell's genre.

To be sure, Letter from an Unknown Woman metaphorically identifies itself with the letter that brings about the man's awakening, hence
Vertigo: The unknown woman in Hitchcock identifies its author with the unknown woman who wrote the letter. But Letter is such a dazzling spectacle that Ophuls's gesture of identifying himself with the woman who wrote the letter appears only rhetorical, only ironic, as if he had nothing on his mind but the creation of a perfect aesthetic object. (To be sure, Ophuls's distanced stance may itself be ironic, a mask for the unfathomable depth of his identification with — perhaps his indifference to — the unknown woman in the film.) By contrast, Vertigo, for all its irony, nakedly opens Hitchcock to be read.

Cavell, in his readings of the melodrama of the unknown woman and remarriage comedies alike, aspires to put into his own words what these films say to their audience. Speaking in his own philosophical voice and out of his own experience of these films, he declares himself to be, despite everything, a representative member of that audience. These American films’ Emersonian aspiration of creating a more perfect human community, shared by their audience, is Cavell’s as well. I find that reading a Hitchcock thriller, reading Hitchcock, with his ambiguous relationship to America, is a very different proposition. I find myself continually called on to make discoveries, to see things that viewers do not ordinarily see, or to see familiar things in an unfamiliar light, to discover unsuspected connections. The Vertigo that emerges, at least in fragments, in this essay is not the film as viewers ordinarily view it (although my reading is meant to account for the common experience, which it interprets as the experience that fails to acknowledge Hitchcock and hence misses his meaning).

To read a Hitchcock film is to understand that Hitchcock is the most unknown as well as the most popular of filmmakers. His films are meditations on unknownness, emerging from and addressed to a condition of unknownness. Vertigo envisions no transcendence, no ideal community or marriage or fulfilled human existence on earth; within every salvation there is a damnation; Hitchcock himself is damned, not saved. Yet Hitchcock’s films are also demonstrations that human beings can be known. Yet to receive Hitchcock’s instruction, to know Hitchcock through his films, is to be condemned to unknownness, not to transcend it.

To investigate the relationship of the Hitchcock thriller to the melodrama of the unknown woman and the remarriage comedy, it is necessary to articulate the central role played by the figure of the author in a film like Vertigo. Do films like Vertigo that tell an author’s story constitute a genre adjacent to those Cavell studies, or perhaps a constellation of genres (perhaps every authentic authorship discovers its own story)? Or are they inaccessible by the concept of genre, beyond its reach as a critical tool?
Made in 1959, *North by Northwest* comes at the end of the period during which Hitchcock’s popularity was at its height. It follows *Vertigo*, considered by many his greatest film, and is followed by *Psycho*, which throws the Hitchcock film, and with it the whole Hollywood tradition, into a state of crisis. *Psycho* prophesies the death of the world of movies, but *North by Northwest* is joyfully possessed by the spirit that animated *The Thirty-nine Steps*, the film that twenty-five years earlier first won the whole world as Hitchcock’s audience and triumphantly established the “Hitchcock thriller” as a genre. *North by Northwest* perfectly recaptures the earlier film’s exhilarating mood, building to a climax that leaves most audiences, even today, cheering on their feet. It is the definitive Hitchcock thriller, providing a bounty of matchless pleasures. Indeed, it goes beyond *The Thirty-nine Steps* by attaining an ending that is perfectly happy.

In *The Thirty-nine Steps*, the poignant death of Mr. Memory gives the union of Hannay and Pamela a melancholy aspect that compromises its joyfulness. The film is further haunted by the tragic fate of Margaret, the crofter’s wife, the woman who gives Hannay the overcoat that stops the bullet aimed at his heart. Margaret is a woman of intelligence, passion, and spiritual depth, haunted by the knowledge that suffering is her lot; she is an ancestor of the tragic heroines of *The Wrong Man* and *Vertigo*. Margaret grants Hannay her blessing, as does the dying Mr. Memory, but she is barred from happiness. Her private tragedy is forced into the background; yet her anguish is a condition on which the lovers’ union depends.

In the creation of the single complex figure of Eve Kendall, *North by Northwest* fuses the witty Pamela in *The Thirty-nine Steps*, the woman destined for union with Hannay, with the tragic Margaret, who blesses that union and resigns herself to forgoing Hannay’s love, and also with Annabella Smith, the mysterious adventuress whose death plunges Hannay into his struggle with the villainous Professor. Or it might be said that the creation of such a woman was essen-
tially completed by Vertigo, and in North by Northwest Hitchcock finds a way to bless this creation with happiness. What better way than to give her away, as a bride, to Cary Grant? But in Suspicion, Notorious, and To Catch a Thief, Hitchcock had raised disturbing questions about this star of some of the greatest American romantic comedies. To prove Cary Grant worthy of Eve Kendall, these doubts must be resolved to Hitchcock’s, and our, satisfaction. Grant must be redeemed.

Part of what makes North by Northwest so satisfying is that it rethinks the conditions of the Hitchcock thriller in terms that acknowledge the roots of The Thirty-nine Steps in the earliest Hitchcock films. In what might be termed the “original” Hitchcock film (films like The Lodger, Easy Virtue, Blackmail, and Murder!), women like Margaret played central roles. North by Northwest declares its continuity with The Thirty-nine Steps and the thrillers that derive from it, and also with those yet earlier Hitchcock films that typically tell the story of a woman tragically consigned to unfulfillment by a man’s world unwilling or unable to acknowledge her. All of Hitchcock’s work thus stands behind, and is celebrated by, this film. North by Northwest is Hitchcock’s monument to the Hitchcock film and to the “art of pure cinema” it serves. It is also Hitchcock’s monument to film’s power (or the camera’s power) to create a new woman, to Cary Grant, and to America.

In Saboteur, made in 1942, Hitchcock satirized an America that cluttered its landscape with billboards. In the new America of North by Northwest, advertising is everywhere. America has become a place, the film continually reminds us, where human beings and works of art alike are reduced to objects bought and sold. Eve is treated as a piece of sculpture, and statues also are denied their souls. Yet North by Northwest, even as it extends and updates Saboteur’s satire on America, also transcends it. The earlier thriller viewed America from the outside, through the eyes of a recent settler amused by his new home. North by Northwest acknowledges the awful truth that Hitchcock has become an American. And he has discovered his love for the America of which he remains an uncompromising critic. Part of what the comedy of North by Northwest declares is that, despite everything, the mythical America of Hollywood films of the thirties in which happiness can be imagined, and imagined to be fulfilled in the love between a man and a woman, indeed in a marriage, is still real to us. Of course, that we can still imagine happiness and that we still pursue it do not mean that even its possibility can be taken for granted, but that is the burden of Psycho, The Birds, and Marnie, not North by Northwest. In all these late films, Hitchcock’s meditation on his own authorship, his meditation on art (in particular, the art of film), his
meditation on love, his meditation on human identity, and his meditation on America are seamlessly joined.

My remarks here attempt primarily to illuminate the medium of Hitchcock's meditations. They barely penetrate the surface of this film, although I hope they convey some sense of the kind of viewing a film like *North by Northwest* calls for if it is to be fully acknowledged.

First I discuss some aspects of Cary Grant's relationship to Hitchcock's camera, focusing on a passage that helps clarify what I mean by saying that *North by Northwest* undertakes to redeem him. Then I illustrate some of the ways Hitchcock's camera participates in creating the woman known to her world as "Eve Kendall." In conclusion, a brief word about the film's villains.

Cary Grant

In *North by Northwest*, Cary Grant plays Roger Thornhill, an advertising executive whom Phillip Vandamm (James Mason) and his ring of spies persistently mistake for "George Kaplan," whom they take to be a government agent on their trail, but who turns out not to exist. One joke in Roger Thornhill's being mistaken for a fictional character is that, as the film makes clear, Thornhill's form of life as an ad man pegs his identity on a role, or set of roles, he plays: Roger Thornhill is *already* a man whose every move is plotted (by his clients, secretary, ex-wives, and mother). But a further joke is in the idea that Cary Grant could ever be mistaken for any "Roger Thornhill" in the first place. Roger Thornhill is only a fictional character, created by Hitchcock and subject to his authorship — no more real than the non-existent decoy George Kaplan. Hitchcock's real agent is... Cary Grant.

Grant's complete visibility in the world of *North by Northwest* is an acknowledgment of his familiar way of inhabiting the screen. He is the screen's consummate performer. On camera, Grant is virtually always in public — on stage, as it were. In a sense, the camera *is* his public, the audience for whom he turns on his powers as a performer, which might also be called his charm.

As I have suggested, in his previous films with Grant, Hitchcock raised fundamental doubts about his character, perhaps most pointedly in *Suspicion*, when Grant looks right into the camera to join with Hitchcock in compelling our acknowledgment that we do not really know him, that for all we know he could be a murderer. Yet it is only in *North by Northwest* that Hitchcock definitively resolves these doubts. The moment when Grant proves himself capable and worthy of love is the first moment he is no longer performing. It comes shortly after the famous art auction sequence, in which Grant gives his most
North by Northwest: Monument to the Hitchcock film

exhilarating performance, escaping Vandamm’s trap by reducing the staid proceedings to bedlam and casting Vandamm’s suspicion on Eve, the woman who lured Grant to his doom on the Twentieth-Century Limited.

The moment I have in mind comes when the Professor (Leo G. Carroll), the CIA mastermind who created the fictional George Kaplan and plotted his every move in order to divert suspicion from his real agent, tells Grant who Eve Kendall really is. At this moment, the camera moves in to isolate Grant in the frame. His face freezes, turns to stone. By this I do not mean to suggest that we have no access to what he is thinking or feeling. On the contrary, we can read him like an open book. We know his joy in realizing that it is possible that Eve loves him after all, his anguish at the thought of her suffering, and his terrible feeling of guilt. Unless he acts, Eve’s blood will be on his hands; he will be responsible for the death of the woman he loves. We know, and know that he knows, the depth of his feeling and his desire.

Suspicion’s question about Grant’s capacity for murder is answered at once in the affirmative and the negative. He has acted vengefully, murderously. In his face, devoid now of all animation, we recognize a capacity for inhumanity. But we also recognize him as a man capable of self-knowledge and capable, and worthy, of love. From this view of Grant’s face transfigured by love, we know him inside and out, heart, mind, and soul. His “charm” may be what allows Grant to make those who do not know him fall in love with him, as Eve charged; but no “charm” is at work now, when he is redeemed in our eyes. At this moment, Hitchcock lights the frame harshly, as if by a searchlight. What this lighting underscores is the monumentality of Grant’s face. This shot is Hitchcock’s monument to Cary Grant.

That Grant is an authentic American hero is, I take it, part of what is proclaimed by the extraordinary gesture Hitchcock now performs, as he effects a slow dissolve from Grant’s face to the Mount Rushmore monument.
Of course, for Roger Thornhill — that is, for Cary Grant within the world of the film — this moment at which, under the camera's scrutiny, he recognizes his own capacity for murderousness is a moment of unbearable pain. The harsh light that almost blinds him — within the fiction, it is cast by an airplane as it taxis into position — is a metaphor for the pain of enlightenment. Hitchcock's filming also suggests that Grant's pain is caused by being subjected to the camera's pitiless gaze. Hitchcock is responsible for Grant's anguish, which is a condition of his enlightenment. Unless the author does whatever is in his power to secure Grant's happiness, Hitchcock will be exposed as inhuman. What is revealed about Grant in this frame not only frees Hitchcock to give Grant his blessing but also mandates that he must do so or be condemned in our eyes. Then, too, when the Professor tells Grant who Eve is, it is also Hitchcock's revelation that he has withheld the truth from us. Can we forgive Hitchcock for deceiving us, as Grant forgives Eve but eventually refuses to forgive the Professor? Has Hitchcock made a film that blesses us?

When the camera now starts moving in on Mount Rushmore, an iris mask appears to frame our view within the film frame, as though we were viewing these monumental faces through a lens. Of course, all the views that constitute the film are viewed through a lens — the lens of Hitchcock's camera. This mask is an ironic reminder that we are viewing a film. This gesture acknowledges, I take it, that the view that resolves our doubts about the Grant character awakens, and does not still, a doubt that, from the outset of his career, Hitchcock has repeatedly raised about himself, a doubt that may be articulated in the form of a question about the camera: Does the camera represent an agency that is human or inhuman, loving or murderous?

The following shot identifies this masked view as Grant's. Yet Hitchcock frames Grant, looking through the telescope, in profile rather than more or less full face as would be the case in a conventional reaction shot. Grant remains more an object of view than viewer (hence his joke that he does not like the way Teddy Roosevelt is looking at him). In the next shot, a long-shot with Grant at the left of the frame and the Professor at the right, Mount Rushmore looks like the backdrop of a stage set. In the ensuing dialogue, Grant once again finds himself performing and being called upon to perform in a world in which the boundary between theater and reality is difficult or impossible to survey. The extraordinary mode of direct address between author and viewer has been abruptly suspended. The film will return to this mode of discourse, however, and complete its statement on the central issue it has raised about the nature of the camera.
Eve Kendall

Eve Kendall is primarily the creation of Hitchcock's camera, or at least the camera's intimate pas de deux with Eva Marie Saint. Eve is not the creation of Saint's performance alone, impeccable though it is, and who Eve is has little to do with who this actress has been in other films.

That Eve has a special relationship with the camera is declared in Hitchcock's presentation of her first entrance, one of the most remarkable passages in the film.

From the hustle and bustle of Grand Central Station, a single cut plunges us into another world. The camera tracks with Grant as he walks to board and then disappears from view onto the train. (A "Watch Your Step" sign, visible through the open door, is a typical Hitchcock touch.) Then there is a cut to a frame void of human figures that, tonally and compositionally, breaks sharply with those that preceded it.

Framed symmetrically, the corridor tunnels into the depths of the space. This framing, which I call Hitchcock's "tunnel shot," occurs in every Hitchcock film and always announces a space of dream or nightmare, a space that is not quite or not exactly real. Grant enters this frame from its depths, makes his way quickly to the foreground, looks through the window, and runs back into the depths.

Hitchcock cuts to a frame likewise devoid of human subjects, but as emblematically flat as Grant's space is deep. Eve enters, gloved hand and handbag first, and only then "in the flesh."

Her entrance is precisely synchronized with Grant's entrance, creating a singular effect, as though this woman were his mirror reflection. As they try to pass each other, they go into a little lockstep dance, sustaining this effect, which is further underscored when Eve's open eye,
looking right into the camera, is framed by Grant's shoulder (a framing that will be repeated later in the passage, and in Eve's Chicago hotel room much later in the film).

Hitchcock presents this routine by cutting back and forth between a two-shot that favors Eve and a two-shot that favors Grant.

In the latter setup, we do not view Grant over Eve's shoulder, as would be conventional. She stands, back to the camera, her blond hair the object of the camera's gaze. Eve is an object of desire for the camera, as for Grant. Yet in this framing she also appears to preside over
this space, possessing it with her gaze, as though hers were more than a merely human power of vision. This framing, which defines Eve as an object of desire, also links her with the divinity that holds sway over this world; it is repeated throughout the film.

Ordinarily, in cutting from two-shot to two-shot in a Hollywood film, screen direction is maintained: If Grant is to the left of Eve in one setup, he will be to the left of Eve in the other. But as Hitchcock composes this present sequence, Grant and Eve alternate places in the frame. Rather, Eve remains centered in the frame throughout, viewed alternately front and back, while Grant’s figure jumps from side to side on the screen. Emblematically, Eve is doubled, is projected with opposing aspects. She will be doubled again and again as the film unfolds, most notably in the art auction, when, in another shot/reverse-shot alternation, she will appear both in Grant’s frame and in Vandamm’s, showing two faces to the camera.

Other symbolically charged ways of framing Eve recur throughout the film. For example, she is repeatedly the object of what I call Hitchcock’s “profile shot.” In the present passage, a shot from Eve’s point of view reveals that she sees the policemen who have entered the car. In a silent and intense exchange of glances, she alerts Grant to the threat and ducks into an empty compartment. Hitchcock then perfectly frames Eve in profile within the frame of the closed compartment door.

Again and again in *North by Northwest*, Eve’s image will be contained in a frame. This is one of the film’s strategies for developing the theme of Eve’s reduction to the status of a commodity bought and sold and the theme of the debasement of art by a world interested only in commerce. But Eve’s framing in profile also declares an aspect of her relationship to the camera. In such a frame, she is turned away, indifferent, absorbed in her private world, inaccessible, mysterious.

On a number of occasions, however, the camera does penetrate Eve’s inner life. For example, during their first embrace on the train – before Grant or the viewer knows of Eve’s bond with Vandamm or her role as double agent – Eve and Grant never stop trading wisecracks, and there is no unambiguous sign that Grant is gripped by real feeling or passion. In an interval between jokes, however, we see Eve close her eyes in ecstasy. At this moment, surely, she is imagining herself in the arms of her dream lover. Of course, we do not know what her dream is. Grant jokes that for all she knows, he could be a murderer. Then is Eve ecstatically imagining herself in a murderer’s embrace? We know that Grant is innocent of the crime for which he is being pursued, and we later learn that Eve, too, has known all along that he is not a murderer. Then is Eve imagining herself in the arms of an innocent man? Yet when Grant presses her to say what she knows about him, she reels off a telling list of indictments: He is an advertising man who
makes words do anything he wants for him, sells people things they do not need, and makes women who do not know him fall in love with him. Has Eve fallen for his "charm" as she once fell for Vandamm's? Or is she immune to his charm, seeing this man who does not believe in marriage and is not honest with honest women as really no different from Vandamm? Does she take pleasure in seducing him, even in condemning him to death, as vengeance on one of the Vandamms of this world? Or does she see in Grant a hero come to rescue her? To send such an innocent to his destruction would mean to preside over the death of her own romantic dream.

When Grant and Eve once more embrace, we assume that she is again in ecstasy. Shockingly, however, she opens her eyes in the midst of this kiss and looks toward the camera, as in her first entrance into the film.

At this moment, Hitchcock calls upon us to acknowledge that we do not really know her, that we have no access to her thoughts and feelings. Momentarily, she averts her eyes as though looking at something offscreen. As if cued by her gaze, Hitchcock cuts to the train corridor, where a porter hands a message to Vandamm. A major movement of the film comes to an end with this stunning revelation that Eve is in league with Vandamm. This is also a revelation that Hitchcock has been deceiving us.

Nowhere is Eve's bond with Hitchcock's camera clearer than in the exquisite passage in which Eve and Grant say good-bye at the train station. Here we witness the first clear sign that Grant is capable of feeling, although it is significant that the camera must look elsewhere than his face for this sign. As he says, "But how will I find you... Please....," there is a cut to Grant's hand, tenderly grasping Eve's arm, then a cut to Eve, struggling to find words to express her feelings or to avoid saying what she feels she has no right to say. She is locked in
what Norman Bates will call a "private trap," from which she is powerless to free herself. At this charged moment, Hitchcock cuts to a shot from Eve's point of view, as she says, in voice-over, "They're coming!"

In this frame, we see no one coming. This view is also a vision: Eve's vision of emptiness, solitude, imprisonment, madness. This haunting vision, to which Grant, of course, has no access, crystallizes Eve's understanding that there is no way out.

The poignance of this moment is sustained in the eloquent transition to the following sequence, a slow dissolve from Eve's beautiful face to the flat, featureless prairie, metaphor for her desolate inner landscape. And it is also inscribed in the transition with which the scene of leave-taking is initiated. Cary Grant's riotously funny performance as he attempts to shave his face with Eve's monumentally small razor ends in a tableau: Grant peering at himself in the mirror, contemplating his own performance, as the man at the next sink returns to the serious business of shaving.

From this image, Hitchcock cuts to Eve framed in the window of a phone booth.
As so often with Hitchcock, the cut is treated as a dissolve, as though the two frames were really superimposed and that superimposition were a medium of significance. In this composite picture, Eve is imprisoned in her own frame, while Grant looks away, fascinated by his own reflection, oblivious equally of Eve's anguish and the precariousness of her survival in this world.

Hitchcock cuts to a frontal shot of Eve, and the camera moves on its own to reveal the sinister Leonard in one of the adjacent phone booths. This movement is just like those in which the camera excludes Grant and sets out on its own to frame someone whose presence is completely unsuspected by him (for example, at the Plaza Hotel when Hitchcock cuts away from Grant and the camera moves on its own to frame the two assassins, and at the General Assembly building when Grant looks away and the camera reframes on its own to disclose the knife-thrower). To invoke these movements in the scene at the train station is to underscore our sense that Eve has a bond with the camera—an attunement, an affinity—that Grant does not possess.

The scene in Eve's Chicago hotel room also manifests this bond.
When Grant surprises her by appearing at her door, we are privileged to witness the look of happiness – unseen by Grant – in her eyes. She buries her face in his shoulder, not wanting him to see her emotion. His hands are poised as if undecided between caress and attack, or as if he were afraid of soiling them.

This frozen pose echoes their earlier embrace on the train and manifests Grant’s resolution to withhold his humanity, and even his charm, from Eve – perhaps out of fear of being seduced again, perhaps out of horror at the murderousness in his own hands.

Having witnessed Eve’s happiness at seeing Grant, we know that she is only acting when she now asks him to leave and claims that this request is motivated by a merely ordinary wish to avoid becoming involved. Eve’s real feeling is expressed by the lamps and mirrors that are haunting presences on the screen, by the inclusion in shot after shot of the double bed that invokes her fallenness and longing for marriage, by the wallpaper over the bed, with its images of nature stilled, by the flowers and the paired oriental statuettes beside the television screen, and by the repeated framings of Eve in profile or with her back to the camera.
Perhaps more than any other in the film, this passage invokes the mood of *Vertigo* and declares Eve’s power to haunt and be haunted by the camera. Its every framing is attuned to Eve’s spiritual desolation, her despair, her renunciation. In this setting, Grant’s refusal even to consider forgiveness is deeply disquieting.

The art auction sequence that follows is one of the film’s great comic set pieces, providing the perfect music-hall stage for Cary Grant and the perfect occasion for Hitchcock to unveil the full brilliance of his own wit. Yet it is also the scene in which Eve feels most desperately alone. Indeed, it is by turning vengefully against Eve that Grant first gains the upper hand on Vandamm. Hitchcock’s camera, however, never loses sight of Eve’s silent presence, which makes Grant’s turning away from her appear a betrayal. Thus, this passage sets up the scene at the airport, for it plays a crucial role in formulating the question about Grant’s character that is answered when the Professor tells him who Eve Kendall is and the camera moves in to frame his face.

**The villains**

At the climax of *North by Northwest*, Cary Grant – one hand grasping the ledge for dear life, the other clasping Eve’s hand, keeping her from falling to her death – pleads to Leonard – Iago to Vandamm’s Othello – for help. After keeping Grant and us in suspense for a long drawn-out moment, Leonard responds by grinding Grant’s hand with the toe of his boot. I like to think that Vandamm, were he in Leonard’s shoes (or perhaps I should say “shoe”), would relent, however reluctantly. Vandamm is, after all, enough of a sport to accept his final defeat with good cheer, the way Ray Milland does at the end of *Dial “M” for Murder*. But Leonard unmasks himself as an inhuman monster. His death, like that of the Nazi at the end of *Lifeboat*, is cause for celebration. Even Vandamm must be happy to be free of Leonard.

When Leonard reveals to Vandamm that Eve is a double agent and
Vandamm punches him in the jaw, he means to acknowledge Leonard's power, yet deny him his soul. Hitchcock, at this moment, calls upon us to recognize a fundamental difference between the two villains. Yet Vandamm is not endorsed by the film, sympathetic though any character played by James Mason must necessarily be. In Hitchcock's eyes, Vandamm stands guilty of using the powers unjustly given him in a man's world to claim Eve as a possession, although he only charmed her and never won her love. Vandamm attempts to create a world of his own, one he can control without ever having to acknowledge another human being. Hitchcock always pits his powers as author against such hubris. Nonetheless, Hitchcock's sympathies are more with Vandamm than with Leonard. Vandamm denies love out of his longing for love, a longing he is unable to satisfy if only for the unjust accident of fate that brought him into this world as James Mason and not Cary Grant. Leonard, by contrast, stands for the denial of all love, of all human dreams. In this, he is like the Professor, for whom human relationships, like international relationships, are only games.

Spiritually or morally, there is little to choose between Leonard and the Professor. Poetic justice demands a violent death for Leonard, whereas Hitchcock devises a very different punishment for the Professor. The Professor's punishment is to be forced to authorize the shot that kills Leonard. With this shot, the Professor sacrifices the plot he had so laboriously scripted. His elegant plan lies shattered, like the little statue with the microfilm that falls out of its belly. From this wreckage, the marriage of Eve and Grant, the ending of Hitchcock's film, is born. Hitchcock turns the Professor's own lie ironically against him. The Professor had promised that once Vandamm was out of the country, Grant and Eve would have his blessing. The shot that kills Leonard and ends the Professor's game is the means by which Hitchcock declares his authority and confers his blessing on this couple. The Professor proves to be only an unwitting agent of the film's author, the decoy of the real "Professor," Hitchcock.
In the early 1960s, what might be called the "classical" period of cinéma-vérité, there was something like agreement among filmmakers in America on what a documentary was and how one was to be made. This consensus was at one level an agreement on a way of avoiding the problems of an earlier generation of American documentary, which around the late 1930s commanded its consensus, including such filmmakers as Joris Ivens, Willard Van Dyke, and Pare Lorentz.

The older kind of documentary composed its views of people lyrically or expressionistically and used them rhetorically in illustration of some social theme. The ambition of cinéma-vérité, by contrast, was to capture the spontaneity of the human subject by recording people's behavior and interactions in their "natural" setting. The goal of filmmakers like Richard Leacock and D.A. Pennebaker was a film in which all signs of direction, and directedness to an audience, disappear, the screen transparently revealing human beings simply going about their lives. Increasingly flexible synch-sound technology was developed (often by the filmmakers themselves) along with increasingly effective strategies for filming people without making them appear manipulated or self-conscious.

What is projected on the screen in cinéma-vérité claims to be a recording of something that really happened, and the method by which the film was made - which defines a role for the filmmaker in filming the scene as it unfolds - claims to assure the authenticity of the scene. Indeed, the film formally testifies to the method by which it was made by its camera style, which approaches as nearly as possible the condition of complete continuity - as if any cut would threaten the viewer's assurance that the filmmaker really followed cinéma-vérité method in making the film. This formal corroboration of the film's claim to be an authentic document is complemented by the continuous look of unself-consciousness on the part of the filmed subjects, who, as it were, unknowingly reveal themselves to the camera.

Part of the revelation of cinéma-vérité is that the noncandid - the
nonspontaneous, the manipulated and the manipulative, the theatrical – is everywhere to be found in the real world. Cinéma-vérité is all but obsessed with the look of people being less than candid with themselves and each other while being unknowingly candid with the camera. There is another look that cinéma-vérité recognizes and accords a privileged status: the look of bewildered isolation of people alienated from the noncandidness in their world. People in a cinéma-vérité film who appear fully human, or appear as though they know they are human, also appear alienated. Their human openness isolates them, even as it strikes us as the possible ground of a human community that does not exist within the world as framed by the film.

Cinéma-vérité film affirms, then, the intelligibility of the idea of a human community, and what it "documents" is the nonexistence of such a community in one particular region of the real world. But this testimony is deeply problematic, for reasons that challenge the whole status of documentary film.

At one level, cinéma-vérité’s claim to authority rests on a particular understanding of the look of unselfconsciousness of the people within its frame. Cinéma-vérité claims that this look implies that everything within the film’s frame is authentic. But this look can suggest something further, the possibility of which “classical” cinéma-vérité does not acknowledge. We cannot take for granted the authenticity of what is in the frame, because our means of access to it may be deeply implicated in its appearance. For example, the look of nondirectness-to-the-camera may itself be directed to the camera (with the filmmaker taken in by that look or in secret complicity with it). If that look of candor is authentic, the camera may nonetheless be implicated in it: The candid expression of human isolation may be seen as a mark of the presence of the filmmaker, whose role calls for him to withhold his humanity from the people he takes as his subjects. Cinéma-vérité stakes its authority on the reality of the act of filming, but it pictures the world as if this act has no tangible effect.

There is today no consensus on how to make a film that seriously claims the authority of a documentary. (There is agreement among serious filmmakers that it is part of the legacy of cinéma-vérité, and of the earlier style of documentary to which cinéma-vérité was in part a response, that the making of documentaries constitutes a problem.) Recognizing that they cannot simply take for granted that the power of the camera to reveal truths about human subjects is assured by a general method, some filmmakers have begun to confront the issues raised by that look of candor that cinéma-vérité took as resolving all doubts. Part of their problem is finding ways of acknowledging within a film the real status of the act of making the film for both filmmaker and subject, and the ways both parties have of comprehending that
act. How may an investigation of the relationship of filmmaker and filmed subject be incorporated into the frame of a documentary film? How may that relationship be transformed so as to resolve the conflicts between the filmmaker's assumption of authorship of the film and the subject's right to participate in the authorization of public revelations about him or her?

Several recent types of documentary testify to this concern: for example, the autobiographical film and film diary (which make the filmmaker the explicit subject of the film) and the portrait film, with its subcategory the family portrait film.

There are several works in these genres that merit serious critical consideration, although they have received virtually none. (Then again, what area of contemporary filmmaking has engendered a humane critical literature confident of its ability to see through rhetoric and cant?) In my judgment, it is Alfred Guzzetti's *Family Portrait Sittings* (1976) that first took absolutely seriously the concerns underlying these genres and provided a compelling demonstration of one particular solution to the problem of making a documentary. (One no longer expects a general solution, the way filmmakers in the late 1930s and again in the early 1960s thought they possessed a general formula for making documentaries.) The appearance of this major work, which found a perfectly appropriate and adequate form and method, constituted an event whose importance still has not been widely recognized.*

The sound track of *Family Portrait Sittings* incorporates tapes of the voices of members of the filmmaker's family, reminiscing and reflecting on their lives. The characters whose narrations are thus included in the film are his mother and father, Susan and Felix; Susan's mother and her Uncle Domenick, the bachelor patriarch of the Verlangia family in America since the death of the filmmaker's grandfather; and relatives on the Guzzetti side of the family who still live in Abruzzo, Italy, and speak no English (their words are translated with subtitles).

This taped material, taken from a small number of sittings, is sometimes employed in synch-sound sequences in which the speaker is also shown. Often the taped voices are accompanied by other kinds of imagery, as discussed later.

The voices recorded in these sittings speak narrations that thread through the entire film. The sittings also represent a clear present that sets off the pastness of the narrated events.

At one level, this narrative material is arranged simply chronologically. The film is divided into three parts (corresponding to its three

*Alfred Guzzetti is Professor of Visual and Environmental Studies at Harvard University. Inquires about rental of *Family Portrait Sittings* should be addressed to him.
16mm reels). Part 1 deals primarily with events leading up to the marriage of Susan Verlangia and Felix Guzzetti. Part 2 takes the story up to the filmmaker's early childhood. Part 3 deals with more recent events and presents as well a kind of reflective overview.

In these three parts of the film, then, the voices together tell the story of the two sides of the filmmaker's family in America, from the prehistory before the emigration up to the present. Their composite chronicle deals with such events as the coming to America of the Verlangias and the Guzzettis; the marriages of the filmmaker's sets of grandparents; the death of Dolores, the filmmaker's mother's little sister; the courtship and wedding of the filmmaker's parents; Alfred's own birth and later the birth of his sister Paula; the vicissitudes of the careers of the uncle (tailor), the mother (schoolteacher), and the father (coal business; then work on the side in candid black-and-white wedding photos; work at the Navy Yard during World War II; finally salesman in a camera shop); the move from South Philadelphia to the present semisuburban setting; Uncle Domenick's decision to remain a bachelor; Domenick's assumption of the role of head of the Verlangia family; the children's growing up.

If the spoken material is at one level organized as a complex sequential narrative, it is also arranged thematically. The film informally divides itself not just into chronological periods but also into sections devoted to different themes. Part 1 primarily concerns emigration and marriage; Part 2, childbirth and death; Part 3, work and politics.

This organization by themes, in turn, helps the film chart the concepts or categories through which the family members think of themselves, their relationships, and their world. To this end, the film's complex narrative structure complements its organization by themes. The film's story is told alternately by several narrators, each of whom is a figure in his or her own narration and also a character in the story as told by the other narrators. The terms in which each of these narrations is conceived harbor contradictions, and there are both discords and harmonies from narration to narration.

If this is a family portrait film, it is one that is seriously concerned with the place of its family within a larger historical context. Events such as the large-scale migration of southern Europeans to America around the turn of the century, the Depression, and World War II play crucial roles in the narrations of the family members. At one level, the film clearly apprehends its characters as living artifacts of a historical America. In a sense, the family portrait format is used to illustrate a particular view of history. The film, at one level, depicts the historicity of this family, as it were, from the outside, implying that an individual's form of life is determined by historical and economic forces and that an individual's form of life and consciousness are dialectically re-
lated. An individual's consciousness, reflected in the way he tells his own story, is threaded with contradictions, which in turn are bound to the conflicts and tensions integral to the fabric of his social life, very much including his life within his family.

In presenting its family as, at one level, a "case," the film establishes an "objective" authorial perspective that appears radically separate from that family's historical situation. Yet, at another level, the film constitutes the filmmaker's own acknowledgment that, despite everything, he is himself a member of this family, and dedicated to it. That is, the filmmaker's act of making this film is posited by the film as a moment within the family's history, although it also appears to assert a perspective separate from that history. Hence, the author implied by the film has a problematic duality. He is the analytical investigator, armed with a Marxist interpretation of history, presenting this family as a case. But he is also Alfred, son of Susan and Felix, wife of Deborah and father of Benjamin: a major character in the film's story, an audible voice and a visible presence. Indeed, the filmmaker as a character shares many of the attributes the film's other characters display. He is determined, like his mother, and possessed of his father's rebelliousness and streak of perverse passivity.

The filmmaker is a character in the film, but he is the only one who has this double role. As a character, he is disclosed by the camera; yet he alone, as filmmaker, has the power to direct such disclosures. But then again, part of what the film discloses of the filmmaker is that his authorial stance threatens to mask his identity as a member of his family. At one level, the film unmasks its author: This man with the movie camera is this son, this husband, this father.

As a member of this family, Alfred's perspective is limited, as are the perspectives of all his relatives. Then from what derives this film's authority — what I take to be, and accept as, its ambitious claims to speak about, and in the name of, family and filmmaking? (It would be a mistake to accept at face value the film's suggestions — for example, in its unprepossessing title — that its aims are really modest.) How can Alfred Guzzetti, from his place within his family, create a film that speaks with authority on issues such as these: What does it mean to be a member of a family? What does it mean to make documentary film? Or even this: What does it mean to know a person? (I personally was what might be called a close acquaintance of the filmmaker when I first saw this film, the viewing and study of which leave me wanting to say two things: "Now I really know Alfred Guzzetti." "I have never known, and never can really know, Alfred Guzzetti.") The fact that whoever he or she may be, a filmmaker remains a stranger to a viewer has something to do with this film's claim that in the act of making a film, something fundamental about belonging to a family can be re-
vealed. Part of this film's authority derives from its form, which enables its authorial perspective to emerge from the family and to be authorized by the family itself. But how can the filmmaker's family authorize his work without at the same time denying his authorship of it? This is a problem close to those we all face as we grow up and attempt to find ways of honoring our families without allowing them to dominate us.

The sound track primarily consists of taped sittings with family members. The images comprise a much wider variety of material.

1. The film opens with a series of shots taken through the front windshield of a car driving down a typical and rather dreary Philadelphia street. Our impression is of endlessness — our penetration gets us nowhere. This series of shots comes to an end only when a traffic light signals a stop.

This series of shots suggests the arbitrariness of any entrance point into any history — and thus the arbitrariness of any way of opening this film. Perhaps it further suggests the arbitrariness of any entrance point, through birth, into life.

2. We pass to a close shot of a hand stitching a collar. It is a key to Uncle Domenick's privileged role in the film that this shot reappears
The "I" of the camera

much later, placed in a context that enables us to recognize that it is his hand, skilled and assured, performing this painstaking work. The film’s titles appear over this shot. The last title dedicates the film to Benjamin, the filmmaker’s son.

We also hear the filmmaker’s voice, initiating a sitting, saying “I don’t know where to start....” (As we shall see, it is only deep into the film that the status of the bearer of this voice is brought into question.)

We cut to Abruzzo, Italy, and another series of shots, closely related to the series of penetrations of space that opened the film. The family in Abruzzo is never shown, as if to acknowledge the filmmaker’s own distance from them. In contrast to the overfamiliar, dreary images of Philadelphia, Abruzzo looks exotic, ancient, mysterious.

In general, the passage of the film’s narrative to the present is formally marked by a succession of introductions of new, ever more “present” kinds of visual material. The shot of the uncle’s hand stitching is displaced in terms of this progression; hence the need for it to return, correctly placed later in the film.

3. Footage from still photographs makes up a sizeable portion of the film’s image track. These photographs are manipulated in various ways. The camera rarely rests on them, but pans, tilts, pulls focus, moves out. Sometimes a shot of a photograph begins with the film’s frame completely filled with white or black, so that it is only when the camera starts to move that we apprehend the object or person shown in the photograph. (Indeed, such a shot may play on a significant ambiguity. Initially, we may not even be able to tell whether we are looking at a photograph or a piece of “live” reality.) Sometimes such photograph shots are placed in series, invoking the series of shots that opens the film.

This photographic material has great beauty and poignancy. One shot in particular, beginning as a close-up of Alfred’s grandfather’s face and then moving out to encompass the whole photograph of grandfather and grandmother nestled on a cardboard crescent moon,
magically sums up the innocence of this family's first embrace of the American dream. The manipulations of these photographs are in turn carefully integrated into the overall composition of the film.

The most characteristic movement is one of pulling back. For example, a region of a photograph first appears in isolation, and then the camera pulls back to disclose, if only partially, the social and historical context revealed in this wider view. Thus, a face first seen in isolation becomes a man surrounded by family and friends on the occasion of a wedding in the America of a particular era.

The expression of the face, at first seemingly entirely composed and self-contained, is revealed as well to be a reflection of a form of social life, itself embedded in a historical situation. Through such a pulling back, it is also forcibly brought home to us that this vital image was captured by a camera at a particular moment now long past, a moment irreversibly reduced by its fixation in a photograph. This realization sucks the life from the image, filling us with a sense of loss. This image does not enable us to know these people, and, in any case, the life crystallized in this image is long since gone.

4. Another kind of visual material makes its first entrance in the figure of the grandmother. This is the synch-sound footage in which we see and hear a family member speak to the camera during a formal sitting.

The film establishes its freedom to cut at any point to such "live" footage in which the present of the shooting manifests itself directly. The synch-signals on the film are not cut out, so each transition is signaled by a glaring flash of light and a loud, harsh buzzing like the ringing of an alarm clock (as if to express the shock of wrestling such a present, or perhaps any present, from reminiscence of a past).

The uncle speaking in his great easy chair is the next figure presented in this way, and then the parents on their living-room sofa. These shots are composed with great care. For example, the setup showing the uncle speaking is so composed as to make most fully ex-
pressive his isolation within his easy chair – an isolation that at times suggests the authority of a patriarch, at times merely the loneliness of a bachelor.

Most brilliant, and most central to the film, is the composition of the setup showing the two parents on their sofa. For one thing, the rather long-shot places them, visually, squarely in the center of their living room. Like all the film’s interiors, this room discloses its Americanness by its artifacts and their placement. Most conspicuous of these artifacts is the mirror that covers the whole wall behind the long sofa. In addition to serving throughout the film as a metaphor for the process of reflection, the mirror continually calls attention to the fact that something has clearly been excluded – or is at least not simply accidentally missing – from this frame. The mirror prevents us from merely taking for granted the absence from the frame of the filmmaker and his camera. This setup makes that absence strike the viewer as a manifestation of the filmmaker’s presence.

As the film repeatedly cuts to this setup (with the accompanying synch-signal/alarm), we cannot help but observe the shifts in the poses and placement of the characters. The father is always seated screen right and the mother screen left, but at times they are very close
to each other, at times at a middle distance, and at times as far apart as possible, as if the only limit were the (considerable) length of the sofa.

This specific composition indeed is perfectly designed to disclose the subtle interactions of the two figures as first one then the other speaks. As the one talks, we notice whether the other is attentive or fidgeting, supporting or undermining the other's narration. All of these little bits of behavior contribute to the establishment of an analytical perspective on the speeches themselves. From this detached perspective, the act of narration appears from the outside as a form of social behavior. We become interested in the relationships among the narration, the terms in which the narration is articulated, and what can be observed of the present behavior of the narrator and his or her temporarily silent partner.

5. Another kind of visual material is more elusive: the single-shot long-take portrait of a space, in the course of which the camera makes some circuit or partial circuit (for example, a 360° or near-360° pan that takes in a whole room; or a tilt down from white sky – in itself indistinguishable from the white of a photograph – passing down the whole height of the monument marking the grave of Dolores, the mother's younger sister, finally coming to rest and holding on the inscription on the base of the monument). These “portraits” – sometimes deliberately overexposed or underexposed – are breathtaking in their beauty, possessing a quality of gravity, a gravity that at times masks an antic wit and/or an editorial comment. For example, at one point in the film, the uncle presents his views on the subject of religion, which are surprising (the two books he cites in the course of his sitting are Capital and Tolstoy's Resurrection). As he speaks, the camera makes a slow, grave circuit of a room. As he gropes to find a word for the power that holds sway over life, the camera for a moment places at the center of its frame a mirror in which we see, perfectly framed in reflection, a neatly made double bed.
It is as if the filmmaker's camera undertakes to identify a force that may or may not be identical with the divinity that Uncle Domenick has in mind. It is a force that is deeply problematic to this man whose bachelorhood is one of the central facts of his life. At one point, the camera continues shooting after the uncle completes an utterance about his bachelorhood and its presumed consequence that, after all his struggles, he will leave no one when he dies. At this moment, we can clearly see the patriarchal aspect drop away, and a look of disappointment and even bitterness rise to the surface, aspects ordinarily hidden in the makeup of his resignation.

6. The next kind of visual material that makes its entrance takes the form of home movies that turn out to have been shot by the filmmaker's father. The first of this movie footage pictures events associated with the marriage of Susan and Felix.

The filmmaker's own visual entrance into the film is effected through the emergence of home-movie footage in color (the evocative color of old home movies). The effect of this display of color nearly an hour into a film that has given all signs of being entirely in black and white is quite startling. All of this color home-movie material has a quality of unreality about it. It is also the material that most nakedly exposes the child Alfred. Much of this footage is almost unbearably painful to watch, as if it contained private images of one's own unguarded childhood. Shots that especially have this painful private quality include the following: Alfred more or less tenderly kissing his newborn sister Paula; Alfred being tucked into bed, but managing – with a lightning move – to insert his teddy bear under the advancing covers; Alfred playing ball by himself, the shot that opens Part 3 of the film; Alfred rummaging through his drawerful of books – like so many of the objects in the film, revealing artifacts of American life – selecting the cowboy book of his choice.
7. This leaves one last kind of visual material: candid cinéma-vérité footage shot in the present.

We are given shots of mother, father, and uncle at work. The mother is in her classroom, with its all-too-familiar row of model script letters posted over the blackboard, and the father is selling film in the store. The uncle, tailoring, looks conspicuously less alienated, despite his own insistence that tailoring in a capitalist society is a form of slavery. This last image is the reprise of the shot of the stitching hand that was part of the credit sequence, here in its rightful place.

We are also given brief glimpses of the family gathered together socially: the family (including the filmmaker, his wife Deborah – who is never formally introduced within the film, although we hear her voice and occasionally glimpse her – and their son Benjamin) at dinner in the home of the filmmaker’s grandmother, at Benjamin’s birthday party, and joined by cousins, aunts, and uncles on the banks of the Schuylkill in Philadelphia.

The earlier use of the color home-movie footage shot by the filmmaker’s father adds to the resonance of these candid sequences, for now the filmmaker films his father filming him filming. He intercuts his own black-and-white footage with the father’s color footage, creating a sequence that incorporates images of father and son filmed by each other, disclosing both engaged in what is and is not the same activity. It is the son’s film that accords the father’s footage an audience beyond the family, but within this film, father's footage and son's footage are equal. The continuity between the two finds perfect expression in the attainment of a perfect matched action cut between color and black-and-white within the sequence.

*Family Portrait Sittings* is uncompromising in exposing tensions and conflicts that, it implies, have made, and continue to make, a struggle out of the loving relationship between Alfred’s mother and father.

There are, for example, conflicts between their accounts of the history of their relationship. Each on occasion corrects the other. These con-
tradictions often have an edge. For example, the father corrects the mother's account of a moment of reconciliation in their courtship by reminding her that his mother "never talked Italian" — a sore point in light of her family's belief that the Verlangias were higher in class than the Guzzettis (the idea is that the Guzzettis may have had more money, but the Verlangias had more respect for education).

Visible tensions reflect conflicts that run through the whole history of their relationship as they see it. Indeed, each on occasion gives the impression of wanting to go on record in declaring an area of friction in their past. Much of this friction involves ways in which they perceive their personalities as clashing. We get the impression that among their many pictures of their marriage — perhaps most of them visions of affection, respect, and love — mother and father privately harbor a few dreadful ones, which they subtly invoke in their tensest interactions, but without explicitly acknowledging them. The film is designed to enable us to read between the lines of the narrations to apprehend, for example, her picture of her husband as a failure (with the corollary that she failed to make something of him and thereby failed to redeem her marriage in her own eyes as a Verlangia). This picture is associated with her often expressed perception of his passivity. On his part, there is a picture of his wife as unbecomingly aggressive (with the corollary image of himself resenting and rebelliously, if futilely, fighting all of her efforts to dominate him).

Tensions between mother and father manifest themselves in part as a visible competition for narrative authority. Each has routines designed to undermine the other. The mother's articulateness and the father's reserved wit seem at times pitched against the other as the mortal enemy. The father's weapons include a barely perceptible rise of a skeptical eyebrow, a slight smile, and, when absolutely necessary, a flourish of nose-blowing. (He had a cold during filming and made good use of it.) By such means does he distance himself from his wife's poetic, yet sometimes barbed, embellishments to assert the superiority of his own easygoing style. For her part, the mother uses both fidgeting and a kind of fixed stare to express disapproval of certain elements in her husband's narration.

All of this, of course, is not to suggest that the film presents the relationship of the filmmaker's parents as nothing but conflict, or even as primarily tense, or that the filmmaker regards the tensions that exist between them as anything but ordinary. But the film does expose the intimate connections between the harmony within an ordinary American marriage and the conflicts integral to its history.

Among the most satisfying moments in the film are those in which harmony and discord are simultaneous. Part 1 ends with a discussion by mother and father about the era of their wedding. As their account draws to a close, we can sense a jockeying between the two speakers
to get in the last word, to be the one to sum up what has been said about that period. As it happens, this competition ends in a dead heat. Closing summaries are spoken at the same time. It is a harmonious unison, except that they say different things. She: "You were doing things together." He: "You had a lot of fun." The close mesh between their two styles is apparent here, but so is the potential for friction between their narrative lines. And who can say whether at this moment in the film's present mother and father are together or apart?

Where they are in clear agreement is on the crucial subject of children. The father jokes about his wife's desire to have "a lot of animals" running around the house, but the two join in reverence of all aspects of the miracle of childbirth. This reminds us of an idea that is articulated more than once within the film: that the role of children is to fulfill the unrealized dreams of the parents. This, in turn, reminds us that these parents' competition for narrative authority is enacted before an audience. Here we come to a crucial point. The implied audience of this film, identified with the camera, is a double one. When a display of alienation from one parent's narration is directed by the other parent to the camera, the camera represents both us (strangers with no history of relationship to the characters, witnesses who are to accord the narrations the status of a document) and their son Alfred, for whose present attention they compete. The shots that expose the parents' competition for narrative authority expose as well the theatricality of their routines, reveal them to be performances directed to a present audience. Their attempts to set the record straight are also performances of old routines directed, now as always, to their son.

We return to the framing the filmmaker selects for the shots of his parents on the sofa. The fixed, frontal alignment suggests that what is enacted within this frame is a piece of theater. At one level, the framing invokes a history of performance directed by these parents to their child. But this invocation by the filmmaker/son confirms a transformation in their relationship. Alfred, as his parents' child, perhaps once felt compelled to respond with strict attention to the solicitations, commands, and so on, called forth by the magical performances directed to him. But the camera now establishes a perspective that is freed from such theatrical seductions; these performers have no power to compel our attention with their performances - their theatrical tricks and subterfuges are too transparent. This framing manifests the power of the child-turned-man to see through the strategies that once had helped bind him to the role of silent spectator. But a corollary of this is that this film can fully acknowledge the motivations of what its camera discloses only if the filmmaker finds a way of declaring the power of his presence behind the camera. Indeed, as the film unfolds, this power is progressively declared, until its limits are reached.

Except for his few words near the beginning of the film ("I don't
know where to begin....") — which, as I have suggested, are placed outside their logical place in the film’s order — we do not, until late in the film, hear the filmmaker asking any of the questions that trigger the spoken narrations. It is as if he is waiting for the right moment to speak, to assert his right to his own voice.

Before we hear the filmmaker address any formal questions, we overhear him muttering a little joke in response to his mother’s claim that there was never any sense of competition between Alfred and his sister Paula. It is as if the filmmaker cannot resist dissociating himself from this claim, but is not yet ready to forsake the silence of his position behind the camera; so he gives his presence away, as it were, inadvertently.

This “slip” is followed shortly by the first of his questions that he leaves on the sound track. Alfred asks his parents why they decided to move from South Philadelphia.

This question has an edge to it. We sense a long-standing conviction that this move was a mistake — a mistake that caused the filmmaker untold grief. The new neighborhood is introduced in the film by a slow tilt down from white sky past factory chimneys to the dreary view from the back of the house. This shot in its movement and tone strikingly recalls the film’s other slow downward tilt: the shot of the monument marking the grave of Dolores. (This is an example of the filmmaker’s use of a “portrait” shot to make a witty, yet serious, editorial comment.)

The second question audibly posed by the filmmaker has a similar edge. He asks his parents why they decided to send him to parochial school. The answer is that the arrival of Paula precipitated this decision. With a second child in the house, Alfred had to be sent to the nearest school. Again, the film alludes to the possibility of conflicts between Alfred and Paula. The privacy of the relationship between the two is, however, faithfully respected throughout the film, opening one of the film’s great mysteries. A discourse by the uncle about the inevitability of death closes with the words "Dust....I don’t know...," conspicuously synchronized with a cut to Paula. The first time I saw Family Portrait Sittings, this moment and others made me think that Paula was no longer alive and that the filmmaker was preparing the viewer for a forthcoming account of her death. It is as if, through such melodramatic means, the filmmaker is expressing an ancient wish, grounded in the natural resentment of a first child for the second, to have his sister out of the way. If this was his wish, history has made it come true, only not by melodrama but by its ordinary way of separating people who once felt the daily pulse of each other’s lives. The gentle lament for the distance that opened up between Alfred and Paula as
their paths diverged is one of the obscurest, but also one of the most moving, strains in the film.

In part, through the filmmaker's questions, *Family Portrait Sittings* declares that the figure behind the camera who frames and places its images and sounds is Alfred, *this* son and father, possessed of *this* voice and body and life history. By relinquishing the sanctuary of his silence behind the camera, the filmmaker acknowledges that he is deeply implicated in the displays of tension and conflict that just seem to happen in the face of the camera. The camera's analytical, apparently disinterested stance reveals Alfred's power to motivate conflicts between his parents - a power bound up with a history of theatrical performances directed to him. He acknowledges his power in the film, and in the family, as an agent, one who acts, as filmmakers do — but then again, as grown children do, as parents do — by indirection.

The filmmaker's questions lead to one of the tensest passages in the film. Through most of its length, *Family Portrait Sittings* appears rigorously neutral in its presentation of the struggle between mother and father. The camera's analytical perspective - not as yet declared to represent the son for whom the parents within the frame are performing - does not seem to leave scope for taking sides. It is not yet clear what might turn on small or large victories in the competition for narrative authority. But shortly after the filmmaker declares his presence through his questions, a shift occurs. Perhaps my own experience of this part of the film has something to do with a sense of the poignancy of the filmmaker's humility in so understating the claim, implied in his questions, that his parents have passed over his desires. My experience hinges on suddenly getting the impression that the father has taken enough. When will he defend himself against his wife's unrelenting verbal assault? It is with real satisfaction that I witness him beginning to put his wife down. But then a corrective perception emerges. He has been playing to this desire that he assert himself, playing to an audience whose rooting interest he assumes. Has he, then, turned the camera into his accomplice, conspiring in a presentation of the mother's manner as unbecoming? Can the filmmaker be unaware of, or indifferent to, this conspiracy, or apparent conspiracy, with one parent at the price of betrayal of the other? That such secret conspiracies are part of any family's history I have no doubt. But I feel that this film's claims to authority now call for some gesture of acknowledgment by the filmmaker of his compromised role. For in his act of making this film, must he not assume responsibility for his relationship with his family, even where this calls for a break with the history of his role in the family?

It is in this context that I understand the film's turning now to Un-
cle Domenick. It is as if to right the injustice of Alfred's treatment of his mother that her uncle characterizes her as possessing depth and a feeling for poetry. The filmmaker then presents to us the mother's voice speaking a haunting meditation on the swift and silent passage of the last twenty years of her life. Attuned to the mood evoked by her poetic voice, the film illustrates this meditation with shots of the backyard intercut with old color movie footage showing the same spot twenty years earlier. She brings her meditation to a close by remarking that her recent reawakening to the passage of time has led her to think about "generations." At this moment, we are given what we take to be a reprise of home-movie footage of the child Alfred playing with his electric trains – an image that consummates the intimacy of the sequence. But then the camera, the father's camera, in the present, tilts up to reveal Alfred, for the first time seen as an adult. Benjamin is the child we have just seen playing with Alfred's old trains.

Thus effected, Benjamin's entrance into the film is the moment of the filmmaker's deepest expression of commitment to both of his parents. The gesture that completes his expression of intimacy with his mother at the same time declares that he is his father's son.

This, the film's most celebratory passage, thus emerges out of one of its darkest sequences. From it, in turn, emerges another sequence of great tension.

Alfred asks his father why he never opened a photographic studio of his own. This is a tender subject. We are reminded again that before the engagement, Susan promised her family that she would "make something out of Felix." (Felix's announcement to her father was greeted with the shrug with which, apparently, he greeted all news.)

The question provokes the filmmaker's father to give an account of himself posed in an attitude of resignation that the mother clearly regards as in bad faith, and resents. Her stony silence seems to drive her husband to ever more extreme expressions of the hated resignation. Finally, he offers to the camera an indifferent shrug that uncannily recalls his description of her father's most characteristic gesture. At this moment, the whole history of their relationship unravels, momentarily exposing wounds unhealed after all these years of marriage, which at this moment looks to be a false union of beings bound to two separate families, two children.

The passage ends in a kind of tableau in which mother and father are united in a mortal appeal for help.

But their pose can also be seen as their joint expression of awareness that, singly or together, there is nothing they can now call upon their son to do, and nothing he can now call upon them to do. Perhaps it is at this moment of understanding that mother and father authorize their son's filming of them, an act of filming whose condition is that
the filmmaker is neither to give nor to receive direction. The filmmaker is once again mute before these two loved figures trapped in history. But his is now the bondage of the adult who knows that there are moments when silence is the only possible way of acknowledging the truth.

The film once again turns to Uncle Domenick. It is at this point that he speaks about the class struggle and tells the story of his own assumption of the role of head of the family. It is at this point, too, that the film once more presents its images of work, reclaiming the shot of the uncle's hands stitching – reclaiming, that is, the film's sole metaphor for the filmmaker's own work in creating *Family Portrait Sittings*.

Its narrations completed, its work authorized, and an image of its work reclaimed, the film is not quite ready to end. First, Uncle Domenick directly addresses Alfred behind the camera, asking the only question anyone directs to him within the film: Has the family ever asked more of him than that he allow it to witness him living a life that does honor to it? In a sense, the whole film constitutes the filmmaker's response to this question, which charges *Family Portrait Sittings* with a specific responsibility. Alfred cannot redeem his parents' dreams of themselves, as no child can. But this film, dedicated to his child, honors his parents even as it confronts their darkest secrets. At the same time, the act of making the film calls for the filmmaker to assume a role that places him both within and above his family, like a patriarch. When Uncle Domenick died about a year after the completion of the film, he may have thought he left no one to oversee the family. *Family Portrait Sittings* testifies otherwise. We viewers bear witness to the filmmaker's testimony.
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