

IDEOLOGY, GENRE, AUTEUR

by Robin Wood

Last summer Robin Wood delivered three lectures at the National Film Theatre in London, in conjunction with the publication of his collection of essays, *Personal Visions*. FILM COMMENT published the first lecture in the November-December issue. The third lecture, "as I wanted to give it," appears below.

"The truth lies not in one dream but in many."

Each theory of film so far has insisted on its own particular polarization. Montage theory enthrones editing as the essential creative act at the expense of other aspects of film; Bazin's Realist theory, seeking to right the balance, merely substitutes its own imbalance, downgrading montage and artifice; the revolutionary theory centered in Britain on *Screen* (but today very widespread) rejects—or at any rate seeks to "deconstruct"—Realist art in favor of the so-called "open text." Auteur theory, in its heyday, concentrated attention exclusively on the fingerprints, thematic or stylistic, of the individual artist; recent attempts to discuss the complete "filmic text" have tended to throw out ideas of personal authorship altogether. Each theory has, given its underlying position, its own validity—the validity being dependent upon, and restricted by, the po-

sition. Each can offer insights into different areas of cinema and different aspects of a single film.

I have suggested, in these talks, the desirability for the critic—whose aim should always be to see the work as wholly as possible, as it is—to be able to draw on the discoveries and particular perceptions of each theory, each position, without committing himself exclusively to any one. The ideal will not be easy to attain, and even the attempt raises all kinds of problems, the chief of which is the validity of evaluative criteria that are not supported by a particular system. From what, then, *do* they receive support? No critic, obviously, can be free from a structure of values, nor can he afford to withdraw from the struggles and tensions of living to some position of "aesthetic" contemplation. Every critic who is worth reading has been, on the contrary, very much caught up in the effort to define values beyond purely aesthetic ones (if indeed such things exist). Yet to "live histori-

cally" need not entail commitment to a system or a cause; it can involve, rather, being alive to the opposing pulls, the tensions, of one's world.

The past two decades have seen a number of advances in terms of the opening up of critical possibilities, of areas of relevance, especially with regard to Hollywood: the elaboration of auteur theory in its various manifestations; the interest in genre; the interest in ideology. I want tonight tentatively to explore some of the ways in which these disparate approaches to Hollywood movies might interpenetrate, producing the kind of synthetic criticism I have suggested might now be practicable.

In order to create a context within which to discuss *IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE* and *SHADOW OF A DOUBT*, I want to attempt (at risk of obviousness) some definition of what we mean by American capitalist ideology—or, more specifically, the values and assumptions so insistently embodied in and reinforced by the classi-

cal Hollywood cinema. Pressure of time enforces drastic simplification; the following list of components is not intended to be exhaustive or profound, but simply to make conscious, and present to a discussion of the films, concepts with which we are all perfectly familiar.

1. Capitalism, the right of ownership, private enterprise, personal initiative; the settling of the land.

2. The work ethic: the notion that "honest toil" is in itself and for itself morally admirable, this and (1) both validating and reinforcing each other. The moral excellence of work is also bound up with the necessary subjugation or sublimation of the libido: "the Devil finds work for idle hands." The relationship is beautifully epitomized in the zoo-cleaner's song in *CAT PEOPLE*.

"Nothing else to do,
Nothing else to do,
I strayed, went a-courting
'cause I'd nothing else to do."

3. Marriage (legalized heterosexual monogamy) and family. At once the further validation of (1) and (2)—the homestead is built for the Woman, whose function is to embody civilized values and guarantee their continuance through her children—and an extension of the ownership principle to personal relationships ("My house, my wife, my children") in a male-dominated society.

4a. Nature as agrarianism; the virgin land as Garden of Eden. A concept into which, in the Western, (3) tends to become curiously assimilated (ideology's function being to "naturalize" cultural assumptions): e.g., the treatment of the family in *DRUMS ALONG THE MOHAWK*.

4b. Nature as the wilderness, the Indians, on whose subjugation civilization is built; hence by extension the libido, of which in many westerns the Indians seem an extension or embodiment (*THE SEARCHERS*).

5. Progress, technology, the city ("New York, New York, it's a wonderful town," etc.).

6. Success/wealth. A value of which Hollywood ideology is also deeply ashamed, so that, while hundreds of films play on its allure, very few can allow themselves openly to extol it. Thus its ideological "shadow" is produced:

7. The Rosebud syndrome. Money isn't everything; money corrupts; the poor are happier. A very convenient assumption for capitalist ideology: the more oppressed you are, the happier you are (e.g., the singing "darkies" of *A DAY AT THE RACES*, etc.).

8. America as the land where everyone actually is/can be happy; hence the land where all problems are solvable within the existing system (which may need a bit of reform here and there but no radical change). Subversive systems are assimilated wherever possible to serve the dominant ideology. Andrew Britton,

in a characteristically brilliant article on Hitchcock's *SPELLBOUND*, argues that there even Freudian psychoanalysis becomes an instrument of ideological repression. Above all, this assumption gives us that most striking and persistent of all classical Hollywood phenomena, the Happy Ending: often a mere "emergency exit" (Sirk's phrase) for the spectator, a barely plausible pretense that the problems the film has raised are now resolved. (HILDA CRANE offers a suitably blatant example among the hundreds possible.)

Out of this list emerge logically two ideal figures, giving us:

9. The Ideal Male: the virile adventurer, potent, untrammelled man of action.

10. The Ideal Female: wife and mother, perfect companion, endlessly dependable, mainstay of hearth and home.

Since these combine into an Ideal Couple of quite staggering incompatibility, each has his/her shadow, giving us:

11. The settled husband/father, dependable but dull.

12. The erotic woman (adventuress, gambling lady, saloon "entertainer"), fascinating but dangerous, liable to betray the hero or turn into a black panther.

The most striking fact about this list is that it presents an ideology that, far from being monolithic, is *inherently* riddled with hopeless contradictions and unresolvable tensions. The work that has been done so far on genre has tended to take the various genres as "given" and discrete, and seeks to explicate them, define them in terms of motifs, etc.; what we need to ask, if genre theory is ever to be productive, is less *What?* than *Why?* We are so used to the genres that the peculiarity of the phenomenon itself has been too little noted. The idea I wish to put forward is that the development of the genres is rooted in the sort of ideological contradictions my brief list suggests. One impulse may be the attempt to deny such contradictions by eliminating one of the opposed terms, or at least by a process of simplification.

Robert Warshow's seminal essays on the gangster hero and the Westerner (still fruitfully suggestive, despite the obvious objection that he took too little into account) might be adduced here. The opposition of gangster film and western is only one of many possibilities. All the genres can be profitably examined in terms of ideological oppositions, forming a complex interlocking pattern: small-town family comedy/sophisticated city comedy; city comedy/*film noir*; *film noir*/small-town comedy, etc.. It is probable that a genre is ideologically "pure" (i.e. safe) only in its simplest, most archetypal, most aesthetically deprived and intellectually

contemptible form: Hopalong Cassidy, the Andy Hardy comedies.

The Hopalong Cassidy films (from which Indians, always a potentially disruptive force in ideological as well as dramatic terms, are, in general, significantly absent), for example, seem to depend on two strategies for their perfect ideological security: (a) the strict division of characters into good and evil, with no "grays"; (b) Hoppy's sexlessness (he never becomes emotionally entangled), hence the possibility of evading all the wandering/settling tensions on which aesthetically interesting westerns are generally structured. (An intriguing alternative: the Ideal American Family of Roy Rogers/Dale Evans/Trigger). *SHANE* is especially interesting in this connection. A deliberate attempt to create an "archetypal" western, it also represents an effort to resolve the major ideological tensions harmoniously.

One of the greatest obstacles to any fruitful theory of genre has been the tendency to treat the genres as discrete. An ideological approach might suggest why they can't be, however hard they may appear to try: at best, they represent different strategies for dealing with the same ideological tensions. For example, the small-town movie with a contemporary setting should never be divorced from its historical correlative, the Western. In the classical Hollywood cinema motifs cross repeatedly from genre to genre, as can be made clear by a few examples. The home/wandering opposition that Peter Wollen rightly sees as central to Ford is not central *only* to Ford or even to the Western; it structures a remarkably large number of American films covering all genres, from *OUT OF THE PAST* to *THERE'S NO BUSINESS LIKE SHOW BUSINESS*. The explicit comparison of women to cats connects screwball comedy (*BRINGING UP BABY*), horror film (*CAT PEOPLE*), melodrama (*RAMPAGE*), and psychological thriller (*MARNIE*). An example that brings us to tonight's specific topic: notice the way in which the Potent Male Adventurer, when he enters the family circle, immediately displaces his "shadow," the settled husband/father, in both *THE SEARCHERS* and *SHADOW OF A DOUBT*.

Before we attempt to apply these ideas to specific films, however, one more point needs to be especially emphasized: the presence of ideological tensions in a movie, though it may give it an interest beyond Hopalong Cassidy, is not in itself a reliable evaluative criterion. It seems probable that artistic value has always been dependent on the presence—somewhere, at some stage—of an individual artist, whatever the function of art in the particular society, and even when (as with the Chartres cathedral) one no longer knows who the individual artists were. It is only through the mediumship

of the individual that ideological tensions come to particular focus, hence become of aesthetic as well as sociological interest. It can perhaps be argued that works are of especial interest when (a) the defined particularities of an auteur interact with specific ideological tensions and (b) the film is fed from more than one generic source.

The same basic ideological tensions operate in both *IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE* and *SHADOW OF A DOUBT*: they furnish further reminders that the home/wandering antimony is by no means the exclusive preserve of the Western. Bedford Falls and Santa Rosa can be seen as the frontier town seventy or so years on; they embody the development of the civilization whose establishment was celebrated around the same time by Ford in *MY DARLING CLEMENTINE*. With this relationship to the Western in the background (but in Capra's film made succinctly explicit), the central tension in both films can be described in terms of genre: the disturbing influx of *film noir* into the world of small-town domestic comedy. (It is a tension clearly present in *CLEMENTINE* as well: the opposition between the daytime and night-time Tombstones).

The strong contrast the two films present testifies to the decisive effect of the intervention of a clearly defined artistic personality in an ideological-generic structure. Both films have as a central ideological project the reaffirmation of family and small-town values which the action has called into question. In Capra's film this reaffirmation is magnificently convincing (but with full acknowledgment of the suppressions on which it depends and, consequently, of its precariousness); in Hitchcock's it is completely hollow. The very different emotional effect of the films—the satisfying catharsis and emotional fullness of the Capra, the "bitter taste" (on which so many have commented) of the Hitchcock—is very deeply rooted not only in our response to two opposed directorial personalities but in our own ideological structuring.

One of the main ideological and thematic tensions of *IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE* is beautifully encapsulated in the scene in which George Bailey (James Stewart) and Mary (Donna Reed) smash windows in a derelict house as a preface to making wishes. George's wish is that he shall get the money to leave Bedford Falls, which he sees as humdrum and constricting, and travel about the world; Mary's (not expressed in words, but in its subsequent fulfillment—confirming her belief that wishes don't come true if you speak them) is that she and George will marry, settle down and raise a family, in the same derelict house, a ruined shell which marriage-and-family restores to life.



IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE. Above: Small-town bucolic. Below: Small-town film noir.



PHOTOS: MOVIE STAR NEWS

This tension is developed through the extended sequence in which George is manipulated into marrying Mary. His brother's return home with a wife and a new job traps George into staying in Bedford Falls to take over the family business. With the homecoming celebrations continuing inside the house in the background, George sits disconsolately on the front porch: we hear a train whistle, off-screen, to which he reacts. His mother (the indispensable Beulah Bondi) comes out and begins "suggesting" that he visit Mary; he appears to make off toward her, screen right, physically pointed in her direction by his mother, then reappears and walks away past Beulah Bondi in the opposite direction.

This leads him, with perfect ideological/generic logic, to Violet (Gloria Grahame). The Violet/Mary opposition is an archetypally clear rendering of that central Hollywood female opposition that crosses all generic boundaries—as with Susan (Katharine Hepburn) and Alice (Virginia Walker) in *BRINGING UP BABY*, Irena (Simone Simon) and Alice (Jane Randolph) in *CAT PEOPLE*, Chihuahua (Linda Darnell) and Clementine (Cathy Downs) in *MY DARLING CLEMENTINE*, Debby (Gloria Grahame) and Katie (Jocelyn Brando) in *THE BIG HEAT*. But Violet (in front of an amused audience) rejects his poetic in-

itation to a barefoot ramble over the hills in the moonlight; the good-time gal offers no more solution to the hero's wanderlust than the wife-mother figure.

So back to Mary, whom he brings to the window by beating a stick aggressively against the fence of the neat, enclosed front garden—a beautifully precise expression of his ambivalent state of mind, desire to attract Mary's attention warring with bitter resentment of his growing entrapment in domesticity. Mary was expecting him; his mother phoned her, knowing that George would end up at her house. Two ideological premises combine here: the notion that the "good" mother always knows, precisely and with absolute certitude, the working of her son's mind; and the notion that the female principle is central to the continuity of civilization, that the "weaker sex" is compensated with a sacred rightness.

Indoors, Mary shows George a cartoon she has drawn: George, in cowboy denims, lassoing the moon. The moment is rich in contradictory connotations. It explicitly evokes the Western, and the figure of the adventurer-hero to which George aspires. Earlier, it was for Mary that George wanted to "lasso the moon," the adventurer's exploits motivated by a desire to make happy the woman who will finally entrap him in domesticity. From Mary's point of view,

the picture is at once affectionate (acknowledging the hero's aspirations), mocking (reducing them to caricature), and possessive (reducing George to an image she creates and holds within her hands).

The most overtly presented of the film's structural oppositions is that between the two faces of Capitalism, benign and malignant: on the one hand, the Baileys (father and son) and their Building and Loan Company, its business practice based on a sense of human needs and a belief in human goodness; on the other, Potter (Lionel Barrymore), described explicitly as a spider, motivated by greed, egotism and miserliness, with no faith in human nature. Potter belongs to a very deeply rooted tradition. He derives most obviously from Dickens' Scrooge (the film is set at Christmas)—a Scrooge disturbingly unrepentant and irredeemable—but his more distant antecedents are in the ogres of fairy tales.

The opposition gives us not only two attitudes to money and property but two father-images (Bailey Sr. and Potter), each of whom gives his name to the land (Bailey Park, in small-town Bedford Falls, and Pottersville, the town's dark alternative). Most interestingly, the two figures (American choices, American tendencies) find their vivid ideological extensions in Hollywood genres: the happy, sunny world of small town comedy (Bedford Falls is seen mostly in the daytime), the world of *film noir*, the dark underside of Hollywood ideology.

Pottersville—the vision of the town as it would have been if George had never existed, shown him by his guardian angel (Henry Travers)—is just as "real" (or no more stylized) than Bedford Falls. The iconography of small-town comedy is exchanged, unmistakably, for that of *film noir*, with police sirens, shooting in the streets, darkness, vicious dives, alcoholism, burlesque shows, strip clubs, the glitter and shadows of *noir* lighting. George's mother, embittered and malevolent, runs a seedy boarding-house; the good-time gal/wife-mother opposition, translated into *noir* terms, becomes an opposition of prostitute and repressed spinster-librarian. The towns emerge as equally valid images of America—validated by their generic familiarity.

Beside *SHADOW OF A DOUBT*, *IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE* manages a convincing and moving affirmation of the values (and value) of bourgeois family life. Yet what is revealed, when disaster releases George's suppressed tensions, is the intensity of his resentment of the family and desire to destroy it—and with it, in significant relationship, his work (his culminating action is furiously to overthrow the drawing-board with his plans for more small-town houses). The film

recognizes explicitly that behind every Bedford Falls lurks a Pottersville, and implicitly that within every George Bailey lurks THE SEARCHERS' Ethan Edwards. Potter, tempting George, is given the devil's insights into his suppressed desires. His remark, "You once called me a warped, frustrated old man—now you're a warped, frustrated *young* man," is amply supported by the evidence the film supplies. What is finally striking about the film's affirmation is the extreme precariousness of its basis; and Potter survives, without remorse, his crime unexposed and unpunished. It may well be Capra's masterpiece, but it is more than that. Like all the greatest American films—fed by a complex generic tradition and, beyond that, by the fears and aspirations of a whole culture—it at once transcends its director and would be inconceivable without him.

SHADOW OF A DOUBT has always been among the most popular of Hitchcock's middle-period films, with critics and public alike, but it has been perceived in very different, almost diametrically opposed ways. On its appearance it was greeted by British critics as the film marking Hitchcock's coming-to-terms with America; his British films were praised for their humor and "social criticism" as much as for their suspense, and the early American films (notably *REBECCA* and *SUSPICION*) seemed like attempts artificially to reconstruct England in Hollywood. In *SHADOW*, Hitchcock (with the aid of Thornton Wilder and Sally Benson) at last brought to American middle-class society the shrewd satirical, affectionate gaze previously bestowed on British. A later generation of French critics (notably Rohmer and Chabrol in their Hitchcock book) praised the film for very different reasons, establishing its strict formalism (Truffaut's "un film fondé sur le chiffre 2") and seeing it as one of the keys to a consistent Catholic interpretation of Hitchcock, a rigorous working-out of themes of Original Sin, the loss of innocence, the Fallen World, the exchange (or interchangeability) of guilt. The French noted the family comedy beloved of British critics, if at all, as a mildly annoying distraction.

That both these views correspond to important elements in the film and throw light on certain aspects of it is beyond doubt; both, however, now appear false and partial, dependent upon the abstracting of elements from the whole. If the film is, in a sense, completely dominated by Hitchcock (nothing in it is unmarked by his artistic personality), a complete reading would need to see the small-town-family elements and the Catholic elements as threads weaving through a complex fabric in which,

again, ideological and generic determinants are crucial.

The kind of "synthetic" analysis I have suggested (going beyond an interest in the individual auteur) reveals *IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE* as a far more potentially subversive film than has been generally recognized, but its subversive elements are, in the end, successfully contained. In *SHADOW OF A DOUBT* the Hollywood ideology I have sketched is shattered beyond convincing recuperation. One can, however, trace through the film its attempts to impose itself and render things "safe." What is in jeopardy is above all the Family—but, given the Family's central ideological significance, once that is in jeopardy, everything is. The small town (still rooted in the agrarian dream, in ideals of the virgin land as a garden of innocence) and the united happy family are regarded as the real sound heart of American civilization; the ideological project is to acknowledge the existence of sickness and evil but preserve the family from their contamination.

A number of strategies can be discerned here: the attempt to insist on a separation of Uncle Charlie from Santa Rosa; his death at the end of the film, as the definitive purging of evil; the production of the young detective (the healthy, wholesome, small-town male) as a marriage partner for young Charlie, that the Family may be perpetuated; above all, the attribution of Uncle Charlie's sexual pathology to a childhood accident, as a means of exonerating the Family of the charge of producing a monster (a possibility the American popular cinema, with the contemporary overturning of traditional values, can now envisage—e.g., *IT'S ALIVE!*).

The famous opening, with its parallel introductions of Uncle Charlie and Young Charlie, insists on the city and the small town as *opposed*, sickness and evil being of the city. As with Bedford Falls/Pottersville, the film draws lavishly on the iconography of usually discrete genres. Six shots (with all movement and direction—the bridges, the panning, the editing—consistently rightward) leading up to the first interior of Uncle Charlie's room give us urban technology, wreckage both human (the down-and-outs) and material (the dumped cars by the sign "No Dumping Allowed"), children playing in the street, the number 13 on the lodging-house door. Six shots (movement and direction consistently left) leading to the first interior of Young Charlie's room give us sunny streets with no street-games (Santa Rosa evidently has parks), an orderly town with a smiling, paternal policeman presiding over traffic and pedestrians.

In Catholic terms, this is the Fallen World against a world of apparent prelapsarian innocence; but it is just as valid to interpret the images, as in *IT'S A WON-*

DERFUL LIFE, in terms of the two faces of American capitalism. Uncle Charlie has money (the fruits of his crimes and his aberrant sexuality) littered in disorder over table and floor; the Santa Rosa policeman has behind him the Bank of America. The detailed paralleling of uncle and niece can of course be read as comparison as much as contrast, and the opposition that of two sides of the same coin. The point is clearest in that crucial, profoundly disturbing scene where *film noir* erupts into Santa Rosa itself: the visit to the "Til Two" bar, where Young Charlie is confronted with her *alter ego* Louise the waitress, her former classmate. The scene equally invites Catholic

low-angle shot of Uncle Charlie's train rushing toward Santa Rosa, underlining the effect with an ominous crashing chord on the soundtrack.

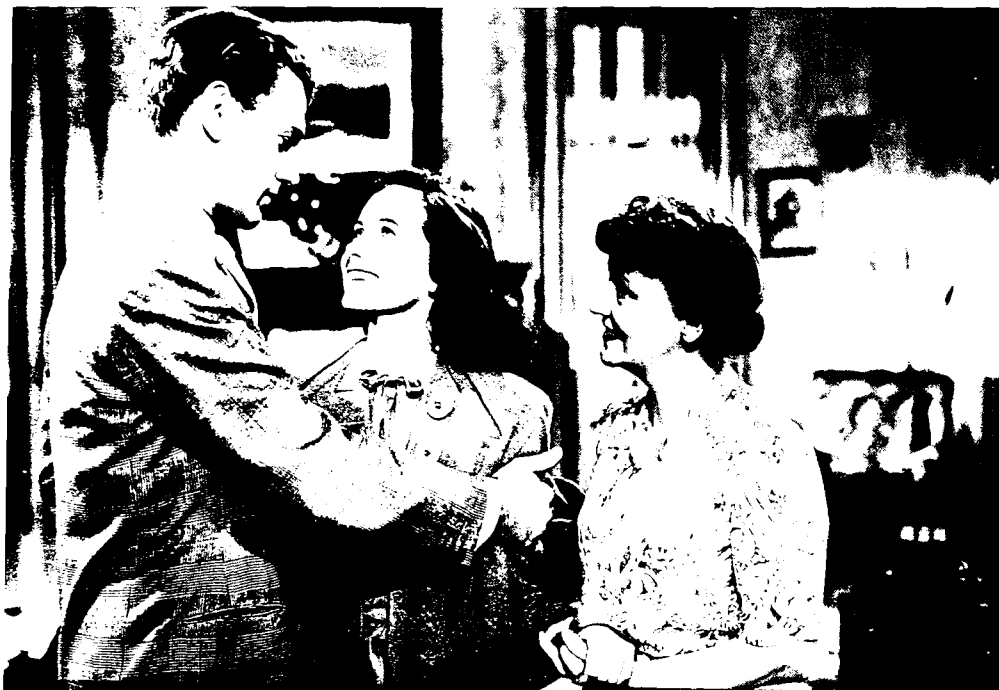
Uncle Charlie is one of the supreme embodiments of the key Hitchcock figure: ambiguously devil and lost soul. When his train reaches Santa Rosa, the image is blackened by its smoke. From his first appearance, Charlie is associated consistently with a cigar (its phallic connotations evident from the outset, in the scene with the landlady) and repeatedly shown with a wreath of smoke curling around his head (no one else in the film smokes except Joe, the displaced father, who has a paternal pipe, usually unlit).

the mutual responsiveness and affection, that Capra so beautifully creates in the Bailey families, senior and junior, of IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE, are here almost entirely lacking—and this despite the fact, in itself of great ideological interest, that the treatment of the family in SHADOW OF A DOUBT has generally been perceived (even, one guesses, by Hitchcock himself) as affectionate.

The most striking characteristic of the Spencers is the separateness of each member; the recurring point of the celebrated overlapping dialogue is that no one ever listens to what anyone else is saying. Each is locked in a separate fantasy world: Emmy in the past, Joe in crime, Anne in books read, apparently, less for pleasure than as a means of amassing knowledge with which she has little emotional contact (though she also believes that everything she reads is "true"). The parents are trapped in a petty materialism (both respond to Young Charlie's dissatisfaction with the assumption that she's talking about money) and reliance on "honest toil" as the means of using up energies. In SHADOW OF A DOUBT the ideological image of the small-town happy family becomes the flimsiest façade. That so many are nonetheless deceived by it testifies only to the strength of the ideology—one of whose functions is of course to inhibit the imagining of radical alternatives.

I have argued elsewhere that the key to Hitchcock's films is less suspense than sexuality (or, alternatively, that his "suspense" always carries a sexual charge in ways sometimes obvious, sometimes esoteric); and that sexual relationships in his work are inevitably based on power, the obsession-with-power/dread-of-impotence being as central to his method as to his thematic. In SHADOW OF A DOUBT it is above all sexuality that cracks apart the family façade. As far as the Hays code permitted, a double incest theme runs through the film: Uncle Charlie and Emmy, Uncle Charlie and Young Charlie. Necessarily, this is expressed through images and motifs, never becoming verbally explicit; certain of the images depend on a suppressed verbal play for their significance.

For the reunion of brother and sister, Hitchcock gives us an image (Emmy poised left of screen, arrested in mid-movement, Charlie right, under trees and sunshine) that iconographically evokes the reunion of lovers (Charlie wants to see Emmy again as she was when she was "the prettiest girl on the block"). And Emmy's breakdown, in front of her embarrassed friends and neighbors, at the news of Charlie's imminent departure, is eloquent. As for uncle and niece, they are introduced symmetrically lying on beds, Uncle Charlie fondling his phallic cigar, Young



MOMA/FILM STILL

A FAMILY TRIANGLE: Uncle (Joseph Cotten), Niece (Teresa Wright), Sister (Patricia Collinge).

and Marxist commentaries; its force arises from the revelation of the Fallen-World/ capitalist-corruption-and-deprivation at the heart of the American small town. The close juxtaposition of genres has implications that reach out through the whole generic structure of the classical Hollywood cinema.

The subversion of ideology within the film is everywhere traceable to Hitchcock's presence, to the skepticism and nihilism that lurk just behind the jocular facade of his public image. His Catholicism is in reality the lingering on in his work of the darker aspects of Catholic mythology: Hell without Heaven. The traces are clear enough. Young Charlie wants a "miracle"; she thinks of her uncle as the "one who can save us" (and her mother immediately asks, "What do you mean, *save us?*"); when she finds his telegram, in the very act of sending hers, her reaction is an ecstatic "He heard me, he heard me!" Hitchcock cuts at once to a

Several incidents (the escape from the policemen at the beginning, the garage door slammed as by remote control) invest him with a quasi-supernatural power. Rather than restrict the film to a Catholic reading, it seems logical to connect these marks with others: the thread of superstition that runs through the film (the number 13; the hat on the bed; "Sing at table and you'll marry a crazy husband"; the irrational dread of the utterance, however innocent, of the forbidden words "Merry Widow") and the telepathy motif (the telegrams, the tune "jumping from head to head")—the whole Hitchcockian sense of life at the mercy of terrible, unpredictable forces that have to be kept down.

The Hitchcockian dread of repressed forces is characteristically accompanied by a sense of the emptiness of the surface world that represses them, and this crucially affects the presentation in SHADOW OF A DOUBT of the American small-town family. The warmth and togetherness,

Charlie prone, hands behind head. When Uncle Charlie gets off the train he is bent over a stick, pretending to be ill; as soon as he sees Young Charlie he "comes erect," flourishing the stick. One of his first actions on taking over her bedroom is to pluck a rose for his buttonhole ("deflowering"). More obviously, there is the business with the ring, which not only, as a symbolic token of engagement, links Charlie sexually with her uncle, but also links her, through its previous ownership, to his succession of merry widows. The film shows sexual pathology at the heart of the American family, the necessary product of its repressions and sublimations.

As for the "accident"—that old critical stumbling-block—it presents no problem at all, provided one is ready to acknowledge the validity of a psychoanalytical reading of movies. Indeed, it provides a rather beautiful example of the way in which ideology, in seeking to impose itself, succeeds merely in confirming its own subversion. The "accident" (Charlie was "riding a bicycle" for the first time, which resulted in a "collision") can be read as elementary Freudian metaphor for the trauma of premature sexual awakening (after which Charlie was "never the same again"). The smothering sexual/ possessive devotion of a doting older sister may be felt to provide a clue to the sexual motivation behind the merry-widow murders; Charlie isn't interested in money. Indeed, Emmy connected to the merry widows by an associative chain in which important links are her own practical widowhood (her ineffectual husband is largely ignored), her ladies' club, and its leading light Mrs. Potter, Uncle Charlie's potential next-in-line.

A fuller analysis would need to dwell on the limitations of Hitchcock's vision, nearer the nihilistic than the tragic; on his inability to conceive of repressed energies as other than evil, and the surface world that represses them as other than shallow and unfulfilling. This explains why there can be no Heaven corresponding to Hitchcock's Hell, for every vision of Heaven that is not merely negative is rooted in a concept of the liberation of the instincts, the Resurrection of the Body, which Hitchcock must always deny. But my final stress is less on the evaluation of a particular film or director than on the implications for a criticism of the Hollywood cinema of the notions of interaction and multiple determinacy I have been employing. It is its rootedness in the Hollywood genres, and in the very ideological structure it so disturbingly subverts, that makes *SHADOW OF A DOUBT* so much more suggestive and significant a work than Hitchcock the bourgeois entertainer could ever have guessed. ❄️