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**Hitchcock and Humor: Modes of Comedy in Twelve Defining Films. Wes D. Gehring.
Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2019.**

In *Hitchcock and Humor: Modes of Comedy in Twelve Defining Films*, distinguished film scholar Wes D. Gehring seeks to fill in what he sees as a gaping hole in Hitchcock criticism. That is the need for an in-depth analysis of Alfred Hitchcock's love of many types of humor, and how, and why, he felt them essential to his filmmaking. Gehring sees humor as central to Hitchcock's artistic vision, not as an afterthought, as he contends most other scholars do. Gehring emphasizes that his mission is not to denigrate any critic, or critical approach. Instead, he seeks to bring attention to Hitchcock's use of humor, so as to let all lovers of Hitchcock's art decide for themselves how important humor is to experiencing a Hitchcock film.

Hitchcock and Humor: Modes of Comedy in Twelve Defining Films opens with an intriguing, though truncated, introduction placing situating Hitchcock's achievements alongside those of, among others, Charlie Chaplin, Frank Capra, Vincent Minnelli, and Roger Corman. Gehring lauds each in turn for their artistry. Nevertheless, he places Hitchcock above them all as he feels Hitchcock most effectively blended multiple genres.

The book devotes a separate, brilliant, chapter to each of the following films: "Blackmail" (1929); "The Man Who Knew Too Much" (1934); "The 39 Steps" (1935); "Secret Agent" (1936); "The Lady Vanishes" (1938); Mr. & Mrs. Smith" (1941); "Shadow of a Doubt" (1943); "Rope" (1948); "Strangers on a Train" (1951); "Rear Window" (1954); "The Trouble With Harry" (1955); and "North By Northwest" (1959). It concludes with a meditative, though comparatively weaker epilogue centered on "Psycho" (1960). Gehring contends "Psycho" perfects and distills all the kinds of humor employed in the aforementioned films, and is worthy of exploration all on its own. The question of whether or not "Psycho" deserves an entire study

of this type unto itself will undoubtedly spur much discussion among lovers of Hitchcock's work.

The dozen films comprising the bulk of the study all receive much stimulating discussion of their individual merits. Each of their places among Hitchcock's finest is reaffirmed and examined in terms of what Gehring takes as their use of, for instance, black humor ("Blackmail", "The Lady Vanishes", "Rope", "Rear Window", "North By Northwest"), satire ("The Man Who Knew Too Much", "Secret Agent", "Shadow of a Doubt", "Strangers on a Train"), and screwball comedy ("The 39 Steps", "Mr. & Mrs. Smith", "The Trouble With Harry"). Collectively, Gehring views them as emblematic of Hitchcock's belief that suspense cannot function without comedy. Thought-provoking insights, and unexpected, perhaps, little known, connections between the films proliferate each chapter giving readers myriad new lenses through which to examine and enjoy them. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for the Epilogue. Even allowing for its role as an Epilogue it contains little noteworthy commentary or analysis relating to anything mentioned heretofore, apart from giving the impression that "Psycho" is likely Gehring's favorite Hitchcock film. That is fine. Still, it begs the question why "Psycho" was not incorporated in as the "13th Defining Film" which would have allowed for a more satisfying, comprehensive epilogue. Nevertheless, the rest of the book is more than compelling enough to withstand any potential weaknesses.

Throughout *Hitchcock and Humor*, Gehring asserts that, to Hitchcock just as it was paramount to pair the "proper" suspenseful story with the "proper" comedic style, so too was the "proper" actor or actress essential. His often loving, sometimes stormy relationships with screen legends like Cary Grant, Jimmy Stewart, Carol Lombard, and Peter Lorre, are expertly chronicled. Collaboration and conflict between Hitchcock and his "most preferred" stars comes

alive through expert analysis and enlightening anecdotes. Hitchcock's crafting, and recrafting of roles to suit particular actors is deftly detailed. For instance, he originally intended Jimmy Stewart and Cary Grant to switch up their now iconic roles in "Rear Window" and "North By Northwest" until Cary Grant asserted that he hated sitting still.

What precise part humor plays in enjoying a Hitchcock film is a topic which will likely be debated as long as film is appreciated as an art form. What is not up for debate is that *Hitchcock and Humor: Modes of Comedy in Twelve Defining Films* offers valuable insights on an aspect of Hitchcock's artistry, and impact on popular culture that even aficionados may not know. The book will appeal to anyone fond of Hitchcock, Cinema history, and Popular Culture.

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