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## Must We Kill the Thing We Love?: Emersonian Perfectionism and the Films of Alfred Hitchcock (Film and Culture Series)

*William Rothman*

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**William Rothman : Must We Kill the Thing We Love?: Emersonian Perfectionism and the Films of Alfred Hitchcock (Film and Culture Series)** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Must We Kill the Thing We Love?: Emersonian Perfectionism and the Films of Alfred Hitchcock (Film and Culture Series):

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A Fresh, Informative Approach Beside Paths Well-Worn By C. C. Black As anyone likely to be considering this book will know, William Rothman is one of the finest interpreters of Hitchcock's films. His "Hitchcock: The Murderous Gaze" (1982; rev. 2012) is a seminal contribution to that director's criticism. In the earlier work Rothman offered detailed analyses of five Hitchcock's works from both his British and American periods. In this book (whose title paraphrases a remark by Oscar Wilde of which Hitchcock was fond of quoting), Rothman proposes an original, very interesting thesis: that Hitchcock's manner of filming, as well as an implicit philosophy underlying his movies, correspond with Ralph Waldo Emerson's views of human perfectibility. To prove his point, Rothman reaches back to Hitchcock's earliest films, including "The Lodger" (1927), surveying the full expanse of the director's cinematic terrain all the way to his final film, "Family Plot" (1976). Significantly, Rothman does not ignore episodes from "Alfred Hitchcock Presents" (1955-62) that Hitchcock himself directed. One can immediately think of the director's more lighthearted efforts (like "To Catch A Thief" [1955] which, unless I missed it, Rothman does not consider) to prove his point; "Vertigo" (1958) and "Psycho" (1960) would seem far less likely witnesses for the defense. However, Rothman returns even to those moodier films and helps one to see it again with fresh eyes. As in "The Murderous Gaze" Rothman's points are copiously illustrated by images from the films studies. The author is everything you would want in a critic: broadly knowledgeable, provocative but not eccentric, sympathetic but not uncritical, deeply intelligent, and clear. This is not a book to be skimmed: it invites careful, thoughtful reflection. I expect to return to it for careful re-readings. Highly recommended.

William Rothman argues that the driving force of Hitchcock's work was his struggle to reconcile the dark vision of his favorite Oscar Wilde quote, "Each man kills the thing he loves," with the quintessentially American philosophy, articulated in Emerson's writings, that gave classical Hollywood movies of the New Deal era their extraordinary combination of popularity and artistic seriousness. A Hitchcock thriller could be a comedy of remarriage or a melodrama of an unknown woman, both Emersonian genres, except for the murderous villain and godlike author, Hitchcock, who pulls the villain's strings and ours. Because Hitchcock believed that the camera has a murderous aspect, the question "What if anything justifies killing?," which every Hitchcock film engages, was for him a disturbing question about his own art. Tracing the trajectory of Hitchcock's career, Rothman discerns a progression in the films' meditations on murder and artistic creation. This progression culminates in *Marnie* (1964), Hitchcock's most controversial film, in which Hitchcock overcame his ambivalence and fully embraced the Emersonian worldview he had always also resisted. Reading key Emerson passages with the degree of attention he accords to Hitchcock sequences, Rothman discovers surprising affinities between Hitchcock's way of thinking cinematically and the philosophical way of thinking Emerson's essays exemplify. He finds that the terms in which Emerson thought about reality, about our "flux of moods," about what it is within us that never changes, about freedom, about America, about reading, about writing, and about thinking are remarkably pertinent to our experience of films and to thinking and writing about them. He also reflects on the implications of this discovery, not only for Hitchcock scholarship but also for film criticism in general.

In his seminal book, *The Murderous Gaze*, Rothman emerged as a central voice in the study of Hitchcock with his probing and fine-grained analysis of the filmmaker's style and deep interpretations of his work. This new project builds on the critical premises of his earlier work but modifies its predominantly ironic view of Hitchcock. Here Rothman argues with critical verve that Hitchcock's films also contain a redemptive vision of the perfectibility of human nature. (Richard Allen, author of *Hitchcock's Romantic Irony* and co-editor of *The Hitchcock Annual*) Rothman entered the field of film study as a maverick, as a Harvard philosopher, at a time when most film classes were taught in literature and language departments, though he has been vindicated in the last decade by a proliferation of philosophical approaches to cinema. While Rothman draws his examples from all across the Hitchcock canon, his work remains resolutely and productively philosophical in that he grapples with the history of Hitchcock's thinking about film, his thinking with and through film. In tracking Hitchcock's ruminations on love, murder, and mortality Rothman both deepens and illuminates our understanding of Hitchcock's continued and uncanny appeal. (Leland Poague, Iowa State University) In this glittering homage to Emerson, Cavell, and the Master of Suspense, one of our most learned scholars of film opens new pathways to understanding Hitchcock's work as penetrating, provocative, labyrinthine, and exquisitely mortal. (Murray Pomerance, Author of *The Eyes Have It: Cinema and the Reality Effect*) Nobody knows the films of Alfred Hitchcock better than William Rothman. The idea of linking these wonderful and dense films with an Emersonian vision is inspired. Rothman's training in philosophy combines lucidly with his lifelong devotion to film in producing a work of originality and authority. (Stanley Cavell, Harvard University) William Rothman, who wrote the remarkable *Hitchcock: The Murderous Gaze*, now takes a revisionary Emersonian view and seeks to enlist the devilish master of suspense on the side of the angels. (Gilberto Perez, Sarah Lawrence College) William Rothman is one of the great close readers of film.... In his new book, *Must We Kill the Thing We Love?: Emersonian Perfectionism and the Films of Alfred Hitchcock*, Rothman again performs virtuoso acts of close viewing.... An important contribution to Hitchcock scholarship. (David Banash Screen) [Rothman's] interpretations are always

insightful (and backed up by close readings of cinematic technique) and his demonstration of the relevance of Emerson to Hitchcock is philosophy of film at its best. (Daniel Shaw New of Film and Television Studies) About the Author William Rothman is professor of cinema and interactive media at the University of Miami. An expanded edition of his landmark study Hitchcock: The Murderous Gaze was published in 2012. His other books include The "I" of the Camera: Essays in Film Criticism, History, and Aesthetics, Documentary Film Classics, and Reading Cavell's The World Viewed: A Philosophical Perspective on Film.