

cluded the worship of goddesses as the primary deities." Associated with this religion of the goddess was a culture characterized by "qualities such as caring, compassion, and nonviolence." There is evidence of division of labour, but not of male dominance. She writes that "there is no evidence of women associated with men in inferior positions," and that "warfare is conspicuous by its absence." Finally, she proposes that "social relations are primarily based on the principle of linking rather than ranking."

After centuries of peace and stability there "appeared on the prehistoric horizon invaders from the peripheral areas of our globe who ushered in a very different form of social organization." After several waves of invasions, these agrarian, partnership societies began to undergo rapid change and the culture in all three areas was replaced by "the warlike, hierarchical, male dominated social structure that is still prevalent."

After establishing the case for the existence of the partnership societies, Eisler makes the following observation:

*Yet even when confronted with the authority of new research, with new archeology, and the corroboration from social science, this truly huge block of new knowledge about millennia of human history so contradicts all we have been taught that its hold on our minds is like*

*a message written in sand.*

She uses the central portion of the book to explain why our new knowledge of these early, peaceful societies is so difficult to retain.

She starts by pointing out that there are innumerable traces of the earlier culture in written history, which are not identified as such. For example, she argues that "the story of Cain and Abel in part reflects the actual confrontation of a pastoral people (symbolized by Abel's offering of his slaughtered sheep) and an agrarian people (symbolized by Cain's offering of 'the fruits of the ground') rejected by the pastoral god Jehovah."

Eisler then shows how all aspects of the cultures of dominance and force became woven into the entire social fabric, for example, the way a deity is originally viewed as an all powerful woman, then, over a period of time, her husband or son gradually becomes more powerful, and eventually only a remnant, such as the Madonna, is left of the original deity.

Throughout history there were resurgences of the partnership ethic only to be suppressed or co-opted by the prevailing culture. Her treatment of the message of Jesus, and the subsequent alteration of his basic message by a hierarchical church, is particularly strong.

It is difficult to know if *The Chalice and The Blade* should be viewed as a populari-

zation of current research or a scholarly work. Eisler seems to lean toward the latter, and viewed this way the book has several shortcomings.

Archaeological research that does not support her case tends to be minimized and she over-interprets results that do. She also introduces a lot of unnecessary terminology. Her claim that work done in the fields of physics, chemistry, and biology on the dynamics of change is applicable to her more general cultural interpretations is not substantiated in the few pages she gives to this subject.

One can go to other works for a more scholarly approach. Two books that cover much of the same material are: *Beyond Power: On Women, Men and Morals* by Marilyn French (Summit Books, New York, 1985), and *The Creation of Patriarchy*, by Gerda Lerner (Oxford University Press, New York, 1986).

*The Chalice and the Blade* is better viewed as a popularization of current research and a rallying cry for much-needed change. In this light it is a very positive work. It contains a good summation of evidence that there have been partnership societies in the past, and convincing arguments that our knowledge of these societies and attempts to return to them have been systematically and sometimes invisibly suppressed; and it offers hope that we can take an active part in making decisions for a better future.

## THE WOMEN WHO KNEW TOO MUCH: Hitchcock and Feminist Theory

Tania Modleski. New York: Methuen, 1988.

### *Kay Armatage*

Tania Modleski teaches film and literature at the University of Southern California. Her first book, *Loving With A Vengeance*, was the first really thorough treatment of popular romance novels utilizing semiotic, psychoanalytic, structuralist, and feminist methodologies. Her second, *Studies in Entertainment*, was a collection of articles by some of the most original figures on the feminist cultural theory scene. It charted up to the minute the most currently provocative issues in

feminist theory, notably a cluster about the feminine body: the carnival monster body (after Baudrillard); the perils of the postmodern body for feminism; the subversive meanings of the shrieking body of punk fashion; and the potential subversion of fashionable sartorial systems through an invocation of the masochistic male body and a self-conscious masquerade of the feminine body through vintage dressing.

This particular constellation, all related more than tangentially to the theory of the masquerade, issues in a virtually unbroken trajectory from a dual source in Claire Johnston's work on femininity and the masquerade, and Laura Mulvey's work on the gaze and the gendered spectator, from nearly fifteen years ago.

The masquerade as a metaphor for the female spectator position, articulated some years later by Mary Ann Doane, joined Mulvey's and Johnston's work through a

breath-takingly literal reading of Freud's model of the differences in the ways that the two sexes acquire the capacity for fetishization or the mastery of knowledge. In Doane's reading, the female subject is doomed to a masochistic overidentification with the body — a closeness to the body, desire and lack — because she cannot reproduce the 'distance' between self and other which is the prerequisite for the (male) capacity for sadistic mastery. The masquerade, then, is the way out for the female subject, and in later treatments of the notion, such as those found in Modleski's *Studies in Entertainment*, it would be theorized as the means by which, through an excessive display of conventional feminine signifiers, the cultural constructions of femininity could be parodically subverted.

Along the way, as this argument was formulated, the satellites in the orbit came to veer further and further from Mulvey's

ground-breaking suggestions about the unconscious relations between the spectator, filmic conventions and the cinematic apparatus, and to slide closer and closer to Johnston's work on the signifying chain, the image and the operations of the diegesis. Although the theory of the spectator and the gaze was invariably involved as a starting point, work centered more and more firmly on the time-honoured objects of analysis of all narrative media: plot, action and character.

Methodologically, this is where *The Women Who Knew Too Much* is situated. In its initial thrust, the book takes up the debates in film theory around the issue of gender and film spectatorship, dealing particularly with some of the more schematic developments from Mulvey, such as that women's response to patriarchal cinema can only be masochistic, while men's response is necessarily sadistic. These are the theoretical underpinnings of the masquerade. But just as Johnston and Doane took their illustration and support from the unfoldings of character and plot, so also in her examination of the issues of the gaze, the spectator and femininity, Modleski offers psychoanalytic readings of the diegetic operations of seven films from different periods in Hitchcock's career. These readings are largely plot-oriented and characterological, emphasizing Hitchcock's complex attitudes towards femininity through his presentation of women characters who are variously hateful or charming, scheming or duped, murdered or married.

As the back cover blurb puts it, Modleski

*claims that critical approaches to Hitchcock have falsely fallen into two camps: either he is seen as a misogynist, or he is seen as sympathetic to women in his demonstration of women's plight in patriarchy. In opposition to these positions, Modleski asserts that Hitchcock*

*is deeply ambivalent towards his female characters.*

Her readings of *Rebecca* (also the subject of Doane's early treatment of the gendered spectator and *the masquerade*), *Notorious*, *Rear Window* and *Vertigo* are especially useful antidotes to the usual readings of these popular films; and her treatment of two early films, *Blackmail* and *Murder!*, and one of the first thorough examinations of *Frenzy*, are fresh and original additions to the Hitchcock canon.

In this way, *The Women Who Knew Too Much* is a pretty good book. It sets out its project clearly and attacks it thoroughly. The examinations of the films are insightful and penetrating, and the theoretical issues are presented without either simplification or undue complication. The writing itself is one of the great strengths of the book. Far from the tortured and tortuous verbiage of — come on, let's face it — far too much of the current feminist discourse, *The Women Who Knew Too Much* is a model of rigour combined with clarity. Lucid, well-argued and compelling to read, in fact it is one of those rare books which actually lives up to the blurbs on the back cover.

This book should take its place along that by now very lengthy shelf of works on Hitchcock, with cross-references to that infinitely longer shelf on the classical Hollywood cinema. I hope that students will take up this book as a secondary source and consult it for essays right along with Robin Wood, Raymond Bellour, Donald Spoto, Raymond Durnat, Fred Jameson, and all the rest of the boys, finding in it just what Modleski intends: the interpretation of Hitchcock from the woman's point of view.

Then why am I not more enthusiastic? Why am I not applauding, with Kaja Silverman and Constance Penley in those cover blurbs, the first feminist rereading

of Hitchcock?

For me, the task of feminist film theory and criticism lies elsewhere, in the support — through analysis, critique and further theorization — of feminist filmmakers. I am increasingly impatient with the feminist examinations of the classical Hollywood *genres* and now *auteurs* which have not begun to abate even after almost fifteen years. Around ten years ago there was a move towards feminist filmmakers: Chantal Akerman, Yvonne Rainer and Marguerite Duras were embraced briefly as salutary opposition to the classic realist text. But they were shortly abandoned in the journals, and no book-length study has appeared. Instead, feminist work, especially from American scholars, has settled back comfortably with those old favourites, those juicy, naughty narrative films where there is really something to talk about: plot and character; romance, danger and death.

Meanwhile, feminist filmmakers in Canada, Hollywood and Europe are finding it harder and harder to survive. We find an interesting but distressing phenomenon in the past ten years. Many women directors get to make a first and even second film. And then no more, because they can't make a profitable return on their budgets. Without commercial distribution, they can't find their audience through conventional means. Feminist critics don't write about them, feminist scholars don't examine them. Thus their potential audience can't find them because they don't know of them. And feminist filmmakers are left without even anything in print to indicate to potential supporters — governments, arts councils, educational TV stations — that there might be good reason to support feminist films. And so they are dying out.

And so I will put this very good book high up on my shelf. If I ever have to teach Hitchcock, I'll take it down again.

## WOMEN AND AGING

Ellen M. Gee and Meredith M. Kimball.  
Toronto and Vancouver: Butterworths,  
1987.

### Mary O'Brien

To date, academic publications on

women and aging have been anthologies and too uneven to use as primary texts for teaching introductory courses on this topic. Therefore, a definite highlight is a recent monograph, *Women and Aging*, published in Butterworth's "Perspectives on Individual and Population Aging" series. Written by two feminist scholars, Ellen Gee and Meredith Kimball, this small, well-researched and highly informative book consists of eight chapters and a

comprehensive bibliography covering issues germane to older women, and largely from a Canadian perspective. Most chapters identify areas for further research and conclude with a discussion of policy implications. Rather than focussing on topics which have tended to limit understanding of middle-aged and older women, such as adjustment to widowhood and the empty nest, the authors have chosen the more arduous task of compiling informa-