,                 On Dealing with Reviews
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A couple of nights ago, I watched a 2014 French film "Bird People" on Amazon streaming. Its two protagonists were a middle-age American businessman in a Paris airport hotel on his way to Dubai (he doesn't make it there) and a young French maid at this same hotel. The two halves of the film contrast markedly: the first is straight-ahead realistic, and the second is a flight of fancy (literally a flight, as you'll see if you decide to check out the film, and I recommend that you do).

After viewing a film I find worthy artistically and challenging intellectually, which was the case with "Bird People," I often check the internet to see what professional critics have to say about the film, as well as look over Amazon reviewers' comments. I was taken by how both groups missed this film's merits. In fact, they seemed to be going out of their way to find fault with it, and the faults they were noting were most often in their minds and not in the film.

On the sites for Amazon films, there's a heading called "Customers Who Watched This Item Also Watched" and then a list of films. One of them for "Bird People" was "Spinning Man," a 2018 release I'd never heard of; I guessed that it was kind of a nothing film that had gone straight to video. But its top-flight cast caught my eye--Pierce Brosnan, Guy Pearce, and Minnie Driver. I recalled really liking Brosnan in the 2010 film, "The Ghost Writer." And the blurb about "Spinning Man" was intriguing: "When a female college student goes missing, a popular professor is the prime suspect. Suddenly, the questions he faces aren't merely academic, they're a matter of life and death."

So I sprung for a $4.99 streaming rental thinking this film might not be too bad, and I'm looking to kill a couple of hours before I go to bed. To my surprise, I really got caught up with the story and was highly impressed by the filmmaking.

Again I went to the reviews, and again as I found them lacking.  So I decided to post my own review on Amazon:

> After watching "Spinning Man," I read a newspaper review that said it was "forgettable."  It wasn't forgettable to me, that's for sure; I saw it two days ago and haven't stopped thinking about it.  Many reviewers have said the film doesn't make sense, the ending particularly.  To the contrary, from beginning to end it makes sense, and the sense it makes is fascinating and insightful.  And the mood it creates and the editing and pace are on the money for this story.  There's no way I can get into particulars here without spoilers.  Let's leave it that surprisingly I found this essentially straight-to-video film to be the best, most thought-provoking, in my memory.  All of it, truly superb by the highest artistic standards: the screenplay by Mathew Aldrich (especially when compared to the book on which it is based), the direction by Simon Kaijser, the wonderful acting down to minor roles, the cinematography by Polly Morgan.  I see myself as a serious film buff, and I'm saying to my fellows, check out this film!

Which brings me to the point in this thought: that something—in this case a film—is what it is, not what someone says it is.  "Bird People" is "Bird People," and Spinning Man" is "Spinning Man," and what people allege about those films, including me, is what people allege about them.

I realize that distinction sounds obvious, but I have tended to lose sight of it.  Staying with film, I'd read a review in *The New York Times* and think, "Oh, that's what that film's about, and that's how good it is."  No, that is how that film reviewer sees that film, and it may well not be accurate or the only legitimate way to perceive it.  In any case, the review is not the film; only the film is the film.

I've also tended to see critics, commenters, as on-high, final arbiters.  It's as if they were wiser and on a higher aesthetic and moral plane than the people who, staying with film, made the movie.  But really, if you think about it—and prompted by the

"Bird People" and "Spinning Man" experience, I've thought about it—the directors of those two films undoubtedly know a lot more about filmmaking than journalists and online reviewers.  You can count of those two directors having put elements in their creations that went right by the people passing judgment on them.

I have personal reasons for getting into this topic.  Since my earliest days, I've given people far too much power to define me.  You're this, you're that, they say; and given the kinds of people I've been around over the span of my life, all too often it's been negative and hurtful and discouraging, and flat-out inaccurate and unfair.  I've decided now, so very late in life, enough of that.

These days, I write articles for webzines, online magazines.  I find myself checking out the posted comments on them, as well as the number of Facebook "likes" they generate, as if those people know more about what I was writing about than I do, and their take on what I produced is gospel.

As a matter of fact, others don't know more about what I wrote than I do; and they are not my superiors or betters.  I'll take what they say into account, but I'll keep in mind that the article is what it is and worth what it's worth, and that I'm the best judge of that using my understandings and goals and standards (not somebody else's) as criteria of measure.  Bottom line, if I can't get beyond chasing after others' approval and deferring to them, I need to stop going public with my expressions, including in this website.