Cinematic Mythmaking
Philosophy in Film

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Prefatory Note

This book is the accumulation of thoughts and writings that resulted from years during which I taught film courses at MIT that were jointly listed in the philosophy section as well as programs in literature and comparative media studies. The work reflects my attempt to probe levels of meaning that film critics often neglect and film analysts sometimes subordinate to the study of technical details. The exploration that I present ranges from a screwball comedy of the early forties to dramatic films of another sort in the last years before the twenty-first century began. Because my mission is not historical, I feel justified in letting the chapters stand alone without much attempt to link them in any causal or temporal pattern. The introduction defines their overall intention, to which I need add only one general remark in advance: Since all of my literary efforts emanate directly from my personal experience, and since that changes in the course of time and individual development, I find that ending each particular book leaves me with the feeling that it would have been very different, and possibly better, if I were now to begin it anew. There is no definitive termination in this text, or in anything else I write. In the present case, neither is there a concluding chapter, since I believe that future explorations of a similar sort may be forthcoming.
From the reader’s viewpoint, my mode of writing has an advantage inasmuch as it precludes the pomposity of authorial claims to objective assurance. I merely offer a panoply of insights and ideas that matter to me and issue out of my response as a devoted, somewhat trained, spectator. I invite those who join me in this enterprise to savor their own experience as fellow members of the audience, whatever that experience may be and however much it contrasts with mine. If I fail to induce this mutually enjoyable communication between us, my remarks will have been largely wasted. Not entirely, however, since the making of them was, for me at least, both life-enhancing and a great deal of fun.

The book is dedicated to my granddaughter Naomi Mae Singer in the hope that someday she will love motion pictures as much as I do. I am grateful to her for that incentive, and to friends—some of whose names appear in the notes—who have generously given me help and encouragement throughout the many drafts of composition.

I. S.