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# American Film Melodrama: Griffith, Vidor, Minnelli

*Robert Lang*

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**Robert Lang : American Film Melodrama: Griffith, Vidor, Minnelli** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised American Film Melodrama: Griffith, Vidor, Minnelli:

0 of 4 people found the following review helpful. The object of its own description. By Samuel C. Much work remains to be done to rescue from academic dismissal on the grounds that it is "melodramatic" not just a significant body of film but of literature and music as well. But the author of this book-polemic ignores the aesthetic while politicizing the theoretical. His representation of gender roles in the "world at large," moreover, is no less Manichean than the narrative worlds that are the subject of his discourse. Women suffer under "patriarchy" (mainly because Lacanian theorists and the likes of Catherine McKinnon say so), and the oppressive power relations evident in cinematic melodrama should make us want to address life's gravest problems, which can all ultimately be traced to the rule of patriarchy. This book may prove useful to a few readers as an introduction to some major currents in 1980s French post-structuralist theory, but it falls far short in addressing the aesthetics or pleasures of the texts it examines let alone the challenging field of "music drama."

"The difficulty for men or the impossibility for women of living up to patriarchal society's ideal order is the very stuff of melodrama," writes Robert Lang in this daring work on what the author sees as the central genre of American film. Lang contends that the true melodrama is essentially an Oedipal drama--a dramatization of the ways in which we are all formed within a matrix of familial imperatives. As he interprets them, these imperatives are often crippling

reflections of patriarchy. Revealing how melodrama both submits to patriarchal ideology and confronts it, he believes that we can learn from it either how to be happier on its terms--which are the terms of life in Western society--or how to find our way out of the familial labyrinth. Lang traces the development of melodrama in the first fifty years of the American cinema by offering detailed interpretations of Griffith's *Way Down East*, *The Mother and the Law*, and *Broken Blossoms*; Vidor's *The Crowd*, *Stella Dallas*, and *Ruby Gentry*; and Minnelli's *Madame Bovary*, *Some Came Running*, and *Home from the Hill*. Drawing on the insights of Irigaray, Kristeva, Deleuze and Guattari, Peter Brooks, and several contemporary film theorists, he focuses on the psychoanalytic aspects of the films to bring us new insights into the way we live our lives.