

WHY NOT MELODRAMA?

In the 70's it has been

~~It is currently~~ unfashionable to refer to a movie you like as a "melodrama." Call it a "mystery suspense thriller" (as the ads for EYES OF LAURA MARS refer to this lurid melodrama); call it a "women's picture" - even this soft core put-down is preferable to calling a spade a spade. But as far as Hollywood ^{popular} language promotional and descriptive language is concerned, ~~the~~ melodrama is as ~~as~~ old-fashioned and dead as the western. The term is used only in a derogatory sense: "Sorry, but this is just too much of a melodrama..."

Random House defines melodrama as "a dramatic form in which exaggeration of effect and emotion is produced and plot or action is emphasized at the expense of characterization." By this definition we must realize that Hollywood produces ~~a lot of~~ ^{almost nothing} but melodramas - STAR WARS, JAWS II, THE DRIVER, THE SWARM, among the summer releases, but all under other ^{pseudo} ~~acronyms~~.

② Hollywood's fear of melodrama ~~seems~~
~~to be~~ is part of ~~the~~ the industry current
rush of pretentiousness. Hollywood
makes "realistic contemporary dramas",
which usually means that the director
has no style and is trying to hide
behind a claim of verisimilitude
to reality. ~~to~~ To my mind, the 70's are so
bleak that I can't understand anyone
wanting to reflect that reality, because
it is synonymous with boredom, frustration,
boredom, total lack of creative impulses.

Hollywood in the 70's has wanted to
be realistic only because it has forgotten
how to make good fantasy. And yet the
term "Hollywood" has always been synonymous
with fantasy. ~~Movie~~ ~~exists~~ The popularity
of movies is dependent upon ~~the~~ capturing
and manipulating mass fantasies. If
ever we needed melodrama it is in the
70's — a fact that Hollywood is just
now beginning to understand. But now,
where are the ~~few~~ directors with the
~~integrity~~ ~~to~~ stylistic integrity to make
a truly contemporary melodrama? To date,
we have only had copies of ~~the~~ ^{melodramatic} ~~stylistic~~
~~sty~~ visual styles from the 30's, 40's and 50's
applied to ~~nostalgic~~ ~~fantasy~~ ~~films~~.

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I look forward with great anticipation to Robert Mulligan's new film BLOOD BROTHER, (which will probably be released by the time you read this) because it has already been described in the press as an "unabashed melodrama". Mulligan is one of the few directors in town who is ~~not~~ ~~contemporary~~ and has an affinity to the exaggeration of effect and emotion, aimed at the 70's psyche. ^{Hitchcock's films had a purposeful} Perhaps because of this, his reputation has languished in this decade, but the few films he has managed to make are, to this reviewer, among the most acutely perceptive and disturbing expressions of the dismal horrors of the times. THE OTHER (1972) and THE NICKEL RIDE (1975) were both highly expressive, unflinching films, pertinent to, and damning of, the 70's - melodramas of the highest order.

unrealistic & thin

Hitchcock made melodramas almost exclusively; so did Griffith, ~~and~~ Douglas Sirk, ^{and Rose} ~~and~~ ^{Corman.} Their films were not realistic, and yet, in their calculated distortions, their formal sensibility, they cut closer to the bone of their times than any of the ~~more~~ socially realistic directors who were ^{usually} more widely heralded when it comes to acknowledging a director's perceptions of reality.

④. A ~~good~~ good director comments on reality in his exaggerations of effect and emotion. This, to me, is a higher function than simply reflecting reality ~~without~~ comment. If I want to see the ugliness of the streets, I can go out for a walk. ~~I don't~~ → under the pretense of existentialism.

I think Hollywood is ready to embrace the melodrama, ~~but~~ because unruliness and fantasy are again "in". But the industry ~~is~~ has little notion of what a high art melodrama can be. When they actually see those exaggerations of effect and emotion, they are frightened that it might not ring true - for they are still hung up on the liberal's intellectualistic insistence on realism.

Well realism sucks, and that's why the movies were born.

The second part of the Random House definition of melodrama suggests that "plot or action is emphasized at the expense of characterization." ~~The great directors,~~ Griffith. The deterministic nature of the a good melodramatic plot - the sense in which form, comments on content - can ~~not~~ reduce the freedom of a character.

⑤ A character is said to be "caught up" in a melodrama. The character struggles against the deterministic forces that the storyline forces ~~to~~ on his actions, and to a lesser extent sub; ~~1-)~~ DeLoach and Griffith countered this tendency by using "stars" whose personalities and idiosyncrasies compensated for the lack of freedom they had as ~~personalities~~ 3-dimensional characters. ~~A~~ Directors like Sam Fritzsche and Roger Corman, ^{however,} were less concerned with ~~the~~ the likeability of their characters, who became the victims of their wildly improbable deterministic storylines.

~~However much Steven Spielberg struggled~~

⑥ A realist 70's director ^{who Steven Spielberg} may struggle to make his characters likeable and 3-dimensional, but they are doomed to be overwhelmed by the mechanics of the such melodramas as Jaws and Close Encounters. The characters in STAR WARS are likeable only in their complete surrender to the 2-dimensionality demanded by the melodramatic form. Other directors - ^{who Robert Altman} sacrifice story for character, and their films never quite sell as contemporary mythology. Brian De Palma, on the other hand, revels in melodrama, its excesses and its extremes, leaving us little time to worry if his characters are personal or not.

⑥ melodrama involves hyping reality, making things bigger than life to better focus ~~life's~~ ^{life's} nature ~~to~~ ^{and} conflicts. The "melo." or melodrama is from the Greek for "song". Melodrama is drama tempered, ~~and~~ by song, seduction. Melodrama takes reality and re-grounds it in mythology. Horror movies are invariably melodramas. So-called women's pictures ~~are~~ ^{take} the drama of everyday life are usually melodramas - the stuff of life enraptured by ^{the} romance of song.

In its denigrated form, melodrama is thought to be hokey, over wrought, ^{mindlessly} sensation-full - like THE OTHER SIDE OF MIDNIGHT or the TV series WHEELS. For many liberals, melodrama and trash are synonymous. Since life itself is not bigger-than-life, it seems frivolous to so portray it. But then, liberals have a sense of the function of art in society (and once in a blue moon a movie still does qualify as art). Liberals dislike melodrama as much as reformed alcoholics ~~to~~ find it irresponsible for people to escape ~~from~~ reality via wine or drug. We are supposed to have sidon up beyond the need of melodramatics.