

# **A Woman's View: How Hollywood Spoke to Women, 1930-1960**

*Jeanine Basinger*

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Now, Voyager, Stella Dallas, Leave Her to Heaven, Imitation of Life, Mildred Pierce, Gilda...these are only a few of the hundreds of "women's films" that poured out of Hollywood during the thirties, forties, and fifties - films that not only delivered on their inherent promise to entertain but also opened a door to the Other, the Something Else, that audiences came to the theater yearning to see and feel, if only for a couple of hours. Films widely disparate in subject, sentiment, and technique, they nonetheless shared one dual purpose: to provide the audience (of women, primarily) with temporary liberation into a screen dream - of romance, sexuality, luxury, suffering, or even wickedness - and then send it home reminded of, reassured by, and resigned to the fact that no matter what else she might do, a woman's most important job was...to be a woman. Now, with boundless knowledge and infectious enthusiasm, Jeanine Basinger illuminates the various surprising and subversive ways in which women's films delivered their message. Basinger examines dozens of films, exploring the seemingly intractable contradictions at the convoluted heart of the woman's genre - among them, the dilemma of the strong and glamorous woman who cedes her power when she feels it threatening her personal happiness, and the self-abnegating woman whose selflessness is not always as "noble" as it appears. Basinger looks at the stars who played these women (Kay Francis, Barbara Stanwyck, Joan Crawford, Bette Davis, Rosalind Russell, Susan Hayward, Myrna Loy, and a host of others) and helps us understand the qualities - the right off-screen personae, the right on-screen attitudes, the right faces, the right figures for carrying the right clothes - that made them personify the woman's film and equipped them to make believable drama or comedy out of the crackpot plots, the conflicting ideas, and the exaggerations of real behavior that characterize these movies. In each of the films the author discuss

## **A Woman's View: How Hollywood Spoke to Women, 1930-1960 Details**

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# **From Reader Review A Woman's View: How Hollywood Spoke to Women, 1930-1960 for online ebook**

## **Benjamin says**

Basinger examines the woman's film, a popular genre of the 1930s to 1950s easily dismissed by critics and film historians. She lucidly investigates the duality of these films, which showed women how their life could be different, more independent, while they reinforced traditional norms and expectations at the same time. She dedicates one of her detailed analyses to the (in my opinion) woman's film to end all woman's films: Now, Voyager!

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## **Julie Barrett says**

While I did enjoy this book on the whole, it could have been much more tightly edited. It was a 500 page book that could have been 250 pages. At times I felt like I was reading a textbook for class. A cool class but nevertheless a class. I felt like the author was beating the reader over the head with examples. So many examples! I understand. You do a lot of research and want to include it all because it's just all so interesting to you. After a while, however, my eyes started to glaze over at yet another 4-5 page summary of a movie. Yet the author did not include a list at the end of the book of all the movies she discussed. I would have appreciated that. She had an appendix & a bibliography but no cohesive list of all the movies discussed. I had to keep a running list of all the movies I want to see. It would have been convenient if there had been a master list that I could have checked off names of movies worth seeing. Oh well. I'm also not sure how many of the movies I'll be able to find on DVD. I'm gonna try, though!

I enjoyed the author's casual writing style. She could be very funny discussing scenes of movies. It made me wish I could watch some of them with her. She seems like a real hoot.

I liked how she divided the book into (looooong) chapters on Men, Marriage & Motherhood(the big three) as well as chapters on the actresses most identified with women's films, the settings of the movies, and the fashion. Oh, and a chapter on the preponderance of twins in these movies. Good twin! Evil twin! Ah, the duality of women!

This is an amazingly thorough and deep book about women's films of the 30's - 60's. As someone who adores that period in film, this book held my interest. It's certainly not for the casual fan. I enjoyed reading about some of my favorite movies (especially pre-code films like Babyface and Female) and also learning about new ones that sound great. I was surprised with myself that I had seen so many of the movies mentioned. I guess it adds up over time. I would have given it 4 stars if it hadn't been so longwinded at times.

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## **Greta says**

Fascinating and entertaining description of women's pictures, included themes and stars. One of the very best

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## **Leslie says**

Basinger is a very appealing writer. I laughed out loud every few pages while reading this book. She has consistently interesting things to say about the movies she discusses. She acknowledges that many of these movies have very silly plots and that some are downright bad, but looks below the surface to see why these films work as they do and what they said to their viewers, especially female viewers. She's great on subtext and ambiguity, which a lot of these films have in spades.

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## **Judy says**

This is an enormously long book, packed with details of an overwhelming array of 1930s, 40s and 50s films of the genre described as "women's emotion pictures". Jeanine Basinger has seen literally hundreds, and draws out a number of themes and plot components, from fashion and glamour to marriage and motherhood. She argues convincingly that the films at once uphold and challenge society's norms. If most of a film shows a woman struggling to be independent and build a career, then this can't all be cancelled out by a soft-focus ending where she falls into a man's arms.

Long as the book is, at times I wanted more - for instance, more details about the directors who made these movies and the impact of the Hays Code. But I found it all very readable, witty and interesting, and am now keen to see even more of the movies from this period starring actresses like Bette Davis and Joan Crawford.

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## **Carrie says**

Excellent source for understanding the images of women presented on screen, particularly during the postwar era. A vital thesis resource for me that turned out to be not only informative but enjoyable.

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## **Lucia Macro says**

Comprehensive book of women's role in Hollywood during its Golden Age. I can't help it, I love this book.

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## **Creolecat says**

My all-time favorite book on women in cinema.

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## **Kate says**

Excellent book on the way women have been portrayed in the movies. Some quite interesting footnotes to movies that were really popular and why they ended up the way they did. It is a long read almost 600 pages

but if you love the movies and like reading the background to their making especially those in the early years before the woman's movement this is the book for you.

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### **Yasmin says**

Quite a heavy book but it was a sort of interesting read in the type of movies there were between the 30s and 60s. However, I can't actually see that there were women in the audience that would watch movies and go home and either reaffirm the way they lived or altered it in some way because a movie suggested it. My grandmother who was alive in this period watched movies to escape her day to day life and to enjoy the story (stories) not because it personally spoke to her or gave her any messages about how she was as a woman or was seen to be. In fact because of how most of the movies did make women out to be in them I can only say that only two movies that scraped under the wire of a negative view of women in society. At Sword's Point and Frenchman's Creek. Of course not every film of those decades was discussed so that the movies that weren't reviewed may not be so negative of women's lives. All though most of the movies portrayals were negative for women viewers there were some important social messages, albiet it would be briefly as movies don't generally run too much over and hour. I think the title may have been more accurate to be How Hollywood Saw Women, even though quite a few times there were women directors, they didn't get much of a mention in this book.

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### **Simon says**

Hugely enjoyable read, with the caveat that it probably helps to be familiar with the performers that Basinger discusses. The films are more widely available now than when she wrote, thanks to TCM. If you haven't seen them (I hadn't seen most of the pre-Code stuff), then you can rely upon Basinger's immensely erudite and witty discussions. She has a sharp eye for the absurd (the book is worth reading for the chapter on Kay Francis' career alone), but also razor-sharp insights into the implications of these movies for American female self-identity during the mid-20th century and beyond. She excels in this book at taking the trees and turning them into forests.

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### **Nancy Loe says**

Basinger is simply brilliant in this book, which updates feminist theory and applies it to classic American films. While I love Popcorn Venus, it does tend toward a victimized view of women, while Basinger's book is more sophisticated – and credits women moviegoers of the time as more sophisticated as well.

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### **Kerry says**

A sophisticated and thorough look at women's films in Old Hollywood, what messages they conveyed, and what the viewers got out of watching them. The author certainly knows her stuff, and her detail-oriented approach encourages more careful viewing of films that, at first glance, seem empty-headed at best or insulting to women at worst. The book also offers up suggestions for readers looking for interesting old movies to watch, making their content more meaningful and intriguing. While it might be argued that the

book is a bit pedantic in its comprehensiveness, the depth of the examinations into the films discussed is both fascinating and--if you like the topic enough--absorbing.

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## **foundfoundfound says**

the natural, unself-conscious basinger genuinely loves these movies (& knows them better than anybody). but basinger's bolshie feminism is always supervening, making heavy weather of the lightest entertainments. movies are showbiz, not 'praxis'.

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## **Jesse says**

A big brick of a book. For some 500 rather graceless pages Basinger stomps from film synopsis to film synopsis with a smattering of analysis (and a lot of bullet-point lists) scattered between, presenting the often contradictory ways studio-era Hollywood films presented women and "women's problems." Taking full advantage of her far-reaching knowledge of films, Basinger presents a lot of compelling evidence and examples for her loosely sketched themes but unfortunately fails to do much with it. Still, it often makes for interesting reading, and I managed to soldier through right to the end, and I suppose that counts for something.

*"It is obvious that seeds of unrest, even rebellion, were planted in some female minds by the evidence they saw on-screen, despite the conventional endings that turn a story into a cautionary tale."*

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