



# Levinas and the Cinema of Redemption: Time, Ethics, and the Feminine (Film and Culture Series)

By Sam B. Girgus

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**Levinas and the Cinema of Redemption: Time, Ethics, and the Feminine (Film and Culture Series)** By Sam B. Girgus

In his philosophy of ethics and time, Emmanuel Levinas highlighted the tension that exists between the "ontological adventure" of immediate experience and the "ethical adventure" of redemptive relationships-associations in which absolute responsibility engenders a transcendence of being and self.

In an original commingling of philosophy and cinema study, Sam B. Girgus applies Levinas's ethics to a variety of international films. His efforts point to a transnational pattern he terms the "cinema of redemption" that portrays the struggle to connect to others in redeeming ways. Girgus not only reveals the power of these films to articulate the crisis between ontological identity and ethical subjectivity. He also locates time and ethics within the structure and content of film itself. Drawing on the work of Luce Irigaray, Tina Chanter, Kelly Oliver, and Ewa Ziarek, Girgus reconsiders Levinas and his relationship to film, engaging with a feminist focus on the sexualized female body. Girgus offers fresh readings of films from several decades and cultures, including Frank Capra's *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939), Federico Fellini's *La dolce vita* (1959), Michelangelo Antonioni's *L'avventura* (1960), John Huston's *The Misfits* (1961), and Philip Kaufman's *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (1988).

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

Girgus's book offers fresh, intriguing insights.

(*Choice*)

#### Review

Sam B. Girgus does what few scholars adopting an interdisciplinary approach achieve: he closely and clearly traces the inextricable relationship involving form, content, and meaning. I can't commend Girgus enough for his ability to unearth the most profound and affecting insights within the films he discusses. His readings are models of the very best in film analysis. Truly an outstanding achievement.

(Cynthia Lucia, Rider University)

Sam B. Girgus daringly and deftly presses the case for cinema's ultimate philosophical consequences. He even presses the case for an ethics that goes beyond philosophy. We may believe we are familiar with the classic Hollywood and European art films we love, but Girgus makes us take another look, a long Levinian look that finally faces up to the faces on the screen. When we then look away, we realize we have found something more about the films, about Levinas, and about the limitations of our viewing of films and our living of life. Nothing could be healthier.

(Dudley Andrew, R. Selden Rose Professor of Film and Comparative Literature, Yale University)

Appropriating Levinas's ethics of transcendence, Sam B. Girgus inaugurates a new direction for film studies. His particularly welcome focus on time and the feminine opens up the cinema of redemption in crucially important ways. Highlighting the infinite demand the other makes on us as singular beings, thinking through the way time is out of joint or unhinged by trauma, and taking on board feminist critiques of Levinas, Girgus sets a very high standard for anyone wishing to follow in his footsteps.

(Tina Chanter, DePaul University)

#### About the Author

Sam B. Girgus is professor of English at Vanderbilt University and author of *Hollywood Renaissance: The Cinema of Democracy in the Era of Ford, Capra, and Kazan*; *The Films of Woody Allen: America on Film: Modernism, Documentary, and a Changing America*; *Desire and the Political Unconscious in American Literature: Eros and Ideology*; *The New Covenant: Jewish Writers and the American Idea*; and *The Law of the Heart: Individualism and the Modern Self in American Literature*. A recipient of the Rockefeller Humanities Fellowship and other scholarly and teaching awards, he has lectured and taught extensively in universities throughout America and the world.

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