



# From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies

By Molly Haskell

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**From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies** By Molly Haskell

For this edition of her classic study of the feminine role in film, Molly Haskell has written a new chapter addressing recent developments in the appearance and perception of women in the movies.

"An incisive, exceedingly thoughtful look at the distorted lens through which Hollywood has historically viewed women. It is a valuable contribution not just of film criticism but to a society in which the vital role of women is just beginning to emerge."—*Christian Science Monitor*

"Haskell is interested in women—how they are used in movies, how they use movies, and how the parts they play function as projections and verifications of our myths about women's lot and woman's psyche and even, lately, women's lib."—Jane Kramer, *Village Voice*

"In examining the goddesses worshipped by an entire nation, Molly Haskell reveals a good deal about our national character and our most cherished sexual myths. . . . Concerned with the deeply ingrained belief of women's inferiority, she analyzes movies as a social product as well as a social arbiter, and she effectively demonstrates how women are encouraged to impose limitations on themselves by fashioning those selves after flickering shadows in a darkened auditorium—sexual creatures who possess neither ability nor ambition beyond their bodies. . . . Both as an examination of film and as sociology, *From Reverence to Rape* is excellent."—Harriet Kriegel, *The Nation*

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### Editorial Review

#### Amazon.com Review

Biting, brilliant, and marvelously witty, *From Reverence to Rape* is the first and the last word on women in the movies--perhaps the best book ever written on the subject. Most feminist film critics produce work that conforms to the academic discipline of cultural studies. Haskell's groundbreaking statement (first published in 1974 but with an added chapter that updates her theme through the 1980s) is accessible, serious, and great fun because its primary source is Hollywood cinema itself. Haskell draws on her amazing knowledge and understanding of American film to comment witheringly upon the ways producers, directors, and critics from the 1920s and onward have treated women. Still, within the attack her passionate love of films and the women who appear in them shines through. For example, in a lovely passage on Greta Garbo, Haskell claims that the actress's appeal, "however provocatively she might array herself, was romantic rather than sexual, and that is the reason women liked her. Her spirit leaped first and her body, in total exquisite accord, leaped after. She yearned not for pleasure in bed but for love in eternity."

Appreciations with this much sensitivity and vigor are as hard to find as a critic who can imaginatively process a lifetime of movie-watching experiences. Moreover, Haskell discusses the larger social significance of the male cinema and male criticism she often finds so infantile. At one point, despairing over critics who either ignore actresses or transform them into love objects, Haskell bemoans the critics' immaturity as "one of the more common and less endearing manifestations of the eternal adolescence that hangs on the American male--who, by the time he is mature enough to appreciate a woman, is almost ready to retire from the arena. There are a few good years in which he can both appreciate and operate, but not enough (particularly with the current defections from heterosexuality) to satisfy the female population, which may be why more and more women are turning to each other, or to themselves." This fine book, as loving and funny as it is angry, is a must for movie fans as well as anyone interested in gender issues. --*Raphael Shargel*

#### Review

My favorite movie when I was growing up was the *Wizard of Oz*. It was full of high adventure, from talking apple trees and flying monkeys, to a shimmering Emerald City to which Dorothy was offered the queenship. She decided, however, that there was no place like home and she really needed to be there by supertime. Excuse me? Well, actually Hollywood decided that for Dorothy. According to Molly Haskell's *From Reverence to Rape* this is typical for women in Hollywood films, from the 1920s when women could do no wrong provided they had a man watching over them, to the 1980s where women in the movies began to pay the price for discovering there were other places besides home. Molly illustrates how Hollywood typecast women both within and outside movies, infusing these images into society. While the madonna and the whore might appear to be the only two roles Hollywood allowed women, this book explains the subtle ways in which women used film to go beyond those roles. -- *From The WomanSource Catalog & Review: Tools for Connecting the Community for Women; review by Amy Fletcher*

#### From the Back Cover

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