



Cinematic Mythmaking: Philosophy in Film (The Irving Singer Library)

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Film is the supreme medium for mythmaking. The gods and heroes of mythology are both larger than life and deeply human; they teach us about the world, and they tell us a good story. Similarly, our experience of film is both distant and intimate. Cinematic techniques -- panning, tracking, zooming, and the other tools in the filmmaker's toolbox -- create a world that is unlike reality and yet realistic at the same time. We are passive spectators, but we also have a personal relationship with the images we are seeing. In *Cinematic Mythmaking*, Irving Singer explores the hidden and overt use of myth in various films and, in general, the philosophical elements of a film's meaning. Mythological themes, Singer writes, perform a crucial role in cinematic art and even philosophy itself. Singer incisively disentangles the strands of different myths in the films he discusses. He finds in Preston Sturges's *The Lady Eve* that Barbara Stanwyck's character is not just the biblical Eve but a liberated woman of our times; Eliza Doolittle in the filmed versions of Shaw's *Pygmalion* is not just a statue brought to life but instead a heroic woman who must survive her own dark night of the soul. The protagonist of William Wyler's *The Heiress* and Anieszka Holland's *Washington Square* is both suffering Dido and an awakened Amazon. Singer reads Cocteau's films -- including *La Belle et la Bête*, *Orphée*, and *The Testament of Orpheus* -- as uniquely mythological cinematic poetry. He compares Kubrickean and Homeric epics and analyzes in depth the self-referential mythmaking of Federico Fellini in many of his movies, including *8½*. The aesthetic and probing inventiveness in film, Singer shows us, restores and revives for audiences in the twenty-first century myths of creation, of the questing hero, and of ideals -- both secular and religious -- that have had enormous significance throughout the human search for love and meaning in life.

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