

Interview with Christine Gledhill

Scott Loren and Jörg Metelmann

Scott Loren/Jörg Metelmann:

Twenty-five years ago, you described melodrama as a “cultural category.” Over the past two decades, work in melodrama studies seems to have confirmed this assertion. How would you qualify your description now, not only in response to recent developments in melodrama studies, but also in relation to the current political and cultural climate?

Christine Gledhill:

I suppose I would say that all aesthetic practices have a cultural dimension to them. They have their own histories, situated within their cultural formations. I was interested in melodrama as a mental framework that went beyond simply a dramatic practice in the theater and became a way of seeing how the world worked. Marx's *Das Kapital* and Freud's psychoanalysis have suggested to several critics the polarized conflicts of melodrama – a moral polarization that of course has come back since 9/11 with the war on terror. And I suppose it is melodrama as a mode of imagining, of thinking, which links melodrama to the concerns of the political sociologist. But a few years ago, when I was writing a piece about genre and trying to think through the relation between genre and melodrama as cross-generic mode, I was confronted by the question: what do we mean when we invoke “melodrama”? And that led me into thinking how melodrama entered the film studies field and what it has meant as a cultural category, critically speaking. It seems to me that you could see its cultural function shifting across decades; that whereas it had initially contributed to creating a broad-based popular audience in nineteenth-century France and England, by the end of the nineteenth century it had the function of dividing audiences. It is extraordinary that, except as a taken-for-granted pejorative, “melodrama” did not appear in the vocabulary of film studies until, I suppose, the 1970s. So there is a long, long period of film history in which we could not think about melodrama as a serious category. It came into film studies via Sirk and the search for progressive film-making, and then got taken in a feminist direction through the importance of family melodrama for female audiences. Both of these moves, I think, made it difficult to reach a full understanding of melodrama. And then it was reclaimed for the early adventure serials and crime melodramas (see Steve Neale, Ben Singer and Rick Altman),

but not applied to contemporary action movies. So it continues to divide critical opinion, to divide audiences and to pull them together around particular melodramatic conjunctures. So in this sense it has performed very interesting cultural work.

We like the idea of melodrama as something that does cultural work. Melodrama as a category-transcending genre or meta-genre already implies that it has a special socio-cultural status. It is one of these overarching frameworks that have the capacity to classify and contextualize diverse genres, but also run the danger of becoming too inclusive. You suggest that it has been worked with or revised perhaps too extensively, which brings up the notion of the protean. In theory on melodrama over the past four decades, melodrama's protean character has repeatedly been stressed, not only regarding the generic styles it might subsume, but also the political discourses with which it engages. If you will permit us to push the point, we are wondering where melodrama is currently most relevant. If we have been through psychoanalytical discourses, and gone through, quite fruitfully gone through, a variety of gender discourses, do you have a sense of where we might be landing with melodrama now?

I think why everyone wants to talk about melodrama now is something to do with the access it gives to emotion and aesthetic affect. I see this connection coming up in the increasing number of conference calls on affect or on melodrama, and it is one I personally feel is important. It feeds into the issue of personalization, which is central to melodrama and, I think, is now crucial. I first came to film studies during the Neo-Marxist period when we were taught to be very suspicious of humanism and aesthetics. There were all those conferences and volumes titled *Aesthetics and Politics*, and really this was about aesthetics as a kind of trap, a disguise, a means by which bourgeois politics infiltrated art and media, so aesthetics really meant aestheticization. But I have increasingly come to think that we cannot escape either the individual or that dimension of experience that art speaks to in a broad sense. I'd like to see art as one of Louis Althusser's semiautonomous spheres, determined in the last instance. In this respect, I think melodrama enables us to avoid collapsing aesthetics into politics, to avoid displacing one into the other. If we shift away from that notion of displacement we have the potential to understand how social forces and economic-political forces actually get realized in human actions, materialized into action through psychically-driven, personally-motivated performance and practice. I am still looking for the vocabulary to conceptualize the necessary cathexis between social, economic and motivating desire. But melodrama helps

us because it is about that two-way process; it makes us feel the unseen but forceful discursive and institutional pressure on the human being, through which social relations materialize as personalized actions between individuals. This is not to suggest that we are simply free individuals. Rather, cathexis between social-political forces and individual psychical investments has become crucial to understanding action in the public sphere, so that what appears to be private has large public consequences. Melodrama dramatizes this process in a high-octane way because it looks for the emotional core at the heart of an action, where social and psychical meet; then it orchestrates plotting that will force the consequences into public view. So this is a process of circular transference between public and personal and back again, rather than a one-way displacement of the public into the personal. But if melodrama captures the short-circuits and consequences of this conjunction, it does not necessarily do so in a way that enables us to translate the process into specific political situations or ideological formulae. So I think what melodrama gives us is often indirect. It is not going to give us meanings *about* a particular social content – which is how I think we used to attempt to translate films back into a social-ideological core.

Can we unpack what you suggest here a bit further with an additional question? On the one hand, there is the notion of not aiming at specific ideological or political content, but rather stressing the importance of the personal. If we understand you correctly, shifting the focus to a personal or inner world returns us to the notion of melodrama as striving to make something hidden visible.

Yes, I like that, as long as we understand that the experience of a personal or inner world is not autonomous but shaped in culture.

So we are still focusing on the centrality of the individual. Peter Brooks famously marked the rise of melodrama as accompanying the rise of Western democracy in the aftermath of the French Revolution. Melodrama becomes symptomatic of the cultural turn toward the individual's experience in and of modernity, and at the same time validates this experience by dramatically aestheticizing it. In your opinion, the centrality of individual experience – in particular, the internal process of making sense of one's individual experiences – has not only persisted in melodrama, but has even gained in relevance?

I think I'd say we need to recognize the way art provides an aesthetic outlet for emotional apprehension and that this probably has gained in relevance, because I think the notion of displacement focuses attention on the social

that is displaced but exists somewhere else outside the work. And in a way, that becomes extremely predictable; once you have the method of translation, it is fairly easy to do. I always end up thinking, well, you have told me what it's displacing, disguising, aestheticizing, what it's not doing; but you haven't actually told me what it *is* doing, you are not telling me about where it reaches its audience. I think that we have to ask what it is that melodrama *does* rather than what it displaces. But to rethink the nature of personalization and the role of the individual is not about free-floating or autonomous individuals. If social forces and conflicts are relayed through the energies of individual actors, energies that coalesce with social pressures or are resistant, we need ways of conceptualizing how such transactions drive social movement and change.

You've noted the recent trend of theorizing melodrama through the lens of affect following the so-called "emotional turn." Following Gilles Deleuze, Brian Massumi proposes a fundamental element of affect theory that would appear to be contradictory to melodrama's concern with the individual: namely, that affect is not about the personal, nor the individual, but about processes of desubjectivation. As such it is concerned not with subject formation, but with decentering (discourses on) the subject. How would you relate melodrama to this particular strand of thought? And where do you see the most potential for interaction between melodrama and theories of emotions?

Melodrama is not Deleuzean. But for de-subjectified "affect" to create social effects requires its channeling into the action/performance of human agents. I think there is another route into emotions via cultural studies, which comes from Deidre Pribram's work on emotion. Her argument, drawing on Sarah Ahmed and others, is that although we think of emotion as inward and arising from individual psychology, it is socially and culturally directed to its objects and named. Pribram's argument interests me in the way it suggests a circulation between social and emotional being. If you go back to, say, morality plays, you have got emotions that are figured allegorically, you know, avarice, vice, virtue, envy, vanity: these are very clearly identified emotions, socially designated, given physical personality types and carrying moral status. Nineteenth-century melodrama bears traces of that process; figures have names that imply their moral identities, which in turn imply their behavior to others; and even contemporary films choose names that seem to identify a protagonist's moral and affective quality. Melodrama is able to inhabit whatever arena of thinking, feeling or knowledge we've got. For example, popularization of Freudian psychoanalysis identifies new

emotions and conflicts – giving us the psychologically realist character whom we now recognize as truer than, say, allegorical figures of avarice or greed. However, it might be said, those emotions are again being named in relation to bankers – you could almost just say “banker” and you get the allegory of greed!

So I think the process of privatization and personalization that Thomas Elsaesser describes in his founding piece of 1972 marks processes of cultural and aesthetic change in the field of emotions: partly a change in what is culturally recognized, partly a change of form where the emotional identities are expressed through personalized relationships rather than as allegorized moral qualities. Peter Brooks provides us with notions of loyalty, betrayal, duty, honor, all of which are about how human beings relate to each other, social but also personal emotions; then psychoanalysis expands the range of available emotions and gives us different stories about where they come from. So the issue is partly about how the social and the emotional become identified and inter-related in successive cultural frameworks, any of which melodrama can inhabit. So, if feminism produces new concepts of sexism and patriarchy, heterosexual relationships offer a new source of melodramatic moral investment, demand and conflict; in some forms, masculinity or femininity – the psyche itself – can be figured as a site of danger, of evil. So social forces are channeled through and into personalized interactions as sites of melodramatic antagonism and opposition that may not have been available in earlier times. Such interactions are where the social plays out, not displacements of what is going on in a social or political sphere established somewhere else. Contrariwise, the emotions that are playing out in the heterosexual or personal encounter have been shaped and named in the social, and in conflicts of the political public sphere we see these personalized emotional forces driving events.

Beyond aesthetic strategies, victimhood has always been the most prominent component of the melodramatic mode. What, in your opinion, has changed in the semantics and functionality of the victim position over time?

I have been quite puzzled about this, because I do not entirely agree: I think the villain is also important to the effects of melodrama. While reading Linda Williams's work, I became aware that she was emphasizing suffering and the victim and that the villain hardly figures. I thought what she is identifying is the specific historical cultural formation of melodrama in America, to which victimhood is central. I understand this in the context of a country that is established on the basis of equality and escape from the

oppressions of Old Europe, but then accumulates its wealth and its power on the basis of slavery. American melodrama has a real ideological problem: it wants to regain its founding promise of a paradise on earth, and so suffering becomes extremely vital to regaining that lost innocence. But Peter Brooks, who wants to delineate melodrama in relation to the French Revolution, certainly thinks that the villain is central, that the villain drives the plot. It is the villain who makes things exciting. I think what the villain does is to tap into the unthinkable, bringing it to the surface. That is what's exciting about melodrama: the villain breaks open the arena of moral certitudes, he challenges what is presumed to be the ethos by which we live; he challenges the moral order; he embodies the danger to it. In this respect, he's iconoclastic. And I think that is partly what makes melodrama, what makes you sit at the edge of your seat. There is a delight when Alan Rickman in *DIE HARD* first enters with this little prayer book and hitches his shoulder in this wonderfully villainous way. We know where we are. The fact that he is willing to break just about every code of human decency opens up the possibility of rethinking what we mean by virtue; it stops virtue becoming routine, a norm, it makes virtue oppositional, it forces virtue to declare itself. I suspect you cannot have a productive use of victimization, of suffering without that kind of call from somewhere else. I remember re-reading *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in the light of its importance to Linda Williams's work, and thinking that Simon Legree is actually a very interesting figure, a complex and significant villain. Against the current notion of the public sphere as full of suffering, we need to remember it is also full of tyrants and powerful people operating on the verge of madness. It is true perhaps that the TV talk show focuses only on the victim, siphoning off and indulging in pathos; that television's public sphere is too polite – television being perhaps too dependent on governmental license and/or corporate sponsorship – to acknowledge or name the perpetrators among us. What melodrama, as an aesthetic, does is to bring victim and perpetrator into confrontation, so stopping the world simply becoming a place of needless suffering. The perpetrator makes suffering and what it stands for meaningful. In the end it is an aesthetic experience, not a political program. And if only one side is exercised – villainy without the resistant victim, victimhood without recognition of the perpetrator – we possibly have bad melodrama.

But then I stopped watching television; I stopped watching the reality shows and the kind of confessional shows that are partly fueling Thomas Elsaesser's thinking about twenty-first-century melodrama, identifying a shift from suffering as the test of virtue to the notion that suffering in itself constitutes virtue. In terms of cinema, however, we still have melodrama's

action genres and it is largely in action and horror films that we find the explicit villains. However, thinking back to nineteenth-century villainy – I've just been re-reading Douglas Jerrold's *The Rent Day*,¹ where we find at the end of the play that the villains themselves have been victims in the past. So after a series of unthinkable cruel, malicious, seemingly motiveless acts, at the end, when the villain is exposed, it often emerges that there has been something in the villain's past which has produced the greed or desire for revenge – eliciting the cry, "revenge is my name" – because of something that was done to a parent or to a child in the past but that was unknown to everyone else, including the audience.

Are you suggesting that in film we are increasingly seeing the psychologization of the villain? The villain also has an inner world, has also suffered damage and loss, thus becoming what he or she is.

Well, not an inner world in the sense of psychological realism, but an internalization of a social force as it impacts on an individual's life and becomes externalized along emotionalized routes – for example the villain's psychologized malevolence – as revenge, grievance, drive for power. What Brooks calls "the melodrama of psychology" (as opposed to the psychology of melodrama) appears most clearly in the Hollywood family melodrama, the 1940s-1950s subgenre that Thomas Elsaesser wrote about, which for a long time and in many cases still stands for the totality of melodrama in the cinema. As Laura Mulvey argues, the family melodrama split along gender lines: the female-oriented form – for example, the maternal sacrifice melodrama – emphasizes the dimension of sentimental pathos, tears and suffering (though there are debates about how to assess the emotional dynamic of these films), while the male-focused family melodrama of the 1950s redefined the villain as the tortured self-destructive anti-hero. In these melodramas villainy is located in a social system that distorts human capacities and produces tragic or happy-sad outcomes – for instance, *WRITTEN ON THE WIND* or *HOME FROM THE HILL*.

We don't get a familial background there? So that is not the point you are making?

All I mean is that the family melodrama is where you get overbearing patriarchs. And here it is patriarchy that becomes the source of the evil, the corrosive personality, whether male or female. That is a site of psychologizing melodrama. We find it more strongly in the family melodrama than in the action film. But I still think action movies often carry the patriarchal,

heterosexist burden. I am thinking about my recent experience at a melodrama conference here in New York, where I showed a clip from *THE LONG KISS GOODNIGHT*, the water torture sequence, and was challenged as to why, with its “cardboard” villains and focus on violent action, I considered this melodrama. Actually the jibes and smirks of the film’s two villains capture the language of gender and heterosexist antagonism, and misogyny constitutes the core villainy. They may not be psychologically or politically motivated, but their characterization as villains draws on cultural gender and sexual reference in terms which, as feminists, we recognize as a social force field of misogynist feeling that generates opposition – and which is countered in the film’s melodramatic fantasy by its amnesiac heroine, who regains sufficient memory of her past CIA-trained identity to overcome her current victimhood. No tears, but jubilation!

You appear to be doing for the villain what you’ve done for melodrama previously: to ask what its function is, no? Instead of asking what the victim is doing, what his or her function is, you redirect the question toward the villain. This led us immediately to think of the lesson of Antigone. With Antigone, you have to transgress; this makes the law evident, makes it “legible” and functional. You were taking a more detailed line, though, not generalizing the villain’s function as implicitly upholding the law, but historicizing it. So your point is that the villain helps us to articulate normative perspectives on virtue at any historic moment in a given cultural context.

Yes. That takes the thought forward, yes. I would agree with that.

To return to the question of psychologizing the villain: it seems everyone, including villains, has become a victim. We completely agree with you on this point. It is not only evinced in cinema and popular culture, but also in institutions like the justice system. To take a rather obvious point of contrast, think of the role phrenology once played in criminology, where criminal behavior could be rationalized through biological factors. Not only do we now live in a psychologized society, where criminal behavior is contextualized in relation to psychological profiles, but we also live in a melodramatized society, where we tend to displace the culpability of a villain onto some formative experiences of loss and suffering that engender psychological profiles.

I am not saying that our interest in the villain lies in his or her victimhood, although this certainly can happen. Embodied villainy allows us to see how social forces work through the corrosive power of malign personality.

*There appears to be a good deal of consensus that melodrama itself has become more complex: for example, with the obfuscation of clear (Manichaean) subject positions, with institutional evil as an embodiment of villainy, or the massive extensions in narrative duration (as in Linda Williams's approach to the HBO series *The Wire* as a "mega-melodrama"). What, in your estimation, might the core of melodrama be defined by, if not Manichaeism, clear-cut moral positions and temporal compression?*

I don't entirely agree with the premises of the question. Melodramas can be good or bad, and the good ones have always been complex – but complex perhaps in ways we don't now recognize, because nineteenth-century melodramas deal in public registers and discourses, even if carried in individuated modes of behavior. The moral field can be very complex, but the plotting will still work to produce clarification – as Peter Brooks argues of Balzac and Henry James. However, it seems today that critics assume that emotional intensity means melodrama irrespective of the issue of ethical conflicts. But I think we need to beware of equating melodrama with emotion or emotional intensity *per se*, as if other modes – realism or romance – don't or can't deal in emotion. Melodramatic emotion works to certain ends and is produced by a certain organization of plotting and *mise-en-scène*. I have, for example, had arguments about whether melodrama is the appropriate term to understand Indian cinema, which draws on longstanding traditions that don't come out of the same historical context and imperatives of melodrama. Nevertheless, I concede that when practices are developed in one cultural context and then circulate in another, they are absorbed into their host cultures to which they offer resources: for example, melodrama travels into Indian popular culture and eventually cinema, through theatrical companies traveling along the routes of colonialism and later through imported Hollywood films. Peter Brooks set out to investigate how nineteenth-century melodrama worked in order to explain the ethical framework of Balzac and Henry James. He claims there is something going on in the moral dimension of those works that you could only identify through the lens of melodrama. So he turned to the popular base of melodramatic theatrical culture as an explanatory tool. I don't think he is claiming that Henry James's work *is* melodrama, but that melodrama can show us what Henry James is aiming for and that there is something shared between their perspectives.

I think melodrama *becomes* such a protean form because historically it has generated such a complexity of sub-genres and practices in the interests of serving different audiences – of creating the first mass audience through

market-led production and multiple companies, traveling theatrical circuits in much the same way that the film industry does today. It has therefore developed a diversity of strategies for different purposes and different audiences; it can do so many different things. Trying to define melodrama is practically impossible; there is no neat definition. But the question is not really what melodrama *is*, but what it *does*. And I suppose that comes back to your point about the function of the villain, that melodrama performs aesthetic, epistemological procedures.

I would also to some extent question your second point about melodrama's time compression and *The Wire*. Theatrical and film melodrama may be time-compressed (although 1950s family melodramas and Indian melodramas cross generations and are very long), but in print form melodrama has always been able to extend across serial formats. If you look back to the nineteenth century, you have Eugène Sue's *The Mysteries of Paris* serialized in ninety parts and imitated by G. M. Reynolds as *The Mysteries of London*; or William Ainsworth's *Jack Sheppard*, not to mention Dickens's serialized novels. Melodrama has always been able to function across far-flung spaces and to extend over centuries – as with *The Wandering Jew* and *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Serialization also emerges from the fact that the villain will always come back. In horror films, you think the monster is destroyed but suddenly it's back. Similarly, the underlying systems embodied by the villains return. So at the end of *The Rent Day*, grandfather's armchair is smashed and suddenly his hidden savings fall out, they can pay the rent and are saved. But then one of the cast comes downstage and warns the audience to "remember the next rent day." So there is a circularity to events; you are never done with melodrama, so there is no reason why it can't go on in a serial format or be "mega." It always had mega-ambitions.

Would you agree with the thesis that melodrama might be considered a form of modernism if the latter is to be understood as aesthetic articulations that respond to and attempt to process the challenges of modernity?

In *Home Is Where the Heart Is* I contrasted three aesthetic trajectories: realism, which thinks it can understand the world through rational means; modernism, where there is no reality beyond the means of its construction, so the quest is, in Godard's terms, to show "the reality of the reflection," to reveal reflexively the work's own mechanisms and processes of construction; and then melodrama, which straddles the two, implicitly recognizing the void while insisting on significance, based on the ethics of justice.² That was a very Brooksonian definition.

I guess the perception of the void, of instability and reversibility, is a perception or experience of modernity. But there is also this sense of home where we've come from and we want to get back to: a space of innocence, as Brooks would say, or an atavism that got melodrama identified as old-fashioned. Critically speaking, melodrama languished all those years, regarded as a Victorian aesthetic constructing a simplistic kind of reality, using simplistic aesthetic strategies. And then, suddenly, we see that those strategies are not simplistic at all. And if you start reading those plays and understand how they were performed and staged, they prove to be neither simplistic nor illiterate, and their dialogue can be highly important, intermeshed with musical underscoring and visual staging; it just does not work in the way that realism demands, the psychological realism that came to dominate the scene in the first half of the twentieth century. I think it is really interesting, the way cinema continually seeks to return to the condition of "silent" cinema – which also doesn't lack words and was never silent – in order to work with a gestural repertoire, with a musical repertoire. Melodrama feeds off crisis, because crisis demands that you show your cards against all the uncertainty of modernity, the sense of everything being in flux and over-determined by hidden forces we cannot control. I follow Brooks in recognizing melodrama in its offer of clarification, its demand that protagonists in the end will show where they stand and what they represent. And I think that is not simple, that is not simplification.

Excellent, that really took us where we were looking to go. It shows you where figures stand. In thinking about modernity not so much as a specific period in time but as a characteristic set of processes, your claim about melodrama forcing the cards onto the table might then be understood as melodrama forcing (or enabling or reflecting) categories of meaning specific to such processes. This comes back to your claims about what melodrama is performing or doing, what it has to do with epistemological procedures. So, melodrama is related to processes of meaning-making, processes of categorization. And crisis fits in here quite nicely.

Yes, but melodrama is as much about bearing witness to significance as a condition of being rather than producing particular meanings and identities, which is where I think the difficulty lies of getting something like the action film taken seriously – a genre that seems to be right at the bottom of everyone's list. I think this is partly because it is so hard for professional critics to forego their skills in analyzing meaning, identifying ideological positioning. But I do think that melodrama meets us through its aesthetic effects, it exists in the frissons it

creates. What it does is say: "Look, things are significant but they are not necessarily going to be telling you what the significance is." Melodrama provides the experience of intensity – a kind of stimulus, making us feel connected again to a disenchanted world. Reclaiming aesthetics from an earlier Marxist relegation as aestheticization, idealization, is to recover a source of renewed energy, the conviction that there *is* significance to human life, things *do* matter. And in a way it is not what the work is actually saying that is significant.

That kind of experience, I think, also connects with a renewed interest in the idea of the sublime and/or affect, noticeable in calls for conferences or new publications on the sublime and on melodrama. In a way, what melodrama does for modernity is to offer a new route into the sublime, a way of producing a visceral, bodily level of experience, of committed energy. Melodrama can rarely be translated into political outcomes whereby audiences leave the theater or cinema to change the world (although Daniel Gerould documents such events during the French and Russian revolutions). We tend, I think, to expect art to somehow effect what political action should be doing. It can't. But it can energize and motivate its audiences. And I suppose that is what I respond to in melodrama.

I [Scott] have had this suspicion that much of Brooks's theory is based on Roland Barthes's work. Look at the "World of Wrestling."³ It's all there: the villain, the victim, the good, the bad, the priority of the spectacle; even the prioritization of identification through moral legibility. What is stressed, of course, are processes and practices of signification; not specific political content.

I guess I have been stressing that along the line of the villain, the emphasis on excitement and sensation. But there is the other aspect which comes with the victim and the prospect of suffering, which is tears, an overwhelming sorrow, pathos, which I think in a way performs something in the same direction. I think Linda Williams argues this when she is talking about the relationship between tears and hope. Pathos reminds us of our connectedness in a different kind of way. It is not the overwhelming significance of things, but it is the connectedness that comes with sorrow for others. We do not want to forget the dead or missing. It can feel good to be overwhelmed by tears for those we have lost: sorrow and tears maintain the connection that would otherwise fade away. That is the happy cry, the happy sad ending. I guess that is what happens at the end of *Oprah Winfrey* shows.

You brought Linda Williams up again. You said that her reading of the melodrama in Uncle Tom's Cabin seems very specific in its cultural relevance to

the United States. Would you say that foundational myths play a role here? Thinking of the work of Perry Miller and Sacvan Bercovitch, US foundational myths are largely organized around the notion of a return to the space of innocence, a space that is spiritual, but also geographical and political.

Yes, I think so: there is the idealism associated with the idea of the American pioneers, people who were escaping oppression at home. We are familiar with the West as garden, the space of innocence. But Linda Williams also talks about the role of Calvinism in its strict adherence to the idea of personal guilt, which I think would also be a part of this culturally specific structure of feeling. I think her argument is very persuasive in relation to films like *THE DEER HUNTER*, or the *RAMBO* films. These work to recuperate innocence in the face of what seems like a betrayal of America's founding myths, betrayal of what is rare in human history – a second chance, an opportunity to begin again.

Before we close there is one in your list of questions relating to the equation of melodrama and the woman's film: I want to say something about that, because I do think the woman's film and women's cultural forms differ at some level from melodrama. I subtitled *Home Is Where the Heart Is* "Melodrama and the Woman's Film." But that yoke produced a back cover blurb that described the woman's film as "melodrama *par excellence*"; I didn't write it but, despite misgivings – I was already arguing that melodrama was a trans-generic mode – I let it go. Later on, as I worked more on the woman's film and soap opera – another form too easily elided with melodrama – I found that early American radio and TV soap opera and British radio serials weren't recognized or even produced as melodramatic. It was the arrival of soap opera on evening television, with a stronger emphasis on male activities, which turned the soap opera in a melodramatic direction. Meanwhile scholars of female-produced "women's fiction" – which provided sources to film and TV – found that, like early soap opera, it had been heavily criticized by the male critical fraternity for qualities that are anti-melodramatic – for example, for having no narrative shape, but being full of talk working over problems, the "drip of domestic dialogue" as one British TV critic termed it. This connects to the critical history of melodrama – the way in which at a certain point it divided its audiences on gender as well as class lines. So while, as Steve Neale and others show, the American trade press retained melodrama to describe adventure serials and crime genres, theatrical and press film critics – later to be followed by film scholars – displaced the emotional dimension of melodrama onto female audiences and therefore women's cultures. A film like *NOW, VOYAGER*, now regularly discussed as

melodrama, was sourced from a novel by Olive Higgins Prouty that falls into the category of women's fiction and is a more-or-less realist psychological staging of Charlotte Vale's problems.⁴ This then became melodramatized through Max Steiner's score, heavily underlining the pathos, and a certain gothic rendering of Charlotte's Victorian mother, while, contrariwise, Bette Davis fought to have dialogue from the novel put back against Warner Brothers' judgment. I think there is something very complicated in terms of gender aesthetics going on there.

Thank you. You noted this as one of the first things in our list of questions you did not entirely agree with. It is of course important that we addressed it, at least in the end.

It is probably because I was jolted by this memory of the back cover of *Home Is Where the Heart Is* when, in connection with the New York melodrama conference, that phrase was repeated to me thirty years later.

That is affective impact! Christine Gledhill, thank you very much!

Thank you.

Notes

1. Douglas William Jerrold, *The Rent Day: A Domestic Drama* (London, 1832).
2. Christine Gledhill, ed., *Home Is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film* (London: British Film Institute, 1987).
3. Roland Barthes, "The World of Wrestling," in *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972).
4. Olive Higgins Prouty, *Now, Voyager* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1941).