

# **More Dirty Looks: Gender, Pornography and Power 2nd Edition**

By Pamela Church Gibson (ed.)

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New Punk Cinema By Nicholas Rombes (ed.)

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## **A review by Iain Robert Smith, University of Nottingham, UK**

This revised edition of 1993's seminal *Dirty Looks* collection signals a shift in the study of pornography. Taking note of the "increasingly sexualised atmosphere of Western society" and the manner in which the "relevant debates, within feminism and elsewhere, have certainly not been resolved" (vii), Pamela Church Gibson offers a collection which builds upon the key texts from the original selection with eleven new accounts which attempt to come to terms with the shifting boundaries of pornography and its politics. Hence, this review will not only address the book's value as an academic text in itself, but also attempt to show how the academic context has moved on since 1993, and how the book addresses these changes.

Feminism has had a highly complex and conflicted relationship with pornography. From the controversial anti-pornography movement of the 1980s -- headed by Catharine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin -- to the 'feminist' pornography produced by Candida Royalle and Annie Sprinkle, there has been little consensus as to what a feminist approach to pornography might be.

When *Dirty Looks* was first published, it was a decisive intervention in the debates, showing that feminism could engage with the complexities of pornography without losing its feminist credentials. Hailed for being feminist *and* anti-censorship, the book offered a contextual approach to studying pornography which moved away from previous attempts to fix meaning solely on the pornographic text itself. Highlighting the significance of pornography within debates on gender and power, *Dirty Looks* was a breakthrough in porn studies. Here, with *More Dirty Looks*, Gibson is addressing the changes since the original edition was published such as the rise of the internet, the popular success of pornography throughout the media, and the widespread 'pornographisation of popular culture'. Through a series of insightful and

provocative articles, leading academics such as Richard Dyer, Linda Williams, Paul Willeman and Laura Kipnis deal with the symbolic and social significance of pornography, with much of their work drawing on contemporary issues and debates.

In the opening chapter, Pamela Church Gibson addresses feminism and its varied engagements with pornography. While maintaining an avowedly anti-censorship line, Gibson asks us to address the problematic representations of women, and the suffering it can impose on its workers. Quoting Drucilla Cornell, she contemplates, in a question which sums up quite concisely one of the key issues this book deals with: "How can we both recognise the reality of the industry and the suffering it can impose on its workers at the same time that we affirm the need for women to freely explore their own sexuality?"(x) One of the most significant changes from the 1<sup>st</sup> edition has been the inclusion of male contributions to these debates. While some may be surprised that men were excluded from much of the previous academic debates on porn (they are, of course, the primary audience for the material), there have been concerns in the past about men engaging in what many have seen as a debate about feminism and its ideals. Nevertheless, in a step towards a more open and inclusive porn studies, *More Dirty Looks* allows men the space to explore and research their own position on pornography and its politics.

In Henry Jenkins' foreword, he discusses the various pitfalls and dangers that belie studying pornography in the academy, even in this supposedly more enlightened era. Like a companion piece to Linda Williams' introduction to her recent collection *Porn Studies*, he addresses the difficulties that academics who wish to teach pornography may face, drawing on his own experience having taught porn at MIT for a decade before a controversial media circus erupted around his work.

Following these opening gambits, *More Dirty Looks* takes a multi-perspectival approach to the field, drawing on a range of disciplines and methodologies. This takes us from the discursive work of Jane Juffer on the 'normalisation' and domestication of pornography to the more textual work of Edward Buscombe who deals with pornography's parasitic relationship with other genres, taking as his case study the 'Dirty Western'.

Sadly, this latter piece highlights one of the problems with studying pornography in the academy. While his analysis offers some fascinating insights, the focus on one film text -- he apologises for not having access to similar films -- leads Buscombe to offer an untenable conclusion that could have been avoided had more contextual information been available. This is not really a criticism of the piece per se, but an example of the difficulty that pornography poses as a research field, especially with the relative scarcity of academic resources and little cross-pollination with the work of fan-historians such as Laurence O'Toole and David Flint.

Many chapters, however, offer a more thorough engagement with the material, with later chapters on cybersex and internet exhibitionism dealing with the encroachment of new media into pornography, while Chuck Kleinhans work on virtual child pornography raises very difficult questions on the efficacy of recent government crackdowns. Reflecting current debates within cultural studies, some of the standout chapters also deal with the transnational nature of much pornography, opening out the discussion from the purely sexual onto discourses of nationhood and identity.

Throughout much of *More Dirty Looks*, there is as an assertion of a woman's right to utilise -- and perhaps appropriate -- pornography to explore her own sexuality. Anne McClintock's work on the politics of S&M and Liz Kotz's chapter on women artists exploring masculinity, especially, deal with complexities of gender identity far removed from the essentialised gender lines drawn in much literature on pornography.

It is these gradualist moves towards a more inclusive and nuanced study of pornography that mark out *More Dirty Looks* as a book worthy of high praise. In a world which is still reluctant to acknowledge the significance of the pornography industry, *More Dirty Looks* offers a much needed corrective. Moving away from the dogmatic anti/pro pornography debates, *More Dirty Looks* takes steps towards addressing the complexities of gender, power and identity in pornography. It is to be hoped that in the future we will see books which continue this fine work and take pornography studies well into the new millennium.

Part of the 'Traditions in World Cinema' series, *New Punk Cinema* offers analysis of the global phenomenon of 'post-punk' cinema. Drawing on a wide range of texts and contexts, Nicholas Rombes's collection examines the myriad ways in which the 'punk' aesthetic has influenced cinematic production, distribution and exhibition.

Building on work in *Underground USA: Filmmaking Beyond the Hollywood Canon* (Alterimage, 2002) and *Deathtripping: The Cinema of Transgression* (Creation Books, 1999), *New Punk Cinema* reflects the recent fashion for academic analysis to delve into the worlds of marginal and alternative cinema. In keeping with the tendencies of this trend, there is an attempt to blur the line between academia and fandom, with some contributors offering anecdotes alongside their theoretical musings. While this approach can sometimes run the danger of losing critical distance, *New Punk Cinema* deftly sidesteps such criticisms by offering an engaging and provocative collection of articles that show the often invaluable insight that can be gleaned from personal investment.

In his introduction, Rombes offers an overview of the 1970s punk movement, looking at how its aesthetics and politics came to influence subsequent filmmakers. With a celebratory fervour, he argues that 'punk' attacked the authenticity of supergroups, offered a more intimate aesthetic through smaller shows and minimalist style, while, in a rejection of technique and embrace of amateurism, also pushing the idea that 'anyone could do it'.

It is this rejection of hierarchies and democratisation of film production which, Rombes feels, defines new punk cinema:

What links new punk films and directors together is a do-it-yourself sensibility, an almost romantic notion that anyone can create something that matters, a troubled desire for and yet a suspicion of authenticity and the Real, an approach to filmmaking that foregrounds the medium of film itself, and an interest in simplicity which, ironically, allows for great freedom and experimentation (12).

As this suggests, the 'movement' is not confined to one city or one nation. In fact, as Rombes argues, it is not really a formal movement at all. Unlike the Cinema of Transgression (based mainly in downtown New York) or the New American Cinema, New Punk Cinema is simply an "approach to filmmaking that shares certain gestures and approaches with punk" (11).

Stacy Thompson's following chapter builds on this work to offer a contextual background to 'punk' itself. Using a materialist critique, Thompson makes an attempt at the unenviable task of defining what punk is. While she discusses the manner in which films can seem 'punk' (through degraded aesthetics and amateurish style) she argues that it is ultimately an economic judgement. The deciding question, for Thompson, is, "who benefits materially from this film?" (36) Her argument is that a film such as Jean Luc Godard's *Eloge de l'Amour* (2001) could be misconstrued as punk if aesthetics were the basis for judgement (the film features formal experimentation and a style which has been described as anti-Hollywood). Yet, with funding from the Canal+ Group, a subsidiary of Vivendi/Universal, the argument runs that Godard is ultimately helping Universal accrue capital and expand its corporate reach. In Thompson's words, "It is impossible to rage against the machine when you are part of it, you only make it stronger." (37)

For Thompson, therefore, new punk cinema is defined by its opposition to the Hollywood production system. A film which received funding from the studio system, even through an 'indie' subsidiary, is automatically exempt, no matter how 'punk' it may appear. In a book which spends so much time discussing the influence of the 'punk aesthetic', with very little mention of economic matters, this is a controversial point. One wonders whether Thompson would accept many of the films under-discussion in the rest of the book (*Elephant* [Gus Van Sant, 2003], *Memento* [Christopher Nolan, 2000], *Fight Club* [David Fincher, 1999] etc.) as genuinely part of new 'punk' cinema.

Other contributors take a more formal approach to the idea of punk with both Jay McRoy and Timothy Dugdale attempting to offer through lines from earlier cinematic movements (Italian NeoRealism and the French New Wave respectively). McRoy takes his new punk case studies -- *Gummo* (Harmony Corine, 1997), *Ken Park* (Larry Clark, Edward Lachman, 2002) and *Elephant* -- and discusses how they blur fact and fiction, in a manner reminiscent of Italian NeoRealist aesthetics, while Dugdale focuses his analysis on *Y Tu Mama Tambien* (Alfonso Cuaron, 2001), a film he believes exemplifies the legacy of the French New Wave at its best. While both writers offer some fascinating parallels, the analysis is often too disparate, drawing links between very tangentially related films. Too little is done to properly focus their analysis on what new punk cinema might entail, leaving their discussion as a series of mini-reviews of their selected films. Dugdale's work especially falls down in his close reading of *Y Tu Mama Tambien*, which is little more than a recounting of the film's narrative, and makes no attempt to relate itself to the wider concerns of the book.

Nicholas Rombes's article on the blurring of boundaries between sincerity, irony and camp offers a much more successful analysis of this 'new punk aesthetic' tracing it through music, literature and cinema. Arguing that the enduring legacy of punk is the tendency to both acknowledge and deconstruct pop-culture narratives, Rombes offers a sense of punk that can be read as both ironic and sincere (eg. Blondie and the Ramones using the more 'innocent' sounds of the 1950s and 60s in their songs). Finding this pattern reflected in the work of Charlie Kaufman and Lars Con Trier, Rombes offers an analysis of new punk cinema which is historically grounded in a media climate that is increasingly ironic and self-aware.

This provocative tract is followed by Graeme Harper's piece on DVD and the demise of 'film'. This paper offers some fascinating and important analysis on the implications of new media convergence and the phenomenon of DVD supplements, but ultimately feels a strange fit in this collection, with some brief mentions of 'new punk' seeming like attempts to reassure the reader that all this has *something* to do with punk.

Bruno Lessard continues this engagement with digital technology, looking in his contribution at the Dogme 95 movement and Mike Figgis' *Time Code* (2000), while the subsequent chapters from Silvio Gaggi and Bruce Isaacs consider the uses of non-linear narratives in new punk cinema. Each of these chapters offer some valuable insights into the films discussed, although it would certainly be difficult to justify the extensive focus on *Amelie* (Jean Pierre Jeunet, 2001) in Gaggi's contribution. Non-linear... perhaps. But punk?

No such worries with Steven Rubio's contribution which looks directly at how the punk movement has impacted on cinema. Seeking films which connect to 'the spirit of punk', he discusses but then discards Dogme 95 (too judgemental), *Elephant* (too artificial), *Memento* (too tricky), *Run Lola Run* (Tom Tykwer, 1998) (too unreal), finally settling on the relatively conventional *Sid and Nancy* (Alex Cox, 1986) as the film which he feels best connected to the spirit of punk.

The final four chapters offer case studies on Dogma 95, *Timecode*, Harmony Korine and Alex Cox respectively. This last chapter -- actually an interview Xavier Mendik conducted with Alex Cox -- engages with the difficulties and challenges Cox faced as a new punk filmmaker. Described as the "last punk auteur in town" (195), Cox discusses his punk politics and commitment and argues that the value of punk is ultimately that it "encouraged the political" (197), a sentiment which this reader feels could have been more thoroughly addressed in this collection.

While *New Punk Cinema* is certainly a unique and ambitious collection, drawing together a range of formally and aesthetically diverse texts, there is a real problem in definition. Although many chapters are discussing the same core selection of 'new punk films', there is little sense of agreement as to what 'new punk cinema' might entail. Furthermore, despite an introduction which promised an engagement with punk's influence on cinema, too often the chapters rely on simply describing the manner in which these films are formally experimental, with cursory mentions of 'punk' dotting the pages. There is little attempt to analyse just how this relates to punk, and almost no engagement with the cultural politics of the "defiant relationship with the mainstream." (back page) Consequently, although the book offered some moments of genuine insight, this reader was left unsatisfied and hoping for a more thorough and coherent analysis of punk's legacy in the future.

Nevertheless, the fact remains that this collection is bringing some much-needed attention to a part of cinema history which is consistently underplayed -- namely the relationship between popular music and cinema. This type of inter-disciplinary work should be commended and the most valuable contribution that *New Punk Cinema* may make to cinema scholarship is that it should open the door to further work in this fascinating area.

# Cinema and the Sandinistas: Filmmaking in Revolutionary Nicaragua

By Jonathon Buchsbaum

Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003. ISBN 0-292-70524-7 (pbk), 0-292-70523-9 (hbk). 52 illustrations, xvii + 323pp

## A review by Sarah Barrow, Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge, UK

Jonathon Buchsbaum announces at the end of the introduction to his monograph on filmmaking in revolutionary Nicaragua that he hopes to rescue "that national experiment in film... from historical oblivion" (xvii) through a careful historical and analytical account of the key people, events and films from that time (1979-1990). This then is an ambitious project, and an exciting one for anyone interested in Latin American history, culture, politics and/or cinema, for here is a story that no one else has told. As the result of several years of field work, interviews and searching out papers that even Nicaraguans considered to be of little value, the author's determination to piece together an incisive account of a neglected but fascinating period for Latin American cinema has to be applauded. For this is not just the definitive study of the INCINE project, but also a critical reflection on the relevance of other trends in militant film-making to the Nicaraguan situation, and a reminder of the continuing importance of national cinemas in an age of globalisation.

In 1979, two months after the Sandinista Revolution had triumphed in Nicaragua, efforts were made by the new governing regime to establish cinema as a way of reclaiming a sense of national identity. This turned into an 11 year project, one that was administered and co-ordinated by the newly-formed government body, the Nicaraguan Institute of Cinema (INCINE). During this period, the filmmakers who worked for the institute made over 70 *noticieros* (newsreels), documentaries and fiction films (mostly shorts). These included both official and independent visions of revolutionary Nicaragua since, as Buchsbaum points out, INCINE enjoyed some distance from the "central priorities of the Sandinista Front" (xvi) that enabled its directors to develop cinematic interpretations of the Revolution as they saw it rather than follow official directives. Buchsbaum also draws attention to the tensions between a national (Nicaraguan) project and a political (Sandinista) one, and through close analysis of a large number of individual films, he considers how cinema in many ways offered an alternative vision of the nation despite being allied to and supported by the state.

Buchsbaum's study of this project is divided into 10 chapters which interweave discussions of political and cinematic developments in Nicaragua between 1979 and 1990 and consider the often ambivalent relationship between the two areas. The first chapter provides the groundwork by recalling the story of the establishment of INCINE, and reminds the reader of the important role cinema played in nation-building throughout Latin America before other media became more prevalent. The influence at this point of 'foreign' filmmakers from Mexico and Cuba is acknowledged, and indeed the dependency on Cuban resources is mentioned several times throughout the book. Chapter two offers lively detailed analyses of

the first eleven newsreel films produced by INCINE, and includes information on the events that they documented as well as on stylistic and technical detail. It highlights the urgency of the project and the pace of production that privileged quantity over qualitative innovation: an initial target of one film per month was achieved in the first year. As Buchsbaum tells us, these early films "tended to be monothematic, structured around FSLN discourses... [which] focused on generalities about the economic plan, the Literacy Campaign, or the Atlantic Coast" (44).

The following chapter covers the second year (1980) of the Nicaraguan cinema project and includes discussion of political developments, as well as accounts of increasing activity in film criticism (newspaper reviews and group discussions), including vitriolic attacks on US releases such as *Kramer vs Kramer* (Robert Benton, 1979). The move to more extensive documentary production is recalled, and analyses of a number of the medium-length 16mm productions are provided. Thereafter, every new development is described, contextualised and its consequences commented upon in detail. It is not until the penultimate chapter that critical discussion of INCINE's first forays into feature film production is offered, coinciding as it did with the effective collapse of the institution. That film, *El Espectro de la Guerra* (*The Ghost of War*, Ramiro Lacayo, 1988) carried an unprecedented budget of \$750,000 and a shooting schedule of 3 months. As Buchsbaum points out via a citation from the film's director (who was also founder and director of INCINE for 10 years), the desire was to create a high quality film that could not be considered a failure in any way (216). But it was, not least because the Spanish dubbed the film so poorly, with technical problems and an ill-judged decision to use Spanish as spoken in Spain rather than as spoken in Nicaragua. Soon after INCINE imploded.

The final chapter links the specific developments and initiatives of INCINE with other militant approaches to filmmaking in Latin America, and speculates that the Third Cinema manifesto would undoubtedly have had some influence on Nicaragua's efforts in this regard. Buchsbaum offers the surprising fact (for a nation with no previous cinema history) that "except for the one in Cuba, INCINE lasted longer than the filmmaking institutions in other Latin American countries" (223). Over the final pages, he then offers an incredibly useful critical summary of the key Latin American film manifestos that preceded INCINE's venture, from statements by Argentine Fernando Birri, to Glauber Rocha and Cinema Novo, the Cuban Espinosa on 'imperfect' cinema, and notes that accompanied the first Festival of Latin American Cinema at Viña del Mar (Chile), discusses their relevance to the Nicaraguan context, and boldly concludes that, despite many differences and tensions, the legacy left by INCINE "remains as the most sustained test of joining third cinema's theory and practice" (249).

The text is wonderfully illustrated with over fifty still photographs, many of them taken directly from the films the author analyses, thus giving access to some rare moments of film history and bringing to life the author's discussions. Such images also add to the contextualisation of the project, reminding the reader of the militant urgency of the time. For example, on page sixteen, a still is reproduced from the first *noticiero* made by the INCINE film-makers and shows a line of children aged around ten armed with guns bigger than themselves, some looking quizzical but most defiant. The image is uncomfortable to look at and indeed the author comments that the filmmaker, Frank Pineda had not wanted to include it, but felt obliged to submit to the will of the Cubans "who were contributing personnel, equipment, and post-production facilities to INCINE" (17). Thus the images are used on a number of levels, and discussion of them is woven into both critical analysis and contextual

comment. On a technical note, it is a pity that these illustrations are not listed in summary, nor cross-referenced more clearly to the discussions of them in-text.

Other useful detail which demonstrate the depth of the author's research include, as appendices, a section of diagrams, plans, charts and documents copied from INCINE's own records. This fascinating record comprises hand-drawn flow charts showing proposed structures of INCINE, an illustrated statement of aims and principles (in Spanish and translated), a classification report by on *Mad Max* (George Miller, 1979) (unfortunately not translated and not entirely clear, but which describes the direction of the blockbuster sci-fi as 'pésima' [awful]!), and an official announcement of the intention to suspend activities at INCINE due to lack of funds.

There follows a detailed filmography of *noticieros*, documentaries and fiction films which is invaluable, and a list of interviews undertaken by the author (less useful). The bibliographic essay offers the enthusiastic reader who may be inspired by this book to investigate further a plethora of useful resources, including books and journals on Latin American cinema, and particularly on the militant trend in filmmaking inspired by Third Cinema.

With *Cinema and the Sandinistas*, Buchsbaum puts Nicaraguan cinema on the map by providing the first ever in-depth study of this nation's filmmaking endeavours, that also provides fascinating detail of the very specific political context within which the INCINE project developed. More than this, it reminds us of the important role that cinema played in nation-building initiatives during the twentieth century and sheds further light on the far-reaching influence of militant filmmaking and theoretical trends in Latin America at a time when opposition to repressive regimes was most urgent. As such, the appeal of this book should go way beyond the potential niche suggested by its title.



# The Cinema of Goshō Heinosuke: Laughter through Tears

By Arthur Nolletti, Jr.

Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2005. ISBN 0-253-21725-3. xii + 331 pp. £14.98 (pbk), £53.99 (hbk)

## A review by Brian Ruh, Indiana University, USA

In part of an essay I wrote for the Japanese book *Oshii Mamoru-ron: Memento Mori* (Nippon Television, 2004) I lamented the paucity of Japanese films that were making their way to the home video market in the United States. At the time, many of the internationally well-known directors like Kurosawa Akira were represented, while others such as Fukasaku Kinji were virtually invisible. In the interval between when I wrote the essay and when it was published, this trend began to reverse, with scores of Japanese films of varying vintages being released on DVD as there has been a renaissance of interest in Japanese films. With recent releases like *Ugetsu* (Kenji Mizoguchi, 1953) by Criterion in the US and *Humanity And Paper Balloons* (Sadao Yamanaka, 1937) and *The Face of Another* (Hiroshi Teshigahara, 1966) by Eureka! in the UK, Japanese film is becoming much more widely available in the home-video market.

Such increasing familiarity with Japanese cinema makes the neglect of the films of Goshō Heinosuke all the more striking. In the introduction to his book *The Cinema of Goshō Heinosuke: Laughter Through Tears*, Arthur Nolletti, Jr. begins by stating simply, "Few of Goshō Heinosuke's films have been seen in the West" (1). Indeed, in preparation to write this review I tried to view some of Goshō's films, but was not able to acquire a single subtitled VHS or DVD copy, and as of this writing none of his films have been licensed for video release in English-speaking markets.

The question then becomes why this lack of Goshō's films should be seen as such a critical oversight, which is one of the main thrusts of Nolletti's book. Although Goshō is frequently mentioned in texts of Japanese cinema history, *Laughter Through Tears* is the first book-length study in English devoted to an analysis of the director's work. According to Nolletti, the most important reason for paying attention to the work of this director who has received such little acclaim in the West is that along with directors like Ozu and Mizoguchi, Goshō played a central role in two of Japanese cinema's 'Golden Ages,' the 1930s and the 1950s. Indeed, he helped to create the classical humanist tradition of Japanese film, which provided the foundation and guiding principle of that cinema and which, by and large, no longer exists. In short, Goshō is essential to any understanding of Japanese film history and cinema history (242-3).

In the 240 pages that precede this pronouncement, Nolletti provides an in-depth analysis of some of Goshō's most important films and builds a strong case for the importance of this overlooked Japanese film master.

The bulk of Nolletti's book focuses on the primacy of the film texts themselves, which is somewhat limiting in the case of a director like Goshō, who directed ninety-seven films, nearly two-thirds of which have been lost. Nolletti begins by trying to clear up a few misconceptions about the director and by placing Goshō's films in context with the rest of Japanese cinema. Although Goshō is best known for working in the *shomin-geki* genre, a remarkably flexible classification of film that focused on the lives of everyday people, he has worked in other genres as well, from 'nonsense' comedies to period films to puppet plays. Nolletti also briefly describes the three main influences on Goshō's life and work: his mentor Shimazu Yasujiro, haiku poetry, and director Ernst Lubitsch. These themes of genre and influence are weaved constantly through Nolletti's analysis.

In general, each chapter of *The Cinema of Goshō Heinosuke: Laughter Through Tears* focuses on a specific film or group of films for in-depth analysis. The first chapter begins with a discussion of Goshō's use of the *shomin-geki* genre in the 1930s and goes on to analyze three of Goshō's 'nonsense' comedies (films with rather little plot intended mainly to elicit laughter) -- *The Neighbor's Wife and Mine* (1931, the earliest extant Goshō film and Japan's first talkie), *The Bride Talks in Her Sleep* (1933) and *The Groom Talks in His Sleep* (1935). The second half of the chapter concentrates on the family comedy *Burden of Life* (1935).

The second chapter focuses on Goshō's adaptation of Kawabata Yasunari's story *The Dancing Girl of Izu* (1933) and the film's relationship to the *junbungaku*, or 'pure literature' movement, which involved filmic adaptations of 'serious' literature. In the third chapter Nolletti discusses *Woman of the Mist* (1936), a unique *shomin-geki* film that "draws on melodrama, and with it pathos, creating the mood of laughter through tears that is popularly known as 'Goshōism'" (82).

Chapter four begins with a brief account of Goshō's work around the time of World War II, touching only lightly on such events as Goshō did not create many films during this period, as he became ill with tuberculosis in the late 1930s and refused to make the stridently patriotic 'national policy' films in the early 1940s. Nolletti then quickly covers Goshō's sympathy for and allegiance with the striking workers of Toho Studio in the immediate post war years. The remainder of the chapter is devoted to an analysis of *Once More* (1947), an allegorical "love story with political overtones" (93). Chapters five and six focus on *Where Chimneys are Seen* (1953) and *An Inn at Osaka* (1954), two post war *shomin-geki* films that continue Goshō's work of creating engaging characters that also serve as metaphors to interrogate the direction of modern Japan. In chapter seven, Nolletti addresses similar issues in his analysis of *Growing Up* (1955). Set in the Meiji era (1868-1912), Goshō's film was able to "engage in the discourse of the day, using the far-from-utopian past to point out that certain things in post war Japanese society had not really changed all that much." (157)

Chapters eight and nine cover the end of Goshō's career from the late 1950s to the late 1960s. In these chapters Nolletti covers the films *Yellow Crow* (1957), *The Fireflies* (1958), *Elegy of the North* (1957), *Hunting Rifle* (1961), *An Innocent Witch* (1965), and *Rebellion of Japan* (1967). The book ends with an appendix that consists of an analysis of three Goshō films Nolletti did not have the opportunity to discuss elsewhere -- *L'Amour* (1933), *A Visage to Remember* (1948), and *Dispersing Clouds* (1951). The book also includes an extensive filmography of all of Goshō's works.

Although each film analysis does an admirable job of explicating the pertinent themes of the films to an audience unlikely to be familiar with Gosho's work, the overall structure of the book still left something wanting. Because of Nolletti's focus on textual analysis and the primacy of the films themselves, coupled with the necessity of choosing only a fraction of the available films for analysis (which are themselves only a fraction of Gosho's output over his lifetime), one does not necessarily get a sense of Gosho's oeuvre as a whole. Most notable is the lack of in-depth discussion of Gosho's films before *The Neighbor's Wife and Mine*, a full thirty-eight films and over a third of Gosho's lifetime output. Although the prints of these films no longer exist, more information on them in the main body of the book would have given a fuller picture of how Gosho worked. For example, Nolletti notes in the filmography that *Sora wa haretari* (*The Sky is Clear*, 1925) was "the first film to show the hallmarks of Gosho's analytical editing style" (285). Nolletti does discuss Gosho's distinctive haiku-influenced style throughout the book, but an analysis of precursors such as this would have lent even more support to Nolletti's arguments. In comparison to the rest of the book, however, this is a relatively minor complaint.

*The Cinema of Gosho Heinosuke: Laughter Through Tears* is certainly an impressive piece of scholarship. Through his selected analysis, Nolletti makes a very convincing argument for the importance of Gosho Heinosuke's work in the Japanese film canon. However, after reading the book I felt a sharp pang of wistfulness, knowing that I could not go out and watch the remarkable films I had just read about. When I look at the Japanese films that have been released onto DVD with English subtitles in the last few years, I am convinced that a place can be found for works that delve into the history of Japanese cinema. Hopefully the current wave of Japanese films on home video soon will carry Gosho's laughter and tears over to our shores.

# The Contemporary Television Series

By Michael Hammond and Lucy Mazdon (eds.)

Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005. ISBN 0-7486-1901-1. xii + 260 pp. £16.99 (pbk)

Popular Television Drama: Critical Perspectives By Jonathan Bignell and Stephen Lacey (eds.)

## Popular Television Drama: Critical Perspectives

By Jonathan Bignell and Stephen Lacey (eds.)

Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2005. ISBN 0-7190-6933-5. x + 230 pp. £14.99 (pbk)

## A review by Thorsten Carstensen, Freiburg University, Germany

While film studies has been an established discipline for decades, the study of television still has a somewhat dubious reputation. Dwarfed by the looming shadow of the cinema, television drama has often only been of academic interest in terms of audience-centred modes of study. Even now, approaches concerned with the specific aesthetic form of television series are surprisingly rare. Therefore, two newly published books on prime-time television dramas constitute a welcome broadening of the analytical horizon. Containing knowledgeable essays on a vast number of different topics, both volumes demonstrate that studies of popular shows such as *The Sopranos*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* or *The Prisoner* can indeed provide an important insight into television's cultural implications. As the books make clear, television has begun to adopt (and develop) inventive narrative strategies which are employed not only to challenge society's values, but also to engage in a metafictional discourse about what the medium is able to achieve.

The history of post-war American television has often been related as one of conformity. 1950s popular sitcoms such as *Leave it to Beaver* (1957-1963) were celebrating the suburban home, in which the traditional nuclear family would gather for their backyard barbecues, as the epitome of the American Dream. Bowing and scraping to consumer capitalism, these shows portrayed an auspicious suburban landscape that offered the promise of economic success and a joyful family life shaped by fixed gender roles. While in the cinema James Dean revolted against the shallowness of suburban life, television heroes such as *Bonanza's* Cartwright family were teaching the viewers what was right and what was wrong on the western frontier. Television's entanglement with conservative ideology became most obvious when New Hollywood began to challenge traditional ways of cinematic storytelling during the late Sixties, while TV shows still stuck to conventional formulas that were predictable and easy to digest.

More recently, quite a few television shows have exhibited a more subversive attitude towards society and its values. Contemporary television no longer seeks to conceal the darker side of the American land of plenty. Instead of promoting the foundational myths of America, these shows are firmly rooted in a violent, often nihilistic contemporary world. In tracing these trends in the arena of television drama, the essays in the volume *The Contemporary Television Series* aim at rescuing quality television drama from "the academic and critical silence to which it was long subjected" (7-8), as editors Michael Hammond and Lucy Mazdon put it in their introduction. Not only do the essays in this book contextualize the individual dramas within the respective historical contexts from which they emerge: using a wide range of analytical approaches, they also develop innovative, at times deconstructive, interpretations.

One of the key claims of *The Contemporary Television Series* is that "in order to understand television and the ways in which we make sense of it, we must always be aware of the complex yet vital relationship between industry, text and viewer" (xi f.). Various essays substantiate this assertion by illuminating intertextual conjunctions, examining audience responses and investigating the mechanisms that underlie the production of television series. Additionally, the book reflects on the question of genre and illustrates how the contemporary television drama seeks to undermine conventions that were created in the early days of the small screen, the 'window on the world.'

In her essay on changes in American television industry, Roberta Pearson examines the important role that TV producers play in altering the televisual landscape by turning away from "least objectionable programming" (25) and challenging the audience's expectations. *The Sopranos* certainly figures as one of the most successful shows of the last decade that fits into the pattern of prime-time 'quality television' that overcomes the media's stigma of catering for the masses with salubrious fare. Taking up themes and motives that were foregrounded in 1970s gangster movies, this series created a dark image of the postmodern underbelly of American life. In his essay on therapy and violence in *The Sopranos*, Jason Jacobs examines the "dangerous quality of impulsiveness" (149) as a key element in the series. He comes to the somewhat startling conclusion that *The Sopranos* "represents the return to humanist values and classical realism that the 1980s and 1990s postmodern television series sought to undermine." Despite his brutality and unpleasantness, Jacobs maintains, the show's protagonist Tony "stands as the last humanist in a world of relative chaos" (156). These two claims made after an otherwise insightful essay are certainly hard to defend. First, the postmodern should not be regarded as necessarily anti-realistic. And, second, Tony's self-pity and his sense of responsibility for his family -- two qualities that contradict his ugly mob business -- only serve to confirm the overall impression the show gives and that is also conveyed by Hollywood movies such as *L.A. Confidential* (Curtis Hanson, 1997) and *The Usual Suspects* (Brian Singer, 1995): in the gritty postmodern world that America has become, the boundary between good and evil no longer exists.

This moral ambiguity is of equal importance for understanding David Lynch's mysterious yet comical drama *Twin Peaks* which, as Linda Ruth Williams notes, was not only to become an "international mainstream cult hit" (51), but is also an example *par excellence* of postmodernism's blurring of genres. Set in a small-town America turned into moral wasteland, Lynch's narrative blends an already labyrinthine murder story with rather unusual sub-plots involving the most bizarre personage (just think of the infamous 'Log Lady!') that television has ever seen. Borrowing from both detective stories and soap operas, *Twin Peaks* is "as genuinely grief-and horror-driven as it is humor-laced" (37), as Williams argues.

Revolving around the FBI investigation of the murder of a teenage girl, the series portrays a domestic world that has become dysfunctional. In contrast to more conventional detective formats, *Twin Peaks* does not set out to quench the audience's epistemological thirst since "Lynch considered *never* answering what began as the primary trajectory for the show" (51).

In what is arguably the collection's most fascinating approach to the contemporary television drama, Angela Ndalani draws on Umberto Eco's theory of the neo-baroque in order to explain postmodern aesthetics on the screen. Postmodern television drama, the author argues, replaces closed narrative forms with "the lack of respect for the limits of the frame" (86). The open form of contemporary shows, pioneered by *Dallas* and *Hill Street Blues*, "is characterised by dynamic narrative structures with multiple centres" (96 f.). In *The X-Files*, *Ally McBeal* or *The West Wing*, no singular, linear framework dominates. This multi-linearity is taken to its extreme in the action thriller series *24* which makes effective use of the split-screen technique and thus creates a sense of simultaneity and authenticity that lures the viewer into the narrative. However, instead of classifying an ideologically conservative production like *24* together with more anarchical shows such as *Six Feet Under*, as Ndalani does a little frivolously, the fundamental dissimilarities should not be disregarded. Even though the strategy of presenting an action-hero -- the federal agent Jack Bauer -- who sometimes needs to be bad in order to do good, might be called subversive, *24* complies with contemporary ideology by reinforcing the audience's fears of terrorist attacks. (The threat, of course, usually emanates from groups vaguely identified with some Eastern European/Middle-Eastern background.) In addition, the frequent and explicit depictions of agents torturing suspects, who might or might not have useful information, uncannily echo the pictures we know from American and British prison camps in Iraq. *24* is one of those rare instances when ideological conformism is wrapped in an unconventional, innovative format. Despite her neglect of these textual aspects, Ndalani makes a very valid point juxtaposing the formal complexity of contemporary shows to that of a 1960s programme such as *Star Trek* which sacrificed "overall serial development for the sake of the closed, self-sustained narrative episode" (88).

Altogether, the *Contemporary Television Series* is a very well organised anthology of essays that yields insight into an area of scholarship which has been suffering from neglect. This verdict can equally be applied to the second recently published collection, *Popular Television Drama: Critical Perspectives*. In contrast to the volume discussed above, which focuses on American television, this book is devoted entirely to British TV drama. The editors consider their collection a reaction to existing work on the subject which, in their opinion, "tends to examine programmes and categories in isolation or subsumes them into a more general cultural or media analysis" (1). Rather than employing elaborated theories, the essays approach their topics in a more pragmatic manner, highlight major developments in the genres they examine, and put stronger emphasis on the position of the viewer.

The extensive range of critical perspectives that the editors assemble is undoubtedly the key strength of *Popular Television Drama*. Stephen Lacey, for instance, sets out to map the shared terrain of the British theatre of the late 1950s and television programmes of the mid-1960s. Within these specific historical contexts, both cultural forms were engaged in a social realism based on Brechtian aesthetics. With its industrial setting and focus on working-class relations in a Manchester factory, the issue-based show *Clocking Off*, which premiered in 2000, could be seen as a twenty-first century version of 1960s realist television. As Lez Cooke shows in his essay, which appears in a section fittingly entitled 'Revisiting the Familiar', this concern with social problems arising out of a contemporary environment is

embedded in a redefinition of the genre's narrative and aesthetic conventions: "A concession to postmodernity in *Clocking Off* was the introduction of a number of stylistic changes which differentiate the series from its more sombre and sometimes pedantic social realist predecessors." (190) With respect to this new stylistic approach, Cooke argues that *Clocking Off* uses editing to increase the pace of narration, inter-cutting scenes which at first glance seem incongruous.

As the editors of this compilation maintain, it is television's "conventional focus upon the familiar, the present time and the everyday that opens up alternative formal and stylistic possibilities" (6). Therefore, television seems to be the proper medium for defamiliarizing what we already know -- a strategy that is often used in horror dramas, as is clarified by Helen Wheatley in her absorbing discussion of how the medium has adapted the 'female Gothic'. In this subgenre, Wheatley argues, the domestic space associated with the female heroine is turned into a site of fear: "By bringing the narrative of female paranoia or fear back into the home, understanding television as an inherently domestic medium, the closeness between the threatened heroine and the viewer of the text is re-established" (152). Wheatley observes a "connection between gender and genre" (150) and makes clear that the television adaptations of these Gothic texts are highly self-reflexive, exhibiting an awareness "of both their domestic viewing context and the female domestic viewer" (153). The author concludes that "the female Gothic television drama may be seen as potentially radical, in that it allows for points of contact between the female domestic viewer and the dramatisation of anxieties converging on women's position in the home" (162).

Addressing questions of simulation, identity and authorship, Mark Bould situates the stylish 1960s series *The Prisoner* within the context of postmodern playfulness. In his exceptionally well-informed essay, he argues that due to its circular narrative and allegorical tendencies, *The Prisoner* "cannot be reduced to a single meaning" (95), but is open to a wide range of interpretations. Following on neatly from Brian McHale's discussion of postmodern aesthetics in literature, Bould maintains that *The Prisoner* bears a number of similarities to the novels of American writers such as Thomas Pynchon and John Barth. What Bould sees at work in *The Prisoner* is the concept of postmodern allegory in which, according to McHale, the "polar opposition proves to be a complex and paradoxical interpenetration." The consequence of this seems to be a drastic "tension between levels of meaning" (103) and an "endless circulation of signifiers" -- or to put it differently, the narrative "proliferates meanings, exfoliates possibilities" (107).

Although presenting selections which are diverse in theme and method, both books discussed in this essay achieve coherence by organizing their contributions into different sections, each preceded by a short introduction that attempts to chart the discourse in which the essays should be read. Both volumes make clear that Bould's observations about narrative techniques in *The Prisoner* hold true for the majority of quality television shows in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century. Hence, while audience-centred criticism has certainly proven a fruitful sub-discipline, deconstruction appears to be a more effective way of pinpointing the differences between the contemporary TV series and its more conventional predecessors. Reconsidering their own legacy and toying with the audience's expectations, these dramas tend to be highly self-reflexive and defy definitive interpretations.

While Bould's explorations of the narrative structures of contemporary television point to the medium's formal innovativeness, it is yet another argument put forward by McHale that can also be aptly applied to the study of contemporary television drama. As McHale argues in his

ground-breaking book on *Postmodernist Fiction* (Routledge, 2004), the postmodern text is structured around a clash of multiple conflicting worlds. These co-existing spheres can overlap and, first and foremost, they capture an ambiguous reality that has come a long way since the times of postwar liberal consensus -- a conflicting reality that cherishes diversity (as in *Queer as Folk*) while being shaped by utter paranoia (as in *The X-Files*). It is this ontological uncertainty -- the question which world do we actually live in? -- that provides the backdrop for television in the postmodern age.



# Media Reception Studies

By Janet Staiger

New York and London: New York University Press, 2005. ISBN 0-8147-8134-9 (hbk), 0-8147-8135-7 (pbk). ix + 251pp. £43.94 (hbk), £13.50 (pbk)

## A review by Mike Chopra-Gant, London Metropolitan University, UK

In *Media Reception Studies* Janet Staiger presents an accessible and highly readable account of this fascinating and often controversial area of media studies. In contrast to Staiger's two previous books relating to this area, *Interpreting Films: Studies in the Historical Reception of American Cinema* (Princeton University Press, 1992) and *Perverse Spectators: The Practices of Film Reception* (New York University Press, 2000), *Media Reception Studies* focuses on offering an overview of the field of study rather than presenting new original research by the author and so appears to be designed primarily to meet the needs of media and film students and those who teach them.

With that aim in mind Staiger has produced an excellent, comprehensive account of the field of media reception studies, tracing the historical development of this area of study from its origins in the 'media effects' research of American Mass Communications, Social Science tradition of which the Payne Fund studies of the 1920s and 30s represent probably the best-known example, through to the recent work of writers such as John Fiske and Henry Jenkins, who attribute a far greater degree of agency to media audiences than allowed by earlier theories of the relationship between the media text and its 'readers'.

Chapter two (the book's first substantive chapter) is devoted to social scientific theories of the relationship between media and audiences, dividing this broad area up into four by reference to the overarching conceptual models -- educational, reinforcement, mediation and power -- that underpin the writing of individual theorists. Here Staiger presents an overview of the early media 'effects' research focussing of the Chicago School, and the Payne Fund studies during the 1920s and 1930s as well as early psychological approaches to this controversial issue. Some of the key themes of this early research -- principally the belief in a 'hypodermic' model of active media/passive audience interaction -- are traced through other historical manifestations, from the pessimistic evaluation of American popular culture of members of the Frankfurt School through post-war, structural-functionalist and behaviourist approaches and on to the more recent critiques of those approaches associated with writers such as David Buckingham, Martin Barker and David Gauntlett, among others. Chapter three turns to consider literary and 'cultural studies' approaches, and brings together the linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure, and the film semiotics of Christian Metz, derived from Saussure's structural linguistics, along with the combination of structuralism and Freudian psychoanalysis in the work of Jacques Lacan and probably the best-known deployment of these converging theoretical trajectories in Laura Mulvey's 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema'. Staiger then considers the alternatives to the explanations of the encounter between media and audiences offered by cognitive psychology and cultural studies. Staiger's account of cultural studies provides perhaps the best illustration of one of the greatest strengths of her

writing; her attention to the subtle fracture-lines that exist within fields of study that are too often presented as coherent and uncontradictory. Cultural studies is not, as Staiger correctly observes a singular, monolithic school of thought, and she provides a concise and lucid account of some of the major factions encompassed by the term and of their contributions to debates about media reception.

In chapter four Staiger moves from considering how media audiences in general have been theorized to examining more recent work that attends to the "specialized mode of reception" (95) associated with fans and fan communities. Here Staiger catalogues the activities and rituals associated with fandom before providing a brief overview of some of the possible explanations that can be offered for the extraordinarily active reception mode adopted by fans and fan groups. Continuing on a related theme, chapter five examines the reading practices associated with stars, cult media forms and the avant garde. In examining stars and their viewers, Staiger charts the progress of scholarship on this phenomenon from some of the earliest work, which presumes an affectionate disposition toward the star on the viewer's part, to more recent accounts of stardom that propose a broader range of viewers' emotional responses to stars and which signal the continuing value of research in this area. The possibility that this range of responses might include extreme contempt as well as attraction or devotion provides a link to the next section of the chapter, in which the responses of what have been labelled as 'paracinematic' fans; those who seek out (generally cult) movies labelled as aesthetically lacking in worth, as 'trash', and who celebrate those qualities as a rejection of the normative aesthetic values of mainstream culture. The paracinematic mode is one of two modes commonly associated with cult film audiences, the other being 'camp', a mode examined by Staiger in the following section of this chapter. Finally Staiger turns to the avant garde and viewers of avant garde movies, an area linked to the preceding sections of this chapter by the generic requirement of viewers who can bring to the encounter with the film text a repertoire of existing knowledges that will enable them to participate actively in the meaning-making process.

Minorities and the media are the concern of chapter six, which addresses the problematic, unspoken assumption of many of the theories outlined in this book, that the 'viewer' hypothesized by these theories is an ideal type; white, male, heterosexual and middle class (and we might add Anglophone to that list). Staiger problematizes these assumptions throughout this book and certainly does not reproduce them in her rendering of the theories she discusses. In this chapter she addresses more directly issues relating to identity, and particularly non-white/male/heterosexual/middle-class identities and the engagements of these viewers with movies. This is perhaps the part of the book that will leave the reader wishing that Staiger had been given the scope to develop her discussion in greater depth in order to more comprehensively cover this extremely complicated area.

The book's penultimate chapter returns to a theme that underlies early US mass communications research into media effects; the impact on viewers of watching violent, horrific or sexually explicit media images. Staiger catalogues the various claims for the behavioural effects hypothesized by 'media effects' researchers and problematizes the oversimplifying models of the interaction between a media text and its audiences proposed by this persistent strand of media research, which is as consistent in presenting an alarmist vision of the impact of media viewing as it is in failing to produce evidence confirming the validity of its hypotheses. Finally Staiger considers the importance of memory in producing the meaning-making encounter between the media text and its viewer. If, as Roland Barthes asserted, the viewer (reader) is already itself a plurality of other texts (*S/Z*, Blackwell, 1990)

then memory is the repository of those texts, the place where -- imperfectly recorded, as Barthes recognized -- they function to constitute the subjective 'I' that constructs the meaning of each newly encountered text. For Staiger memory has another meaning in our understanding of media reception, for it not only provides the only means of access to the moment of the interaction between viewer and text but often also operates collectively through the media to constitute a social 'memory' of past events rendered in media texts. Staiger's account of this area of media research is limited by the scope and format of this book, but provides sufficient food for thought to leave the reader hoping that this is an area that Staiger will develop further in her future work.

# The Politics of James Bond: From Fleming's Novels to the Big Screen

By Jeremy Black

Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005. ISBN 0-83032-6240-X. xii + 227pp. £12.95 (pbk)

**A review by James Chapman , University of Leicester, UK**

There are three kinds of book about James Bond. First, there are the glossy, large-format, analysis-lite 'histories' of the Bond films, most of which repeat familiar anecdotes about the production of the films and generally endorse received wisdoms about the Bond series (such as *Goldfinger* (Guy Hamilton, 1964) was the archetypal Bond film, *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* (Peter R. Hunt, 1969) has been unjustly neglected and the Roger Moore films spoiled Bond by their recourse to comedy). Sometimes, most recently in the case of John Cork's *James Bond: The Legacy* (Boxtree, 2002), these books have been endorsed by the films' producers and can themselves be seen as part of an 'official' discourse around the films. Then there are the likes of Tony Bennett and Janet Woollacott's *Bond and Beyond: The Political Career of a Popular Hero* (Macmillan, 1987) and the recent collection *Ian Fleming and James Bond: The Cultural Politics of 007* (Indiana University Press, 2005), edited by Edward P. Commentale, Stephen Watt and Skip Willman -- highly academicised cultural studies interpretations of the Bond phenomenon that are heavy on the theory and short on anything that resembles crisp, clear prose. Jeremy Black's *The Politics of James Bond* -- published in hardback by Praeger in 2001 and now making a welcome appearance in paperback -- falls, fortunately, into a third category, one that takes its subject matter seriously and adopts a duly scholarly approach but which is refreshingly free from the jargon of culture-speak and does not require a dictionary of critical theory to rest by the reader's elbow. It is to be hoped that, just as Fleming's novels first appeared as 'quality' hardbacks before being paperbacked, the publication of Black's monograph in paperback will earn it the wider general readership it deserves.

Black's approach is to place the Bond corpus -- both books and films -- in the context of geopolitics. He relates the Bond conspiracy plots to the continuously shifting climate of international relations, charting Bond's progress from Cold Warrior in the early novels to the defender of the free world against the diabolical forces of international terrorism in the films. He takes on board such contexts as Britain's retreat from empire, the space race and the history of espionage. Particularly illuminating is Black's mapping of the changing context of Anglo-American relations reflected in the books and modified in the films. He argues that Fleming's plots "can be seen as efforts to create an impression of the normality of British imperial rule and action, with Bond as a defender of empire" (7) -- an important ideological imperative at the time of the publication of the first Bond novel *Casino Royale* (1953) when the CIA was deeply concerned over Soviet penetration of the British intelligence services in the wake of the defections of Guy Burgess and Donald Maclean. Fleming's subordination of the CIA to the British Secret Service was carried through into the early Bond films, which most closely adhered to the plots of the novels, but could no longer be maintained by the 1970s when films such as *Diamonds Are Forever* (Guy Hamilton, 1971) and *Live and Let Die*

(Guy Hamilton, 1973) -- both set largely in the United States -- "reflected the insignificance of Britain" (130). Black also demonstrates how the notion of 'third party' villains attempting to spark global conflict -- a theme first explored in the film of *You Only Live Twice* (Lewis Gilbert, 1967) that became increasingly prominent in the series from *The Spy Who Loved Me* (Lewis Gilbert, 1977) onwards -- "was to help the Bond films outlive the fall of the USSR" (138). For all the criticisms leveled against the films for their absurd plots, the film-makers have often uncannily anticipated 'real' politics, for example in the complicated arms-and-drugs dealing plot of *The Living Daylights* (John Glen, 1987) and the threat to the West's oil reserves in both *Never Say Never Again* (Irvin Kershner, 1983) and *The World Is Not Enough* (Michael Apted, 1999).

It would probably be fair to describe Black as a historian interested in popular culture, rather than a cultural historian *per se*, and this is how the book should be read. There is little here, for example, about the political economy of the film industry or about the formal and stylistic properties of the films. To be fair, though, this is not Black's aim. What the book offers, in abundance, is a thoroughgoing contextualisation of Bond -- something that is conspicuous by its absence from some of the more cultural theory-oriented studies of the Bond phenomenon. This is apparent, for example, in the attention that Black gives to texts that have too often been marginalised in Bond criticism, including not only the continuation novels by John Gardner and Raymond Benson -- interestingly Black considers the US author Benson to have provided "a successful revival of the Fleming style" (198) to a greater degree than the British Gardner -- but also Fleming's neglected collections of short stories, *For Your Eyes Only* (1960) and *Octopussy and the Living Daylights* (1965). This is a welcome corrective to the structuralist analysis of Fleming by Umberto Eco, who simply dismissed the short stories -- and the novel of *The Spy Who Loved Me* (1962) -- on the grounds that they were minor works. (I suspect that what 'minor works' meant was stories that did not fit Eco's preferred model of the Bond narratives: as cultural analysts, however, we must base our interpretation on all the available texts and not simply select those that most easily support the point we want to make. This is also a weakness of several of the contributions to *Ian Fleming and James Bond: The Cultural Politics of 007*.) In fact Black makes a strong case for reconsidering *The Spy Who Loved Me* as "the most realistic of the series" (72) and suggests that contemporary critics (it was the least well received of the books) missed its links to the 'kitchen sink' realism emerging in British cinema at the time.

A particular strength of this book, furthermore, is that it does not unduly privilege either books or films: Black accepts both as objects worthy of analysis in their own right. This differentiates *The Politics of James Bond* from Bennett and Woollacott's *Bond and Beyond*, where it is clear that the authors rather look down on the films as inferior and juvenile in comparison to the books. A feature of most Bond criticism, both academic and popular, is that critics eventually come down on one side or the other. Anthony Burgess, for example (in his introduction to the Coronet editions of the Fleming books in the 1980s), had declared that "it is time for aficionados of the films to get back to the books and admire their qualities as literature". In contrast fan-boy authors Alan Barnes and Marcus Hearne, in their *Kiss Kiss Bang! Bang!: The Unofficial James Bond Film Companion* (Batsford, 1997), set out their stall "to reclaim Bond from the humourless Fleming pedants who view Bond as fixed, immutable, an unalterable period antiquity". Black resolves this tedious dispute with a subtle and nuanced assessment of the differences between the literary and cinematic Bonds:

On the screen, the narrator ceases to be omnipotent. Instead, it is the camera that narrates. That both requires and permits a very different kind of

observation. Bond is seen from outside, a process aided by the paucity of reflective passages offered by the screen character and the preference, instead, for one-liners, by the emphasis on Bond as an action hero and by the somewhat wooden presentation by two of the actors. (91-2)

The films' representation of villainy, moreover, adopts visual conventions -- best exemplified in the Chairman Mao-style tunics favoured by Bond's arch-enemy Blofeld -- in contrast to the wordy intelligence reports and dossiers that the novels adopted as an authenticating device.

In conclusion, this is a highly readable book that should be of interest both to the more discerning sections of the Bond fan community (the absence of illustrations will deter those whose preference is for Bond Book Type No.1) as well as to students and teachers of political history and, to a lesser extent, film and cultural studies. *The Politics of James Bond*, indeed, is in the vanguard of a recent welcome trend to place popular fictions in the contexts of both geopolitics and historical processes -- a trend that was also apparent in the September 2003 Institute of Historical Research conference *Britain and the Culture of the Cold War* in which papers were offered on such topics as Biggles, Dan Dare and Captain Scarlet. Professor Black's principal achievement here, however, is to demonstrate that James Bond can be taken seriously without recourse to either the excesses of uncritical fanzine journalese on the one hand or the impenetrable critical language of high theory on the other.

# Hollywood Divas, Indie Queens, & TV Heroines: Contemporary Screen Images of Women

By Susanne Kord and Elisabeth Krimmer

Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005. ISBN 0-7425-3709-9. 12 illustrations, vi + 185pp. £14.99 (pbk)

## A review by Hannah Hamad, University of East Anglia, UK

*Hollywood Divas, Indie Queens, & TV Heroines* is a very readable series of case study analyses of female screen personae in the period from 1990-2004. The book is ambitious in scope, covering as it does Hollywood cinema, US independent film productions and US television drama in one (relatively slim at 185 pages) volume, necessitating a degree of generalisation, and some subjectivity in the selection of texts for analysis.

The authors explain their selection methodology thus: "the most important criterion was the question whether an actress was 'in' at the moment and had been 'in' throughout the 1990s." (2) This certainly accounts for the absence of discussion of currently significant stars such as Nicole Kidman and Cameron Diaz, whose sustained popularity and bankability has come about more recently than that of chosen case studies Julia Roberts, Sandra Bullock and Meg Ryan (Chapters 1-3). However, a much stronger case could be made for the inclusion of a chapter on Jodie Foster than Renee Zellweger (Chapter 4) whose stardom was only effected following the 1996 release of *Jerry Maguire* (Cameron Crowe, 1996), and who (notwithstanding the authors' discussion of the unsuccessful *Nurse Betty* [Neil LaBute, 2000]) did not register another major hit until *Bridget Jones's Diary* (Sharon Maguire) in 2000. Conversely, Foster was 'in' throughout their chosen period, maintaining her star status with hit films like *The Silence of the Lambs* (Johnathan Demme, 1991), *Sommersby* (Jon Amiel, 1993), *Maverick* (Richard Donner, 1994), *Contact* (Robert Zemeckis, 1997) and *Panic Room* (David Fincher, 2002). Also, they identify Whoopi Goldberg as a 'hidden alternative', unique in terms of her being Hollywood's only female African-American megastar in its history. However, the bankability of her stardom has not been maintained, nor can she be considered to have been 'in' since 1993's *Sister Act 2: Back in the Habit* (Bill Duke), which makes a case for some discussion, or at least mention of the ascendant stardom of Halle Berry. While the authors make reference to the scant success of Goldberg's more "politically challenging" (129) roles, they do not interrogate the significance of this or the uniqueness of her success in terms of either racial or gender politics. They also read her persona as progressive and empowering, transcending stereotypes of both race and gender, with some convincing readings of *Ghost* (Jerry Zucker, 1990) and *Sister Act* (Emile Ardolino, 1992), which though they acknowledge them, tend to downplay the significance of the ideologically problematic depictions of race and gender in these films.

Within the opening Hollywood star case studies, attempts are made to determine causality with regard to box-office success, sometimes without appropriately backing them up. For example during their analysis of Meg Ryan's persona in chapter three, the authors assert: "It is likely that the box office success of *Sleepless in Seattle* is directly connected to its preoccupation with signs, fate, destiny, and reincarnation." (60) This statement is made somewhat blithely with no real substantiation, and attributes box-office success solely to thematic content, without acknowledging the importance of marketing and publicity, star bankability and celebrity status, release pattern, genre, audience targeting or any number of other industrial economic factors. Similarly, this assertion does not account for the relatively poor box-office performance of a film like *Forces of Nature* (Bronwen Hughs, 1999) which has a similar thematic content to *Sleepless in Seattle* but failed to make a significant impression on potential audiences. Bearing this in mind, it is noticeable that *Forces of Nature* (a Sandra Bullock vehicle) is not covered in the Bullock chapter.

There are some methodological inconsistencies in that the authors also attempt to explain the reasons for the relative box-office failure of several of Sandra Bullock's vehicles (53-54) for sexist ideological reasons, however, they do not do this for Julia Roberts' conspicuous flops, asserting that "Sandra Bullock's career, as measured by box-office success, is a great deal more spotty than that of Julia Roberts." (54) Chapter one presents Roberts as a model of box-office reliability through discussions of *Pretty Woman* (Garry Marshall, 1990), *My Best Friend's Wedding* (P J Hogan, 1997), *Runaway Bride* (Garry Marshall, 1999), *Notting Hill* (Roger Michell, 1999) and *Erin Brokovich* (Steven Soderbergh, 2000), while there is no mention of the relatively unsuccessful films *Dying Young* (Joel Schumacher, 1991), *Mary Reilly* (Stephen Frears, 1996), *Something to Talk About* (Lasse Halstrom, 1995) or *I Love Trouble* (Charles Shyer, 1994), despite the fact that all of them were released in the period under interrogation. Attempting to determine causality in box-office success is always a problematic venture, and in this case, they do not complement the authors' largely insightful, accessible and engaging analyses of these Hollywood screen personae.

The case studies are selected by star, but they do not cover entire career trajectories, opting instead to cherry pick individual vehicles. Box-office information is included with each entry, but for no apparent reason. There are inconsistencies -- like those described above -- to hamper any potential speculations one might make for the inclusion of this information, other than simply to emphasise the commercial nature of Hollywood films. Furthermore, the book does not benefit from throwaway assertions like "Clearly, in 1957 movies strove to depict 'real life,' whereas in 1993... movies strive to imitate movies." (61) This statement is fraught with problems, not least of which is its reductive binary opposition. The authors clearly have a valid point to make about postmodernism and intertextuality in contemporary Hollywood films and are keen to make it in an accessible and readable manner, but statements such as this do no justice to their attempts.

Chapter three discusses Meg Ryan in the context of her status as a heroine of romantic comedy but it makes no reference to *When Harry Met Sally* (Rob Reiner, 1989), arguably the most important role of her career, and certainly the film which established her status as a heroine of her trademark genre. The film does fall out of their chosen timeframe by one year, but considering its centrality to Ryan's persona, which they identify as synonymous with the romantic comedy heroine, the film certainly warrants a mention.

Chapter five 'Highlights and Low Points' presents a selection of readings of films that the authors have chosen and deemed to be either particularly progressive or particularly



retrograde in their depiction of women. Although it contains some fairly insightful analyses, it is entirely subjective, and would be more persuasive had the authors argued for or against these texts in more convincing ideological terms. This is not to suggest that their analyses are devoid of an ideological standpoint, but they are posited in terms of individual value judgements, and hard-line divisions like *Strange Days* (Kathryn Bigelow, 1995) is a 'highlight' and *Charlie's Angels* (McG, 2000) is a 'low point'. Having said this, the book is at its best when it engages in readings and critiques of iconically postfeminist films like *Charlie's Angels* and *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* (Simon West, 2001). The analysis of the latter is particularly engaging during its discussion of fatherhood and the way that the film "overemphasizes its heroine's relationship with her father" (107), and marginalizes motherhood: "Her mother, on the other hand, is reduced to a pale, silent image." (101) In their analysis of *Charlie's Angels* they also place the paternalism of Charlie's relationship to the Angels nicely alongside the daddy's girl of *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider*. As the authors observe, Lara's "heart belongs to daddy." (102). Also, in their reading of *Charlie's Angels*, the authors astutely point out that "We can choose to read [its] excess as deconstructive parody or be put off by the fact that *Charlie's Angels* capitalizes on what it pretends to critique", which highlights the postfeminist double-bind presented by many popular cultural texts in this period, of which *Charlie's Angels* is only one.

In chapter six, good points are made about representation of female authority figures in *Shakespeare in Love* (John Madden, 1998) and *Mrs Brown* (John Madden, 1997) in the context of a discussion of Judi Dench's screen persona. This is followed by a discussion of the persona of Kathy Bates, which the authors describe as "that of the middle-aged bitch" (119), and later by an analysis of *Something's Gotta Give* (Nancy Meyers, 2003), which is described as "an omnipotence fantasy for a sixty-year-old woman" (167). The issue of aging in terms of the depiction of women, is thus obliquely alluded to, but is not directly addressed.

One of the book's main aims is to highlight the 'mixed messages' of postfeminist texts like *Charlie's Angels* and *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider*, yet it does not acknowledge the similarly mixed messages of television series *Buffy The Vampire Slayer* which is read rather as unproblematically progressive and empowering: "one of the most enjoyable female omnipotence fantasies ever to have graced the tube" (142). Similarly, while they acknowledge the ideological problems of *Something's Gotta Give* in their largely positive reading, they are not identified or interrogated. One of the book's most important points is made when the authors rightly critique the historicisation of feminism in films like *Mona Lisa Smile* (Mike Newell, 2003) and *Cold Mountain* (Anthony Minghella, 2003):

the films' discovery of forward female thinkers of the past seems, above all, to acknowledge one thing: if set in the present day, movies celebrating female independence and survival skills or advocating women's right to a career and an education would appear shrill and demanding -- in short 'feminist' and in a context in which commercial viability is everything, that appearance has to be avoided at any cost. (166)

For all its methodological inconsistencies and its relatively slight treatment of some large issues of gender representation and contemporary stardom, *Hollywood Divas, Indie Queen's, & TV Heroines* is an enjoyably readable introduction for students new to studying women in film and television, and provides a wide variety of case studies pertinent to the study of contemporary Hollywood.

# **Hitchcock's Cryptonymies: Volume I. Secret Agents**

By Tom Cohen

Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005. ISBN 0-8166-4205-2 (hbk), ISBN 0-8166-4206-0 (pbk). 376pp. £17.50 (hbk), £34.65 (pbk)

Hitchcock's Cryptonymies: Volume II. War Machines By Tom Cohen

## **Hitchcock's Cryptonymies: Volume II. War Machines**

By Tom Cohen

Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005. ISBN 0-8166-4171-4 (hbk), ISBN 0-8166-4170-6 (pbk). 360pp. £17.50 (hbk), £34.65 (pbk)

### **A review by Mary Valentis, State University of New York at Albany, US**

In 1799, as Napoleon's soldiers were digging the foundations for a fort near the Egyptian town of Rosetta (el-Rashid), they unencrypted what came to be called The Rosetta Stone. Three ancient scripts or sign systems -- hieroglyphic, demotic, and Greek -- etched across the stone's surface in triplicate cued the French scholar Champollion to the fact that hieroglyphics 'recorded' the sounds of the native demotic script. Once decoded and deciphered, these transports and translations among visual, acousmatic, and logical languages repeated a material, human history from an ancient image to pre-historical language cultures that get reversed today in the current turn from book to global image culture.

On exhibit in the British Museum since 1802 when the English appropriated the stone after Napoleon's defeat, The Rosetta has since embodied a primal scene in the archive of reading and compressed what Deleuze calls "a cloud of virtual images" or possible reading futures that surround "every actual." (*Dialogues*, Columbia University Press, 1987: 148) Virtuals and unencrypted images that have attached themselves to the stone and its origins coalesce around war and reading: as French excavation and decipherment (Derrida); as global conflict -- Syria and the bombed out El-Rashid Hotel; as the British Museum, epicenter of vast cultural agencies and mnemonic objects amassed during the age of empire building; and as language learning software sold today at airport kiosks and over the Internet under the name Rosetta Stone.

These same kinds of transports, signature sign systems, mnemonic relays, and compressed virtualities at work on the Rosetta are at play in Tom Cohen's groundbreaking, densely elusive yet revelatory new study of Hitchcock's cinematic archive. *Hitchcock's Cryptonymies*, published simultaneously in two, 'hyperlinked' volumes, *Secret Agents* and *War Machines*,

"takes 'Hitchcock' as a Rosetta Stone," for "cinema's advent, its accelerating role in a teletechnic revolution, and its presumed death, *as if* at the hands of new media" (*Agents* 2). In addition to incorporating this historio-graphic allegory, Cohen's 'Hitchcock' becomes both a planetary, futuristic reading room and a platform for invention, a medium to rehearse what I will call a Nanotechnology of Reading that has implications for critical readers beyond the Hitch canon.

Both a science involving nanomachines that engineer atomic particles and a science fiction in the process of imagining its own possible futures, these 'technologies' of miniaturization, when troped as reading and applied by Cohen to the subcutaneous layers of Hitchcock's celluloid, precisely manipulate the director's micrological 'secret agents' and performatively animate the inter-filmic relays, syllables, pre-letteral marks, hieroglyphs, and over-determined images encrypted in these films. In other words, the pre-logical worlds of letteration and graphic markings, when mixed with stars and storyboards, take on a life of their own in this universe of memory systems.

The word 'Vertigo', for instance, aside from its obvious signification as the experience of simultaneous dizziness and free falling brought on by physical causes or emotional trauma, conflates *verte*, the French word for green, and *igo*. Green is nausea, 'nature', and Elster's wife's Rolls; it is a colourised signifier for the fog that surrounds Judy Barton dressed up as 'Madeline' and a copy of herself when she posed as the 'original' who never existed anyway. 'Igo' fuses 'I' and 'ego', or self, that when paired with nature cites or becomes a referent for the undoing of Enlightenment aesthetics and, in particular, the romantic sublime tradition.

'Green's' apogee in 'Vertigo' occurs at the site of the giant sequoias where Madeline and Scottie examine the sliced tree and its inner rings dating back to the Battle of Hastings in 1066. The sequoia "disclose(s) an archive" or a "tree pre-inhabited by a techne" (*Machines* 148). The nature/self binary de-couples and petrifies as nature itself is exposed already or always de-naturalised. Cohen explains: "So the vertigo motif is actually a predicate for the emptying out of a certain mock-romantic mimetic ideology in the name of the 'natural'; or 'nature' here is another name for a kind of transvaluation, the sequoia's rings sucking historical dates into the tree's graphic vortex, the trajectory of Hitchcock's diverse 'O-Men' (Johnny O, 'Roger O., Dick O)" (*Machines*)148.

Cohen's readings of Hitchcock's cinemaginary attempt to de-frame (yet have clearly introjected) modernist, ocularist, auteurist, psychoanalytic templates -- the 'usual suspects.' They strive for originality even as they disclose its impossibility, and, for the most part, succeed in having it both ways. As Cohen deciphers and decodes what Walter Benjamin called the camera's "unconscious optics", frame by frame, his readings are stylish, impassioned, thick -- migrating back and forth from literary theory into the hybridized field of visual studies and culture. He tracks a (theoretical) line of flight through Nietzsche's Zarasthusian solarly, Walter Benjamin's de-auracized cinema, Derrida's allosemes, graphematics, and spectrographics, Abraham and Torok's notion of cryptonymy, and McKenzie Wark's 'virtual geographies'. Cohen acknowledges his precursors such as William Rothman whose biography *The Murderous Gaze* (Harvard University Press, 1984) revealed the persistent 'barcode series', Žižek's 'sinthomes', and Deleuze's 'demarkings'. Their readings gesture in the direction of cryptonymies, but Cohen is dismissive of the latter two as coitally interrupted commentaries.

His closest correlative, via Derrida's introduction, is to the 'wild psychoanalysis' of Abraham and Torok in their book, *The Wolf Man's Magic Word: A Cryptonymy* (University of Minnesota Press, 1987). That book's method invents 'cryptonymy' as a way to read Freud's own undecipherable reading site, itself a 'Rosetta', called *The Wolf Man or A Case of Infantile Neurosis*. Space doesn't permit an extended reading of Derrida's gloss of the "wolf man's magic words" as decrypted by Abraham and Torok. Suffice it to say that their methodology of decipherment, like Cohen's, involves the hunting down of etymological sediments or allosemantic elements of words for encryptions or buried secrets. These encryptions, in turn, reveal a network. Networked secrets hyperlinked in words or sounds, or syllables, or visuals, once decoded, animate and are 'embodied' performatively, whether at work in the Wolf Man's 'fantastic memory tableau' or in the 'screen' memories of a Hitchcock film.

In his introduction to the Abraham and Torok book, Derrida explains that: "the allosemantic pathways in this strange relay-race pass through non-semantic associations, purely phonemic contaminations" and "these associations in themselves constitute or parts of words that act like visible and/or audible bodies of things." (*Wolf Man's* xlii). Abraham and Torok define cryptonymy as "a way of reading that is distrustful of the presumed transparency of words themselves and even of the motivations behind revealing a secret. In fact, according to cryptonymy, secrecy and revelation are not oppositional but one in the same" (*Wolf Man's* 43). The trajectory here is from modernist interiority to its disappearance and reification in postmodernist 'extreme' exteriority; in other words, from Dora's reticule, a Victorian purse nervously fingered by Freud's famous patient that signified a secret genital/bisexual correlative in her 'case' history, to Marnie's yellow pocketbook which Cohen reads as a literal floating signifier for "pre and post-gendered" genitality:

It [*Marnie's yellow purse*] is perhaps cinema's most succinct undoing of the imaginary of the phallus, since by circulating as countermytheme of a freely detached and mobile vaginal entity, one expanding with folds and allied to the pink book pages that serve as background for the credit sequence, the alliance of a privileged signifier with the phallic order is simply suspended (*Machines* 72).

*Cryptonymies: Volume I. Secret Agents*, lays out the terrain of micrological subversion and identifies the primal scene for reading Hitchcock 'teletechnically'. An aperture that cuts through the 'fog' of moviemaking and marks future media empires, this 'inaugural' cameo in *The Lodger* (1927) cites Hitchcock as the master of teletechnic transport and duplication presiding over the machinery of Benjaminian "art in an age of mechanical reproduction." 'Hitchcock' appears in that first cameo sitting "in front of a giant media factory, in a glass booth as news editor amid typographic machines and crushing gears, to the relay of mass papers and trucks and wireless relays. That is the installation at the core of a telemedial empire."

*The Lodger's* subtitle, *A Story of the London Fog*, evokes for Cohen the "particles and pointillistic markings on which what is called light hangs" and "seems to name all of the material logics that precede the mimetic premises cinema conjures as a spectral machine" (*Agents* 43). In other words, the fog of cinema, like Hamlet's father, is the ghostly medium that makes real the procession of images that orchestrate material events. One also thinks of 'utility fog', a nano-technological term coined by Dr J. Storrs Hall, Research Fellow of the Institute for Molecular Manufacturing, to describe how 'a swarm' of interlocked nanobots ('foglets') can shape-shift and virtually form themselves into anything. Hitchcock's 'foglets'

emerge out of *The Lodger's* cinematic vapors to produce a virtualized after-life for cinema or cinema's ghost relayed into digitalized image culture.

Cohen's reading software comes packaged with what, in section two of *Secret Agents*, is called 'A Users Guide:' which is a series of semi-glossed markers that make up the various visual and linguistic circuits that seem to be at work beneath the surface of these films. The most significant of these are the 'bar' series, read as "an irreducible signature of prefigural alteration and spacing" (*Agents* 50) and inserted into names such as Judy Barton or Detective Barton, used as a noun such as the Oak Bar at the Plaza Hotel or the Bar at the Top of the Mark in San Francisco, and of course imaged in the ski tracks of *Spellbound* (1945), the iron fences of *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1954), the graphic bars that open *Psycho* (1960) and so on. There is also the 'Mar' series, "a counter-signature to the 'bar series' that locates a nonvisible order upon which all visible effects are projected" (*Agents* 58).

Like the 'Nina' that caricaturist Al Hirschfeld sequestered in every one of his theatrical drawings for the *New York Times*, the 'Mar' series encrypts itself in each Hitchcock work as Mark, Marlow, Marnie, Marion, Mary, Marvin, and Margaret. 'Mother' is another shiatsu point or citational node for reading Hitchcock's signature markings; for Cohen 'she' is non-gendered, anti-Oedipal, and non-psychoanalytic, the death mother of de-auracized cinema: "the non-site where all inscription stands to occur." B.M. denotes the British Museum, blackmail, the Rosetta stone, the inscription on the female Charlie's ring in *Shadow of A Doubt* (1943), anality, and so forth.

The readings in Volume One reel through Hitchcock's films in the British cycle, contextualizing and framing each one as a distinct exemplum of a particular Hitchcockian allegory. These allegories are not representational, that is traditional, as Cohen articulates in his reading of *Sabotage* (1936); rather, they are performative allegories, Benjaminian, and hyperactive since they carve interventions and mnemotic incisions into the perceptual fabrics and historical memories of these films. As an elaboration of this distinction, *Sabotage's* Detective Ted Spenser, the precursor to Robert Parker's detective, 'Spenser for Hire', is a citational 'hit' for Cohen on Edmund Spenser, poet of the *Faerie Queene*, the crown jewel of the British allegorical tradition.

The war between the 'home state' and the foreign powers in these films is archival. Espionages and intrigues are merely window dressing, a chocolate factory in *Sabotage* disguising a spies' post office, a front or Macguffin for the titanic battles taking place at nano-logical levels of Hitchcock's films. Behind the scenes, within the camera's unconscious, the real war being contested is between languages: the languages of the book -- mimetic, Copernican, visual -- and the replicated, black-holed, kinesthesia of cinematic expression.

Cinema wins out in the end of course. *Blackmail* (1929) allegorizes the shift from 'silents' to talkies, *Sabotage* cites cinema's annunciation of the *animeme* or electric animal of animation. *Secret Agent* (1936) sends the photogenetic, Shakespearian actor, John Gielgud, and Peter Lorre on a mission to uncover and trap what turns out to be secret agency itself and the identity of Marvin, the figure for the origins of cinematic language. *The Man Who Knew Too Much* loops back and forth between the first, black and white version and the colorized copy of the second film that repeats the first, as the eternal return of excess, this time with a focus on the family or 'in-house' cinematic affair -- a movie about making a movie.

In 'Volume Two', *War Machines*, 'Hitchcockian' cinema turns from nanotechnology into touristic video game, perhaps akin to the notorious 'Grand Theft Auto' and particularly the 'San Andreas' version of the game with its encrypted virtual sex scene. For Cohen, the Hollywood period films are swarming with machines (and prostheticized birds) that bomb, blast, terrorize, sink, and 'shit on' the book, romance, the family, the human, sex, gender, and most particularly Mother. Under Cohen's reading regime, the most familiar of the middle and late Hitchcock films, along with their critical archives, their actors and characters 'live' in and act out the after-life of a spectral cinema. Sometimes queered, or at least in need of Viagra, these sexually ambivalent specters populate the films like ghosts driven from Freud's case histories: exhibiting photophobia, vertigo, and frigidity, symptoms of a de-auracized cinema and conflated sexualities. As Cohen remarks:

Variations and combinations shift. In *Frenzy*, references are made to 'Dick-O Blaney' as if two genital shapes were interfaced, mirrored in the fetish necktie with its circle-collar and dangling tie. In *Family Plot* Lumley promises Blanche in bed a 'standing ovation' where an erection is interfaced with an 'O' figure marked as female (ovarian). Tropes are circulated that retire the binary war of genital markers, become invertible spaces or topographic folds, like Marnie's purse (*War Machines* 76).

Cohen's insistence that Hitchcock uses as a prop or passes on (in the sense of not buying) Freud's Oedipus by passing through or beyond it, as in surpassing, again sets up an extreme makeover of Mother, Freud, Lacan, and the gaze in *Psycho*. *Psycho*, for Cohen, is "ground zero in Hitchcock. It reads and re-writes every other film." (*War Machines*, 89). More particularly, this reading collapses 'the Oedipal theatre' in which sexual and gender identifications supposedly congeal, and then goes on to 'transvestite' the Freudian family romance and its secrets. Norman, a diva-ed Clytemnestra dressed to kill in the fruit cellar, is a man impersonating a mother who "cannot be personified or given a place." Instead 'Mother' is a displacement of a primal scene *manque*, an indentation on the bedspread of a cinematic house already emptied of its originality.

Marnie too is a cinematic stand-in whose glacial sexuality 'McGuffins' for her status as a celluloid (blond) copy and acts as a trope for cinema "voided of the rituals of sexuality altogether," (*Machines* 77). Her 'mar' name alone sets off a series of memory screens that front for a chain of signifying mother links. In fact, 'Marnie' proffers a series of false fronts, including a patriarchal institution like a publishing house, that beards for what Cohen calls a 'secret eunarchy'; a horse named Forio that suggests a Laurentian sex animal but whose loops and twists refer to film rather than love-making; and flashbacks and post-traumatic memories front for the mechanics of making movies.

Tom Cohen concludes his Hitchcock study with an extensive reading of what has generally been considered a fluff piece, *To Catch a Thief* (1955). Spread over two inter chapters and a long chapter, his reading includes a mock Socratic dialogue between Cohen the critic and an imaginary reader that doesn't quite work. What does work extremely well in this re-evaluation is Cohen's notion that *To Catch A Thief* is not just a pleasant romp on the Riviera. Rather, from its opening shot of the travel folders behind glass, *Thief* plays out a dis-enfolding and ultimate disappearance of the Real (in the Baudrillardian sense) or the cat disclosed as another version of Mother.

At the same time it nullifies the Real, the film enacts a reification of sex and seduction as crystallized in the business with the stolen jewels and reveals Hitchcock as a master of literary pyrotechnics of the sort familiar to readers of Harold Bloom and his theory concerning the 'anxiety of influence'. For Cohen, Hitch's fireworks shot off over the Mediterranean in the window behind Grace Kelly and Cary Grant are not clichéd tropes for sexual climax. In fact there is no arrival at pleasure in this *mise en scene*: "jouissance is another fake ad in the travel window" (*Machines* 238).

Rather Hitchcock's bursts of cinematic fireballs, aligned with the sea and sun, purloin James Joyce's humble pyrotechnics that arc above the lame Gerty McDowell, fantasy object for Leopold Bloom's ejaculation in the Nausica section of *Ulysses*. Cohen's 'cryptonymies' link this Joycean filch to a signature scene system that includes Homer, Mother, nature, modernist poetry, and the atomic bomb that "sucks up its entire archival network with dizzying and mocking superficiality" (*Machines* 236). Similarly, the masked ball attended by Grant in black face carrying a parasol cites the house of Paramount and anticipates thoroughly deconstructed movie sets as those in David Lynch *Mullholland Drive* (2001).

*Hitchcock's Cryptonymies* are not for everyone. Cohen's reader must be theoretically sophisticated and have a passion for Hitchcock's films. His reader must be willing to suspend disbelief and plunge fearlessly into the black holes of citalogical cinematics and allegorical hyperperformativity -- the movie underworld of reels, celluoids, rolling cameras, sutures, cuts, microfilm. One can toss out this extremely detailed, impeccably researched user's guide and bail out of this micrological 'wonderland' in order to perpetuate a sentimentalized, Judy 'Bartoned' version of Hitchcock. Or one can engage with these texts and their demands by moving deeper into the nanoworlds of this curiouser and curiouser cinema.

# Watching Daytime Soap Operas: The Power of Pleasure

By Louise Spence

Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2005. ISBN 0-8195-6765-5. 1 illustration, 272pp. £15.95 (pbk), £27.68 (hbk)

## A review by Janice Kelly, Marymount Manhattan College, US

Louise Spence confesses (the choice of words is deliberate) that during the course of her research for *Watching Daytime Soap Operas: The Power of Pleasure* she "even began to think of myself as 'the soap opera lady'" (52). The statement is rather ironic in two ways. In daytime soap operas, regular viewers are thoroughly immersed in the stories and characters. Spence uses the terms "intersubjective dialogue" and "dialogic interdependence" (53) to describe her conception of ethnographic research, which does not purport to be objective, but which emphasizes the subjectivity of the ethnographer as critical to the tasks of fieldwork and written interpretation. The term 'soap opera lady' suggests the ethnographer is as involved in the subject matter as her interviewees. As the book unfolds, it is clear that Spence's relationship to her interviewees and the soap opera genre is analogous to their relationships with the various people and plots that populate daytime soaps.

'Soap opera lady' also carries a self-deprecating connotation. Spence recognises that she is writing about a form of entertainment that routinely elicits disdain. A dominant theme is that women who enjoy watching soap operas almost invariably feel compelled to justify their pleasure. Spence's aim is to prove to the reader that their interest and excitement is indeed justified. However, one gets the uncomfortable feeling that Spence herself is not free of the same guilt. Spence admonishes the reader that in attempting to understand the experiences of soap opera viewers, "we should factor in the fact that for some people, especially those with many household responsibilities, watching soap operas has not attained the same respectability that writing about soaps has in academic circles" (53). Spence seems to have difficulty in balancing the roles of academic and soap opera viewer.

One of the anecdotes in the book is of a retired schoolteacher who related how she took to spending her afternoons watching soap operas after failing to master bridge, which would have ensured her a place in the social world of her new condominium community. As portrayed by Spence, the former teacher's remarks suggested she was striving to justify her viewing choice, "proving it worthwhile by conforming it to academic interests and fitting her acts and talk into an intellectual framework" (53). Ironically, Spence appears to be doing precisely the same thing. A tone of ambivalence runs through the book. Soap operas provide women who are home during the day with a range of intriguing characters, complex albeit familiar plots, emotional expression, and a social bond with others who share their interest. Yet when the last show of the day is over and the credits roll by, the television is nothing more than another electronic device amidst appliances such as stoves, vacuum cleaners, dishwashers, and other symbols of what is often an unsatisfying reality.



The book begins on an intimate note, which is fitting for the subject matter. Spence recalls how she became interested in the project, a graduate student nursing a flu or cold and watching daytime soap operas for the first time in nearly thirty years. The familiar television shows evoked a "warm feeling" accompanied by a "sense of loss" (1) over connections with family and with women, and an urge to find out more about the women who take pleasure in daytime soap operas and their object of choice. The quest to delve into the intricacies of the extremely popular but maligned genre evolved gradually. Over fifteen years, Spence engaged in dialogues with more than twenty-five women who regularly watch daytime soap operas. The discussions ranged from casual conversations to formal interviews; in some cases, ethnographer and interviewee watched television together. Spence emphasizes that she had no desire to present a quantitative analysis. Television audiences have historically been surveyed, quantified, and categorized. A 'Nielsen mentality' is hardly appropriate for presenting a sensitive, insightful portrait of devotees of soap operas or any other form of entertainment. Rather, the author sought to "respect the complexity, the contradictions, and the paradoxes" (10). The book is replete with complexity, contradictions and paradoxes. Soap operas are made for conventional women yet the very act of taking pleasure in a culturally degraded pastime constitutes an act of rebellion. Women who watch soap operas typically lead respectable lives but their favourite characters are embroiled in a remarkable array of schemes, infidelities, and intrigues. Women who may always assert themselves in the world have no inhibitions about proclaiming their opinions about the actions they see on the screen. And it is not necessarily the villain -- or villainess -- they condemn but rather the 'wimps'.

Spence begins with some historical background information that sets the stage for the unfolding narrative. From the days when soap operas made their debut on the radio, the prevailing wisdom was that they served as a refuge for women spending their days alone at home. Isolated from the social, political, and occupational realms, and often with limited education, these women were not only lonely but naïve, gullible, and impressionable. The situation made them the darling of advertisers and the subject of psychologists and sociologists, who elaborated on how soap operas provided homemakers with a substitute for real social interaction.

Spence's analysis of the image created by 'experts' of the lonely homemaker using soap operas to compensate for an empty existence is especially interesting. By criticising women for relying on a fictional medium to compensate for what is lacking in real life, the researchers invoke "images of the socially inept, the rejected, those with low self-worth or an incomplete identity the psychologically needy". The assumption is that without their daily daytime distraction, their lives are "uneventful, unrewarding, or insufficient." This has been said before. What Spence brings up is the implication that the escape into the social relationships of the soap operas "spoil one's appetite for real life" much the same way that junk food spoils one's appetite for a real meal (4).

According to Spence, this is simply a form of blaming the victim for her social isolation. Instead of being out in the world of 'normal' human relationships, the stay-at-home soap opera junkie is "hopelessly captured by the evils of banality" (4). Spence makes a convincing point. However, the paradox is that the lives of most people are banal when compared to the intrigues of Erica Kane and other denizens of daytime soap operas. What comes across is that the victims are not blamed for their choice of television fare but rather for their decision to stay at home. The legions of fans of *Dallas* were safe from such condemnation because they engaged in their escapist soap opera viewing after a day at work.

One of the ironies of the book is that while it is meant to be a study of women who watch soap operas, the most interesting passages are devoted to descriptions of the daytime soap opera medium and its technical aspects. Soap operas originated in radio. Despite designer clothes, luxury cars, and close-ups of buff male torsos, they remain close to their aural roots. Spence makes an intriguing comparison of the way women and men watch television. Embedded in American television culture is the image of the male viewer fully relaxed in a recliner with a remote on his arm. Women, or at least women at home doing housework, are never fully engaged in the screen. There is always something that needs cleaning, dusting, or diapering. Soap operas are designed to fit this purpose; one can easily be distracted by other tasks and still keep up with the story unfolding onscreen.

Spence describes how some women talk to the characters on the screen, applauding them when they leave their husbands (apparently a popular theme for many viewers) or sympathising with their pain. They know they have no influence over the action but nonetheless they enjoy declaring their opinions. Spence points out that the viewers' expression of opinions (or emotions) goes beyond talking to a projected image. Soap opera fans share their opinions, ideas, and emotions, with other avid fans -- in much the same way as sports fans, science fiction fans, or reality show fans.

In fact, there are numerous instances where what Spence seems to feel is a unique dynamic between soap opera viewers and their favourite shows could easily be applied to any popular medium. Describing an exchange between her mother and grandmother, Spence found it especially interesting the way they smoothly switched back and forth between the fictional world of the characters and the plot to information about the performers. Is that really so unique to soap operas? If there is any significance in the exchange it lies in the camaraderie between the two people talking that makes them privy to information an outsider would find confusing. Other popular entertainment forms induce similar camaraderie except that the fans do not feel compelled to justify their pleasure as Spence repeatedly tells us that soap opera viewers do.

Interestingly, Spence acknowledges that although her emphasis is on soap operas as perceived by the women she interviewed, she does not attempt to separate that from the ways she has experienced them. When her focus is on the soap operas, the characters, the intrigues, the visual images, and visceral elements, her analysis is excellent. When her focus is on the perceptions of soap opera viewers one wonders how much of it comes from the women she interviewed and how much of it is a projection of her own ambivalence. Is watching daytime soap operas really such a 'guilty pleasure' to the legions of fans who enjoy them or is it her guilt as an academic watching a disdained medium? Do homemakers who feel compelled to justify their passion for soap operas feel guilty because they are watching *One Life to Live* or because they are home instead of in the workplace?

In the beginning of the book, Spence argues that the justification for taking soap operas seriously lies simply in the fact that they are important to the people who watch them. Spence does an admirable job of convincing the reader of that. The problem is that she does not seem to have convinced herself.

# EcoMedia

By Sean Cubitt

Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2005. ISBN 90-420-1885-2. 13 b&w illustrations, 168pp. £24.85 (pbk)

## A review by Holly Rogers, University College Dublin, Ireland

In this book, Sean Cubitt leaves his usual domain of video culture to focus on the ways in which technology can mediate a changing relationship between the human and the natural worlds in film. Published in 2005 -- the year of tsunami, hurricanes and Birmingham tornadoes -- the book taps into very prominent and pressing environmental concerns. As cinema can enable the mass dissemination of significant cultural values, while providing direct access to trends within mass culture -- "we have no better place to look than the popular media for representations of popular knowledge" writes Cubitt (1) -- film has become an important arena in which to air and reflect ecological anxiety. On-screen, glimpses of environmental apocalypse (*The Day After Tomorrow* [Roland Emmerich, 2004], *Ice* [Jean de Segonzac, 1998], or the dystopian worlds of *Terminator* [James Cameron, 1984] and *Blade Runner* [Ridley Scott, 1982], for instance) illustrate to mass audiences the consequences of working against nature; and off-screen, many actors have used their fame to eco-warrior ends, spending time in jail for the illegal planting of industrial hemp seeds (Woody Harrelson), for example, or broadcasting eco-adventures to the MTV community (Cameron Diaz). There has even been a recent drive for film companies to take responsibility for their ecological footprint during filming, with the Environmental Media Association honouring those productions who best minimise carbon emissions and so on (one wonders, though, what the footprint of an awards ceremony is).

It is not surprising, then, that the relationship between ecology and cinema has found its way into film literature. But Cubitt's hypothesis sets his work apart from previous theories and histories. Unlike two recent books -- Pat Brereton's *Hollywood Utopia: Ecology in Contemporary American Cinema* (Intellect Books, 2004) and David Ingram's *Green Screen: Environmentalism and Hollywood Cinema* (University of Exeter Press, 2004) -- *EcoMedia* does not trace green themes in film history; nor does it consider films that offer a Naomi Klein-like warning of environmental Armageddon. Rather, it hypothesises a three-fold relationship between nature, the human world and technology, a reciprocal interaction that requires a radical rethink of eco-politics. Although technology is commonly blamed for human-nature rupture, Cubitt insists that it is a mistake to consider all technologies in this way. Pointing out that both scientific and entertainment media rely constantly on technology to mediate between the human and natural worlds, he demonstrates how it can be (and is) used as a productive communicative tool enabling the natural and the human to reach "some kind of dialogue" (133).

In order to ground his theories within cinema, Cubitt analyses a somewhat unusual and eclectic assortment of films and television programmes. Myths of union, bio-security, relationships with animals, bioethics, over-fishing, eco-terrorism, genetic modification and

global warming are all part of his selection criteria, although these themes are not always the most immediately obvious in terms of narrative. Each work chosen (*The Lord of the Rings* [Peter Jackson, 2001], *Princess Mononoke* [Hayao Miyazaki, 1997], *The Perfect Storm* [Wolfgang Petersen, 2000], *X-Men* [Brian Singer, 2000] and *X2* [Brian Singer, 2003], *The Day After Tomorrow* and the BBC's drama *Edge of Darkness* [Martin Campbell, 1985] and documentary *The Blue Planet* [Alistair Fothergill, 2001]) illustrates Cubitt's point that the *polis*, the human world, cannot survive outside a three-way partnership with *physis* and *techne*, the green world and the technological (which includes not just machinery, but also mediating techniques such as language and gesture [4]). Cubitt's terminology is important: his use of *polis*, *physis* and *techne* goes some way toward dissolving the boundaries between the three domains, boundaries which, he suggests, "may not be so robust, nor the oppositions between them so entrenched, as must often seem the case" (4). While these distinctions cannot be annulled, *EcoMedia* calls for them to be superseded by a new relationship, "one grounded specifically in mediation" (117).

Cubitt begins with an analysis of *The Lord of the Rings*, a trilogy that clearly articulates the many levels on which the three domains can interact. Moving from the large-scale to the local, Cubitt reads the films as a parable about technological impact on the natural world in a land where the forest can, quite literally, fight back. The theoretical integration of film world and its beyond is at its most successful here. After detailed exploration of Middle Earth's peoples and their technologies, in which Cubitt illustrates how manufacture is seen as false and amoral, while the 'good and true' is represented by craft -- the smith, the weaver, etc. -- the analysis considers the filmmaking process. Peter Jackson's battle of peoples and landscapes is enabled by technology: Treebeard speaks, moves, emotes even, on behalf of the forest only because he is a construct of technology; the vast landscapes of Middle Earth are technologically manipulated Aotearoa, a product of CGI. Cubitt concludes that *The Lord of the Rings* is "a technological triumph in the service of a green mythology" (23), a fictional world created by successful interaction of *polis*, *physis* and *techne*.

In the third chapter, Cubitt's attention moves to Zoomorphism in a reading of the anime, *Princess Mononoke*. After rigorous reflection of the complex relationship between humans and animals, including the ways in which both can be said to draw (a dog with scent, etc.), he considers the implications of technological animation, where the hand is removed from the drawing and the cartoon movement "seems to lose its physical grounding in the world" (34). This process distinguishes not only human from animal, but also both from machines. However, within the film, a raging battle between human and animal, iron and green worlds is resolved only by the intervention of the forest spirit. In physical terms, this spirit (at least in its night time incarnation) is a composite of animation and digital effects. Enabling the resolution of human and natural conflict in *Mononoke*, then, is a force entirely technological; a conclusion similar to that of the last chapter and yet vastly different in both approach and implication.

Moving as far away as possible from the fictional world of *Mononoke*, Cubitt's next chapter considers how technology can further understanding of, and thus engagement with, the natural through a reading of David Attenborough's *The Blue Planet*. The discussion, supported by engagement with the notion of the sublime, focuses on the dilemma between a "pristine nature" and the cutting edge, high-end technologies that enable us to engage with it (52). Unable to dive unaided more than ten or twenty metres below the sea's surface, humans have had to rely on underwater photography to explore the ocean bed, technology that enables footage of the horror-film-like deep sea creatures in *The Blue Planet*. Given the

cloudiness and darkness underwater, however, the photography itself needs to be enhanced by an array of other technologies: complex lighting, digital grading, CGI images, and montage techniques. What the finished product offers, then, is only a virtual image of the underwater, a technologically constructed world: but as Cubitt concludes, "*techne* proves itself again the mediator" (59).

Chapter five, an analysis of *The Perfect Storm*, employs more complex theoretical matter. This time, the human-nature antagonism is located within the capitalist system of ownership, loans and leasing that has resulted in severe over fishing, and Cubitt's analysis again concludes that there is no way to reconstruct the events of the narrative without special effects. However, as his discussion builds on Hegelian notions of freedom, references to the film become few and far between. By chapter seven, consideration of *X-Men* and its sequel occupies only a secondary place in the discussion of genetic modification (through the writing of Habermas): in the following chapter, the wider context takes over almost entirely, with any reference to film seemingly incidental. But this progression from the local to the theoretical works to re-enforce the power invested in film to reflect and influence, as mentioned above, the trends of mass society; to operate within an arena far greater than the cinema auditorium.

Cubitt's continual reference to philosophers, cultural theorists and semioticians makes for heavy reading at times: Hegel, Kant, Lyotard, Agamben, Flusser, Lotman, Bookchin, Luhmann, Latour; the list goes on. There is also a frequent spattering of spelling mistakes and typos in the text, something that does nothing to relieve the density of Cubitt's writing style. And yet, such diverse referencing is at the heart of *EcoMedia*'s success. To distil the essence of the book, as I have tried to do here, diminishes significantly its complexity. Although keeping a tight grip on his fundamental premise throughout, Cubitt's method of analysis allows him both to draw together numerous strands of thought, and to situate his premise within the larger cultural and theoretical picture. Such diversity is, of course, necessary when tackling a subject as complicated as this and Cubitt's blend of local and global issues makes *EcoMedia* an enormously important book. A rare combination of ecological and pro-technological thought, his theory of mediation -- of *techne* as a beneficial communicative device -- suggests that, rather than treat technology as the enemy, we should embrace it as a powerful ally. His case-studies reveal that seeing technology as a positive force could be the key to a non-aggressive form of ecopolitics: that rereading media technologies as communicative devices could help re-establish a *physis-polis* relationship in areas beyond film.

However, introducing into a dysfunctional relationship a mediator does not always result in a calm, rational conclusion. Moreover, irrevocable damage can be created by getting everything into the open, by revealing, as Attenborough tries to do, everything in its fictional glory, without attempt to understand the need of nature simply to be left alone. The *enormous* ecological footprints created by the film industry -- energy consumption, travel, paper waste, industrial waste, devastation of local environment, etc. -- are unfortunately much more real and immediate than the constructive co-habitation within the virtual landscapes of its products. Cubitt's mediation enables only a utopian interaction; recognising that technology can help, as well as hinder, a positive human-nature relationship will not separate our sedentary generation from its cars. But the hope is, of course, that cinema will use its influence to disseminate these messages of integration to the greater population; that film itself will become the mediator.

# **Nikita Mikhalkov: Between Nostalgia and Nationalism**

By Birgit Beumers

KINOfiles Filmmakers' Companion 1, London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2005. ISBN 1-86064-785-5. 147 pp. £14.99 (pbk)

Alexander Medvedkin By Emma Widdis & Dmitri Shostakovich: A Life in Film By John Riley & Kira Muratova By Jane A. Taubman

## **Alexander Medvedkin**

By Emma Widdis

KINOfiles Filmmakers' Companion 2, London and New York: I.B.Tauris, 2005. ISBN 1-85043-405-0. 154 pp. £14.99 (pbk)

## **Dmitri Shostakovich: A Life in Film**

By John Riley

KINOfiles Filmmakers' Companion 3, London and New York: I.B.Tauris, 2005. ISBN 1-85043-484-0. 150 pp. £14.99 (pbk)

## **Kira Muratova**

By Jane A. Taubman

KINOfiles Filmmakers' Companion 4, London and New York: I.B.Tauris, 2005. ISBN 1-85043-409-3. 124 pp. £14.99 (pbk)

## **A review by Lars Kristensen, University of St Andrews, UK**

Academics of Soviet and post-Soviet cinemas have long been waiting for a comprehensive study in English to give to their students. Although we will still have to wait for such a comprehensive study, we can enjoy these four individual studies from the publishing house of I.B. Tauris, who seems to be dedicated to the area of both Soviet cinema and post-Soviet (at least Russian) cinemas. These four books are individual and disconnected, but they at times tell the same story, be it the thaw or the stagnation period of Soviet cinema or the economical difficulties after the fall of socialism. In addition to this, the size of the publications -- a little over 100 pages when notes and references are excluded -- leaves little space for the analysis

of these major filmmakers and their many films and no space for a theoretical framing of their topics. While all four authors use a chronological contextualisation including both Russian and non-Russian critical receptions of the films, the approach to their subjects are different: Jane Taubman interviews Kira Muratova personally, Emma Widdis engages in close archival reading of Alexander Medvedkin's diaries, Birgit Beumers emphasizes a distinction between the public and the fictional persona of Nikita Mikhalkov and John Riley weaves with the private, the public and the artistic spheres in order to give a picture of Dmitri Shostakovich.

A comprehensive study would set the record straight by correcting the Soviet cannon and by including the transitional period, following the turn of the filmmaker from troubled, banned, fetishised or cherished Soviet film director to struggling, turning-popular, and searching or 'forgotten' post-Soviet Russian, Georgian, Armenian or Ukrainian filmmaker. One such case is Kira Muratova, who was born in Moldavia, went to school in Rumania, got her film education in Russia and has made most of her films in the Ukraine. She is still active and now very much appreciated as a national director of Ukrainian cinema.

The history of Soviet cinema is full of struggling filmmakers like Muratova. Her films have been censored, banned and restricted to limited circulation, and at one point she was stripped of her qualifications and thereby her right to making films (Muratova, demanding to work at the studio, was at first allocated work as a cleaning lady and gardeners assistant and later writing screenplay to order). Jane A. Taubman's dedication to her subject shines through to her reader to such a degree that a small inconsistency with a film title (*The Long Farewell/Goodbye*, 1971) and a repetition (38) are easily forgiven.

The great scope of Taubman's account of Muratova's works is not her struggle with the Soviet authorities, which has been told before, but bringing Muratova's career up to date and examining Muratova as an independent artist (discussion of context is consigned to the first ten pages). Taubman concentrates over the next three chapters on the three best known films of Muratova, namely, *Brief Encounters* (1967), *The Long Farewell* (1971) and *Asthenic Syndrome* (1989). Since the first two films were banned and only released in the early years of Perestroika, Muratova has become the epitome of the Perestroika filmmaker with *Asthenic Syndrome* in particular dissecting the sentiment of the period. One of Muratova's trademarks that Taubman examines is the brief shot of a doll or dolls, which are mostly "plastic, naked, alone and unloved" (38). Love and death, as the dolls suggest, go to the core of Muratova's artistic concerns, emphasized by the recurring phrase in her films, 'no one loves anyone' (*'nikto nikogo ne liubit'*), on which Taubman assesses, "rather than an assertion, it is rather a proposition she presents for examination, in the secret hope that it will be proven wrong" (8). Taubman agrees with the categorisation of Muratova as a formalist, linking aptly the filmmaker to the neo-expressionist FEKS group of early Soviet cinema through the influence of Muratova's teacher and mentor Sergei Gerasimov, who was a FEKS actor, and through a strong emphasis on defamiliarisation devices. These devices consist, for example, of improper use of speech, as with long monologues or rehearsing a speech in *Getting to Know the Big, Wide World* (1978), and with the use of vulgar language in the end scene of *Asthenic Syndrome*. Along with *Enthusiasts* (1994) both these films also use the neo-expressionist tool of character doubles. Muratova explains, "doubling, doubles -- is strikingly interesting. It seems to me that there's a very ancient curiosity about doubling in nature" (p 73). In *Enthusiasts*, the character of Violetta, played by Svetlana Kolenda, was doubled because Muratova desperately wanted a role for Renata Litvinova. Hence, Violetta's double, Lilia,

was created. As Muratova's artistic concerns of love and death, these two characters are both separate and interdependent at the same time.

With the arrival of the post-Soviet era, Muratova turned to the more popular genres of comedy and crime stories without losing her artistic integrity, and led by the eloquent hand of Taubman, one often loses sight of the fact that these were not mainstream but high art films akin to Peter Greenaway and Sergei Paradjanov. While others sought to make big budget films, Muratova commented, "you may need \$45 million (the cost of *The Barber of Siberia*, 1998), but I don't. I need just a little bit, and I'll do it marvellously" (92). In the case of Muratova, less is more.

With the introduction of *The Barber of Siberia*, we are also introduced to the next filmmaker -- a contemporary of Muratova -- Nikita Mikhalkov. If Muratova is placed within art-house cinema, Mikhalkov is to be categorised within the mainstream of both Soviet and post-Soviet cinema. Nikita Mikhalkov is the self-crowned king of Russian cinema and also the best known name of contemporary Russian cinema outside Russia.

While it is customary to start with biographies, Beumers' biography is by no means an unwanted necessity as Nikita Mikhalkov's family relations inform both his films and his position within the film industry. Mikhalkov is of aristocratic background with both parents being established writers and Beumers has produced a family tree that goes back to Pushkin, Gogol and Catherine the Great. This constructed linkage to the past and the heritage of Russian culture is important when discussing a film director who likes to pose himself as 'the father of the nation'. Although Mikhalkov likes to cast himself in a position of power -- he is the chairman of the Russian Cultural Foundation and the Filmmakers' Union (a powerful position during Soviet times), and he holds the presidency of the Moscow Film Festival -- he has failed when seeking positions of real power, for example nomination as a candidate in the 2000 presidential election. Beumers' questions, not only in the first chapter but throughout the book, Mikhalkov's nostalgic view of the past, arguing that "Mikhalkov performs a shift from a nostalgia of a past that is openly constructed as myth to a past that pretends to be authentic" (2). In particular with *Burnt by the Sun* (1994) and *The Barber of Siberia* (1998), Mikhalkov muddies the water between fact and fiction. Here reality is presented as "more illusory than the fairy tale" (112). In the former film, a Soviet reality is presented full of political ideals, and in the latter, pre-revolution Tsarist Russia contains sacred spiritual ideals. Both the political and the spiritual ideals are presented as authentic ideals, which contemporary Russia is lacking, and since Mikhalkov casts himself as the guardian of these ideals in the leading role of his films -- General Kotov in the former and Tsar Alexander III in the latter -- we have the complete break-down of the fictional Mikhalkov of the films, and the real Mikhalkov seeking political power. Beumers juxtaposes these films to Mikhalkov's earlier films, which made Mikhalkov internationally known, among them *An Unfinished Piece for a Mechanical Piano* (1977), *Oblovov* (1979), *Dark Eyes* (1987) and *Urga* (1991), where there is nostalgia for the past, but a past which is unrelated to the present. Ironically, while Mikhalkov's fame abroad was on the rise, he went the opposite way at the hand of the domestic intelligentsia, being accused of making cinematic "kitsch for export only". But, as Beumers notes, while Mikhalkov's *The Barber of Siberia* flopped abroad, it was, in fact, very popular with home audiences.

The films mentioned here are by no means the only films that Beumers deals with in the book, and it is thoroughly researched with a chronological approach to Mikhalkov's work. There are a few occasions where this chronological structure bites itself in the end: as when



Beumers makes the comparison of a character in *Mechanical Piano* to Iliusha Oblomov before the chronological introduction of the film, *Oblomov*. Writing chronologically is very good when pointing backward, but clumsy when pointing forward. David MacFadyen's *The Sad Comedies of El'dar Riazanov* (McGill-Queens University Press, 2003) is a good example of how the chronological approach to a filmmaker -- El'dar Riazanov, who has directed Mikhalkov twice, in *A Railway Station for Two* (1982) and *A Cruel Romance* (1984) -- can be abandoned for a thematic, psychoanalytical approach with great insight into a significant Soviet and post-Soviet Russian filmmaker.

When Mikhalkov gained international fame in 1977 with *Mechanical Piano*, another Soviet filmmaker, Alexander Medvedkin was also being celebrated abroad, especially in France. Though Medvedkin's fame abroad comes late in his life, his career in filmmaking encompassed nearly the entire history of Soviet cinema, from the early pioneering years to the Perestroika period. Emma Widdis tracks the life of this troubled Soviet filmmaker, who is one of the overlooked directors in the Soviet film cannon (consisting of the 'big' five, Kuleshov, Pudovkin, Dovzhenko, Vertov and Eisenstein). As such, this study is an important contribution to scholarship in English on early Soviet cinema and will be helpful to teachers of early Soviet cinema looking, for example, for sources on the film-train (which is the object of one of Widdis' chapters). The Soviet film-train, a Medvedkin initiative, was revolutionary in several aspects beside the already well-known factors, such as eradicating illiteracy. Firstly because, as Widdis' reading of Medvedkin's diaries highlights, film was not the only medium to be used on the train: "a combined editorial team [local newspapers, workers and the filmmakers], tackled the material on screen," (25). Secondly, the emphasis was not on showing pre-made film, but on filming locally and then showing it to the local people -- the train's catchphrase was 'we film it today and show it tomorrow.' Films were being produced for screening in record time -- one in "a mere eight hours" -- to be consumed by local audiences (24). Thirdly, the train had the risky aim of revealing the problems of Soviet reality and of solving them; risky because this contradicted the Soviet propaganda of which the train was a part. This ambivalence of Medvedkin's filmmaking, revealing the flaws of the world he promoted, is also present in his feature films.

Where the aim of the film-train was to make educational films by shaming "incompetent and irresponsible individuals and groups on screen" (31) -- sinisterly making Medvedkin's film-train an uncanny predecessor to the show trials a few years later -- Medvedkin sought to make didactic feature films by political satire, using old folklore traditions. Widdis concentrates on four of Medvedkin's films: *Happiness* (1935), which is probably the best known outside Russia; *The Accused Force* (1935-36), on which Medvedkin began production but was forbidden to complete -- a key film which Widdis analyses through reading the script; *The Miracle Worker* (1936), which has been hailed as a 'forgotten' master piece; and *New Moscow* (1938), which was banned because of a humorous scene whereby playing the scene backwards Medvedkin re-erected old-Moscow. At the centre of these films is the attempt to show serious political satire -- an attempt that fails largely because of Medvedkin's unlucky timing. Rather than wanting serious satire that provoked a response in the audiences, the mood of the time was for entertainment on a grand scale with no connection to reality, as with the Stalin-musicals of Grigori Alexandrov which are contemporaneous to the films of Medvedkin. Despise Medvedkin being a committed Bolshevik, remaining so until he died in 1989, Widdis portrays him as being at odds with his films -- they just 'turned out' to be subversive, which, paradoxically, was the last thing Medvedkin wanted.

After these more or less failed projects, Medvedkin turns to agitational work; giving cameras to soldiers during World War II, making animation films and documentaries, mostly on the environmental problems of the evil West. Sadly, all this is squeezed into the last chapter, which is far too little space given to the second half of a filmmaker of Medvedkin's standards career. Medvedkin's legacy to the art of cinema was his pioneering experiments in the genre of the political film, a legacy that in the late 60s influenced the establishment of 'the Medvedkin Group' in France. Furthermore, if Medvedkin's *The Miracle Worker* and *New Moscow* were to be made accessible to a wider audience outside Russia, which Widdis hopes, Medvedkin's long and active career has the potential of rewriting the Western canon of Soviet cinema.

Often, when writing on music in Soviet films, the point of view of the director is narrated -- as seen above with Alexander Medvedkin where, for example, the use of songs in *The Miracle Worker* "provides a means through which the depth and breath of the landscape is articulated" (Widdis: 74) -- and little attention, if any, is given to the composers of the tunes. John Riley adapts the point of view of Dmitri Shostakovich who "had a knack of writing these infectious melodies" (19), and examines the, at times, troubled relationship the composer had with 'the most important art': cinema.

Shostakovich's life in film began when he was 16 years old and he started to work as a cinema pianist, at which he excelled. The experience Shostakovich gained from working endless hours playing to films was two-fold. Firstly, Shostakovich got a first hand knowledge of the conventions of cinema, and secondly, it fed into his compositions. For example, his First Symphony "with its concertante piano part and filmic structure" (3) and his Eleventh Symphony, which was attacked for being too close to a film score (86). Riley's focus is on Shostakovich's film scores and his major music cues, which has been left untouched by both musicologists, focusing on the concert suites, and film critics for the reason described above. Music and film have a special history in Soviet cinema and some attention has already been given to composers working with film directors (notably to Sergei Prokofiev's work with Eisenstein), but although the two great composers worked in cinema at the same time, in Riley's view, Shostakovich's film works are markedly different from Prokofiev's and closer to Alfred Schnittke's, who constructively "use[d] film scores to test and develop ideas" (109). Shostakovich's ideas on film music were that the music should *not* be merely illustrative; music and images should work together, forming "a third genre" (11). If Shostakovich is to be associated with one director, it would be Grigori Kozintsev and Leonid Trauberg, with whom he made six film scores (four with Kozintsev alone).

Kozintsev's and Trauberg's *New Babylon* (1929), generally perceived as the first film Shostakovich worked on, is an example of Shostakovich's 'third genre'. In a scene where the German cavalry is advancing on Paris the film cuts back to an empty restaurant, but, in Shostakovich's own words, "the music, in spite of the fact that the cavalry is no longer on screen, continues to remind the audience of the approaching threat" (9). Or as in *The Return of Maxim* (Kozintsev and Trauberg, 1937) where the hero says goodbye to his girlfriend. Riley assesses that "the music, rather than romantically describing their feelings or picturing the luminescent sky, is dark, speaking of an unseen impending threat, before working up to a militaristic toccato as [the villain] attacks [the hero] leaving him unconscious" (34). In essence, music and images together write the film. *New Babylon* is also an example of the risks Shostakovich took when working on film scores, because, as the film fell out of favour with the authorities, so did its music composer. "Films have meant nothing but trouble for me, beginning with the first one, *New Babylon*", Shostakovich writes. He continues, "I'm not

talking about the so-called artistic side. That is another story, and a sad one, but my troubles on the political side began with *New Babylon*" (11). Shostakovich kept returning to the medium, although he also experienced setbacks after *New Babylon*, partly as a necessity for making a living, at times it being his only source of income, and partly because a popular film, with his score, would also give him ideological leeway for his concert suites.

Over the years, Shostakovich mellowed, leaving behind the avant-garde techniques, and slowly withdrew from film work only to produce "a final condemnation of the regime under which he had spent most of his life" (110) in Kozinstev's two films, *Hamlet* (1964) and *King Lear* (1971). Riley tells the story of Shostakovich's life in film fascinatingly and one cannot help but be drawn to it.

These four books are very different in their themes and their execution. The necessity of highlighting continuity speaks volumes of the fact that there is a need for larger publications on Soviet and post-Soviet cinema(s). These books are filmmakers' companions and not exhaustive studies of the four filmmakers. However as companions, they are well-researched and well-written studies and are very useful for cineastes, student and academics with an interest in Soviet and post-Soviet cinemas.

The KINOfiles series form a publishing trend in cinema studies of many small-sized publications. The problem, in my opinion, is that while a film companion fits this size, a filmmaker's companion requires more space. To contradict Muratova's dictum, less is more: I want more.

# **Genre and Television: From Cop Shows to Cartoons in American Culture**

By Jason Mittell

London and New York: Routledge, 2004. ISBN 0-415-96903-4 (pbk), 0-415-96902-6 (hbk). 238pp. £16.99 (pbk) £55.00 (hbk)

Serial Television: Big Drama on the Small Screen By Glen Creeber & Alan Clarke: The Television Series By Dave Rollinson

## **Serial Television: Big Drama on the Small Screen**

By Glen Creeber

London: BFI Publishing, 2004. ISBN 1-84457-021-5 (pbk), 1-844570020-7 (hbk). 19 Illustrations, 184pp, £16.99 (pbk), £50.00 (hbk)

## **Alan Clarke: The Television Series**

By Dave Rollinson

Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005. ISBN 0-7190-6830-4 (hbk). 197pp. £47.50 (hbk)

## **A review by Sarah Godfrey, University of East Anglia, UK**

While all of the above books deal with television studies, their approaches, themes and areas of interest are diverse. As such this review will tackle each book individually in order to give as comprehensive treatment as possible.

*Genre and Television* by Jason Mittell updates traditional genre theory and adapts it for the specificities of television studies; while Mittell draws upon traditional literary and film studies understandings of genre he also establishes a sound argument as to why the theories need to be re-worked when dealing specifically with the domestic medium of television. Indeed Mittell makes a sound case for continuing to use forms of genre theory within the discipline arguing that renegotiating and adapting theories of genre affords a useful approach to issues such as production, distribution and the reception of television programmes, both old and new. His introduction outlines what he terms a 'cultural approach' to television genres. In other words, an approach which draws upon the idea of a genre as a continually evolving cultural category that is subject to discursive transformation. He advances a methodology which goes beyond a traditional text-based approaches to include, amongst others, industrial/corporate influences, making a strong case for how and why genre is used by television channels to form and maintain a distinct brand identity, for example. He also

draws upon audience practice, reception theory, industrial developments and historical trends in order to produce a case which is holistic and comprehensive offering a timely review of the relevance and potential offered by generic approaches to television studies.

Before going on to explore a number of generic categories Mittell outlines his main agenda and methodology in the first chapter 'Television Genres as Cultural Categories'. While he concedes that deconstructionist theory has somewhat undermined the traditional more essentialist approaches to genre theory, as a concept genre still can and does hold relevance for media scholars and students today. Instead of perceiving genres as distinct, intransigent categories he puts forward an argument which acknowledges "genre definitions are no more natural than the texts they seem to categorise" (1) but that generic distinctions remain a key way in which producers, broadcasters and audiences understand and make sense of the wealth of televisual material which confronts them in day to day life. With this in mind Mittell contends that a specifically televisual "genre theory needs to work against some of the core assumptions of traditional approaches to genre", essentially updating the formalistic and aesthetic approaches which have led to genre theory being declared outdated and deterministic. His formative questions are driven by this cultural approach to television. For example, he states that "the central questions motivating many media scholars today [include] -- how do television programmes fit into historically specific systems of cultural power and politics?" (p2) Problematising a 'definitional' approach to genre Mittell prefers to approach genre with a view to exploring and explaining how a particular programme or type of programme functions within the wider cultural context. Drawing on Foucauldian notions of genealogy, Mittell proposes to explore a range of genres within their cultural, historical and production contexts in such a way that takes into account the specificity of television history, form, institution, uses and style. The rest of the book is divided into four chapters which are arranged around fairly traditional generic headings -- the quiz show, cartoons, talk shows, police drama. The final chapter explores the concept of genre mixing (Mittell openly argues against the idea of generic hybridity because it re-states the implicit idea of a pure or essential notion of genre) in the 70s programme *Soap* and *The Simpsons*.

While Mittell's various case studies draw on American television programmes the issues he raises in the various chapters are often equally salient to readers interested in these debates from a British television studies perspective. For example, in the chapter on cartoons he discusses how the perception of cartoons has transformed over time from being family entertainment to being categorised (and chastised) as an immature childish genre and then again to being a more complex and contested genre which can appeal to a diverse range of audiences courtesy of *The Simpsons*, *South Park* and so on. His discussion of the debates around this latter group of cartoons is particularly engaging as he delves into the controversy of 'adult' cartoons and their 'appropriateness' (or lack thereof) for an audience which is assumed to be young and impressionable. He also explores the impact of corporate branding upon the genre in a discussion of *The Cartoon Network* and its success in the 1990s. The chapter which focuses on *Dragnet* and policing genres falls into the more typical terrain of traditional text based genre studies and he places the changing notion of police procedurals within the changing cultural context of 70s America. He explores how changes in culture impact upon generic categories with specific reference to the ways in which narratives of police institutions and procedures become increasingly personalised at the time.

The chapter on talk shows engages with those debates around class and the distinctions between 'low' and 'high' brow cultures and Mittell conducts small scale ethnographic research which yields some interesting results in terms of audience perception of talk shows and the

means by which audiences are continually involved in the processes of defining and interpreting genres. In conclusion Mittell turns his attention to the emergent genre of reality television in order to demonstrate that not only does genre still matter as a scholarly approach to media but that generic categories continue to evolve and emerge; this section is, he admits, far from being a fully developed chapter on one of the newest generic clusters but it is the beginning of such a process. He notes how these new forms of television programming have continuities in form and style which form a cluster but, crucially he also notes how these new forms of television draw upon a range of other more established forms of programming such as soap opera and talent shows. He explains that reality television programmes such as *Survivor* form part of a genre because they rely upon a range of generic precedents and devices which "carry with them a set of assumptions and associations" that become inherent to a public and a corporate understanding of reality television. This book makes a cogent case for the retention and expansion of genre studies within the field of academic television studies showing how, with a little theoretical and philosophical adaptation the concept of genre can still provide a useful and insightful way of approaching the increasingly diverse realm of television in contemporary times and thus he provides an excellent introduction to students interested in gaining a new understanding of the ways in which genre works specifically within the medium of television.

Creeber's book *Serial Television: Big Drama on the Small Screen* is not as theoretically motivated as Mittell's. The book is more introductory in both style and content than Mittell's and as such I would recommend it for early undergraduate work in television and genre because it provides some excellent case studies and is written in an accessible, enjoyable style without being limited in either scope or rigour. Creeber follows a set structure throughout each of the four main chapters: he provides an introductory section which outlines the main themes, issues and textual concerns before going on to examine the three chosen texts in individual sections. While this would make the book an ideal text book in terms of having distinctly laid out textual references it somewhat precludes the enjoyment which could be found in reading Mittell from beginning to end. The structure becomes slightly repetitive at times and it would have been interesting to see a greater integration between the textual analysis than is able to exist in the presented format. However, Creeber draws upon a vast range of sources in his discussions of the various texts and consistently maintains a good level of cultural relevance to the otherwise textually based discussions. Creeber begins by explaining his motivation for this book: to disprove the idea that long running serial dramas are somehow inferior to the much lamented single play. In his introduction Creeber lays out his argument as to why the single plays superiority is misconceived snobbery; he contends that the very form of serial dramas and television series lend themselves to greater complexity in terms of writing, performance and execution than the somewhat limited narrative potential afforded by the television plays' singular form. Moreover, he contends, the dramatic serial or series has a "paradigmatic complexity" which enables it to "weave in and out of the domestic space...deliberately tapping into and playing with an audience's sense of time in a way never imagined before by the cinema, theatre or single play" (4). The television serials have, he argues, enabled a redefinition of the "narrative horizons of television fiction as a whole" (p4), and thus should no longer be maligned as the low brow, poor cousin of the esteemed single play. Indeed, he contends that the series and serial have as much political content as the single play even though this might well be manifested quite differently. A key contention of the book as a whole is to demonstrate how "the television serial may actually better reflect, engage with and respond to the subtle nuances, political preoccupations and social realities of the contemporary age" (15) -- an argument which Creeber executes by drawing on a wide range of political, aesthetic, generic and industrial sources. Creeber

concedes that this rather broad and ambitious aim would be impossible to execute to its fullest and most comprehensive ends within the space of one book and as such he explains his choices for the case studies as being representative of some of the most vital and important issues that, in his opinion, require attention and, despite his own caveat, the book offers useful insight and analysis of some of the most important television drama serials to have been produced.

One of the most important distinctions Creeber makes at the outset is between the various forms that serial drama can take. There are, he argues, an infinite number of programmes and genres which contribute to the whole idea of long form television drama, and he gives an account of some of the most important forms that the serial television drama can take, from the continuous nature of the serial or the soap opera to the self contained narratives of mini series. His chapters therefore take the following form: initially he explores the mini series, focusing on the ways in which dramatisation of private and political issues is facilitated by the increased narrative flexibility offered by an expanded narrative time span, drawing on the variously acclaimed/debated *Roots*, *Holocaust* and *Heimat*. Entitled 'Adapting the Past: Empirical and Emotional Realism in the Historical Mini Series' Creeber focuses on a very specific manifestation of the mini series drawing parallels with epic cinema drama and demonstrating how a longer form of television drama enables a more thoroughgoing representation of complex and often contentious historical events. He situates the mini series historically. It is, as he notes, a form of drama which has fallen out of fashion recently, but one which was vitally important in the late 1970s and early 1980s. In many ways the programmes he explores are given cultural prestige by their contradictory place. They are not in the trivialised realm of the long form serial yet their serialised form enables a greater complexity than that which is typically offered by a single play or one off drama. The three texts which Creeber focuses on for his textual analysis all attempt to represent real times and events -- slavery, the holocaust and World War II respectively -- and he argues that their very form as a mini series enabled multilayered narratives which were both self conscious and politically complex.

The second chapter sets out an argument which seeks to disprove the notion of the television drama series as un inventive in terms of both form and style. He offers a textual analysis of some of the most challenging television dramas of recent years drawing on *Twin Peaks*, *Cold Lazarus* and *The Kingdom* in what is perhaps the most theoretically challenging chapter of the book (drawing upon Lacanian and Jungian psychoanalysis in respect of *My Kingdom* in particular). In this chapter Creeber takes to task the idea that single television plays are inherently more creative than the longer form dramatic formats of series such as *Twin Peaks*. His very use of these three case studies proves that within the realm of television drama serials there is innovation, experimentation and a genuine concern with television as an art form in its own right. His analysis of these three series demonstrates that within the 'post modern' dramas there is room for the political, the critical and the topical to emerge -- these concerns are, he shows, not just the preserve of the traditional single play. In this chapter Creeber develops a discussion about the issues of modernism and postmodernism within television drama and explores issues surrounding authenticity, realism and the radical potential offered (yet often overlooked) by television drama. His engagement with these issues coupled with his readings of the three chosen texts make this arguably the most stimulating of the four chapters in this book. Although they might be somewhat intimidating for the uninitiated reader they make for a thought provoking chapter which, in my opinion was one of the highlights of the book as a whole.

The third chapter is more driven by a generic focus on crime dramas and gender; he draws on the British examples *Prime Suspect* and *Cracker* as well as the more recent US series *The Sopranos*. His work on Jane Tennyson draws upon an established body of feminist television studies of the programme (See Yvonne Tasker *Working Girls* [Routledge, 1998] for example) and is both engaging and well informed, exploring Tennyson's gender in the traditionally homosocial environment of the crime drama, and he raises a number of issues pertaining to the wider questions about Mirren's star persona and her sex appeal. The section on *Cracker* equally draws on the history of the crime/police genre and situates the central character of Fitz within this context as a somewhat unreconstructed, troubled man who is attempting to come to terms with the changes brought about in traditional notions of masculinity. Drawing explicit parallels between the section on *Prime Suspect* and *Cracker* works well -- Creeber is able to counterpoint the narrative agendas and the gender issues of the two serials with thought provoking outcomes. The section on *The Sopranos* draws together this chapter's focus on gender with the concerns of the previous chapter exploring this successful American series in terms of its self-referential and post modern style. In drawing out elements such as the use of music, misquoted lines from the 'classics' of the gangster genre etc Creeber uses *The Sopranos* to raise further issues around changing masculinities within an American context, a contrast which works well in conjunction with the previous work on *Cracker*. This chapter demonstrates, with conviction, that serial dramas readily engage with contemporary political and cultural issues and that they, more so than the single drama, are equipped to realise the narrative devices in such a way that enables subtle contradictions and nuances to be played out and worked through with greater complexity further illustrating the importance of audience familiarity and understanding to these processes.

The fourth chapter focuses on how the serial drama is able to engage with 'life politics' in new and challenging ways that were often unthinkable, or at least unworkable within the confines of the one off televised dramatic play. Again he focuses upon three widely known and critically acclaimed series to be produced in Britain and America in recent years: *This Life*, *Queer as Folk* and *Sex And The City*. Situating these programmes within the wider trend for narratives that focus more on the private and personal details of individuals Creeber makes the case that serial television is equally, if not better equipped to narrativise the political complexities of personal lives than the traditionally venerated single play. He debunks the idea that narrative attention upon the personal is instead of a focus upon the political and, further, he explains that such 'personal' issues have a long history within both film and television texts, citing *The Big Chill* as one example. The programmes that form the focus of this chapter are, Creeber argues, generically mixed: they incorporate elements from a range of other genres including drama, melodrama and soap opera, to name a few. Their most important aspect is, he contends, the fact that this generic hybridity does not necessarily mean that questions of power and politics are negated; on the contrary, the chapter demonstrates that serial dramas such as *Queer as Folk* employ and subvert generic conventions precisely in order to maintain their politics. As in previous chapters Creeber draws on popular, industrial and scholarly sources to form an engaging and accessible argument about the political proclivities of serial television dramas drawing out the subtleties of his chosen texts and utilising to counterpoint and compliment one another. In the conclusion to this book Creeber restates his claim that the so called 'death' of television has been prematurely declared and that, of all forms, the long running series and serials would be the least likely candidates for the demise in any case. Finally, he looks to the possibilities offered by a multi channel future and contends that television style, form and content will continue to evolve and develop and that serial drama, far from precluding such creativity, remains a vital part of a vibrant television culture.



Overall I would recommend this book to teachers on television drama units and students alike; the accessible style and format of the book make it easy to draw upon and a useful resource for anyone interested in the recent history of television serial drama.

The final book featured in this review is Dave Rollinson's book on the acclaimed television director Alan Clarke and it is, being a single director study, a more specialised read than the others. Rollinson approaches Clarke's work chronologically situating his oeuvre within cultural, institutional and personal contexts; the book begins with an overview of Clarke's background and early theatre work before moving on to explore some of his most well known productions in more detail. Each chapter provides at least two detailed case studies ranging from the 1974 fantasy television play *Penda's Fen* to some of his more controversial and better known pieces such as *Scum* (1979) and *Made in Britain* (1984). Rollinson is, as he confesses at the outset, a long time fan of Clarke's work and his extensive knowledge of the director's personal history as well as his professional work make this book a thorough and informative exploration of some of the most important television dramas to have been produced by a British director. The first chapter begins with some biographical details about Clarke, explaining how his working class background fitted in to his approach to his work both in theatre and television as well as situating Clarke within that all important first generation of television directors which included other prestigious names such as Garnett, Griffiths and Loach. Following on from the biographical details the rest of the chapter establishes the social and cultural contexts which formed Clarke's thematic concerns as well as beginning to explore the ways in which Clarke's role as a director was shaped by the "institutional expectation that directors 'serve' the scripts" of writers (10) and outlining the recurrent themes that are found throughout Clarke's work.

Throughout the book Rollinson makes use of a range of sources, from interviews with Clarke and his peers (most notably David Hare) to the industrial press as well as utilising more traditional forms of close textual analysis in such a way that facilitates a thorough working through of the themes and issues that seem most pertinent to Clarke's diverse range of work. These issues include communication and the struggle for communication thereof, the policing of the self and institutionalisation among others. Rollinson applies a range of cultural theory to his interpretations of Clarke's work, most notably drawing on the work of Foucault as a means of exploring the methods of policing and discipline which become recurrent themes in many of Clarke's best known pieces. As well as exploring Clarke's own work Rollinson dedicates a great deal of time to examining Clarke's role as a collaborator with a number of other writers, actors and producers which adds to his overall ideas about how the role of the television director remains something of a negotiated auteur: continually bound by television's collaborative nature as well as institutional policy. After discussing Clarke's personal style in the first chapter the second chapter moves on to examine how his 'voice' as a television director developed throughout the seventies -- the period in which he produced some of his most acclaimed and yet controversial work. The main focus of this chapter falls, unsurprisingly upon *Scum* and discusses the "changing status of radical single drama" which was highlighted by the controversy caused by the play upon its initial release. The chapter also places Clarke's work in its context, comparing and contrasting it with the likes of Loach's *Days of Hope* (1975) for example. By the end of the second chapter, Clarke's emergence as a politically motivated director have become apparent and this theme is continued into the third chapter which explicitly addresses issues of themes, approaches and ramifications of Clarke's style within the conservative culture of Thatcher's Britain. While the radical single play was declining rapidly during the "oppressively reactionary 1980s" Clarke, it seemed, somewhat paradoxically "thrived" (98) and produced work which Rollinson terms as amongst "his most

vivid, vital and vigorous." (98). He explains how Clarke's work during the 80s engaged with some of the most pressing themes of the time including unemployment, Ireland, football hooliganism and drug abuse. The chapter also examines Clarke's early moves into cinematic directing in the form of *Rita, Sue and Bob Too* (1986). Again, the analytical work undertaken by Rollinson in this chapter is rigorous and putative providing a fitting tribute to the work of the director with whom he is concerned. Clarke of course died in 1990 but Rollinson's conclusion is not overtly sentimental: instead he focuses upon the influence that Clarke's work has had on new directors and upon television drama as a whole while lamenting the fact that the chance of a director of Clarke's voracity and eloquence will probably never emerge through the medium of television directing again. Overall this book is a cogent exploration of Clarke's work; it draws on a wide range of sources in order to provide detailed, in-depth analysis thus providing a timely account of one of Britain's best known television directors. It might, at times be a little too detailed for the more casual reader who is less familiar with Clarke's work but it offers something for everyone; for the less familiar reader the book provides an insightful account of Clarke's work while those readers who have more detailed knowledge of his plays, dramas and films will find the book an engaging and comprehensive account of his main programmes.

# The Past within Us: Media, Memory, History

By Tessa Morris-Suzuki

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## A review by Amresh Sinha, New York University, US

Tessa Morris-Suzuki's book *The Past Within Us: History, Media, Memory* is devoted to issues of representations of history mostly related to the Holocaust, the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the genocides in the Balkans in the 90s in the various media in order to generate a comparative account of how a particular discourse of history is framed and shaped by the structure and logic of a particular medium. The book covers a wide array of topics, loosely connected and related to the images of history that cross over from one medium to another. It is divided into seven chapters, each concerned with a particular aspect of the media, ranging from historical novels, monuments, museums, photographs, and films to comic books and the Internet. Although it is an eminently readable book that weaves its way through a plethora of materials in its expansive and discursive tour of the history of the media, with a particular emphasis on the Japanese media, it has its share of misinterpretations and biases with regard to the historiography of postmodernism, which will form the bulk of my criticism later in this review.

In a multimedia age, people's conception of their historical past is now primarily constructed by the media rather than by the history textbooks, according to Morris-Suzuki. "To read about the past in a textbook...is different from encountering it in artifacts, photographs and dioramas of a museum like the Independence Hall. Truthfulness about the past requires reflection on the role that such media play in moulding our understanding of history" (29). Without saying as much but reading between the lines, one can't help but notice that the project of historical truthfulness, in the author's view, entails a rejection of the mode of 'realism' in historical representation that attempts to define the world of the past realistically in human language, as linear, regular, and with a clear sense of cause and effect. In that respect, Morris-Suzuki's project is not simply to interpret the philosophy of history but to create a field of inquiry and dialogue in which the genealogy of history is no longer represented through "periods, peoples, or civilizations" but by the images constructed and produced by the media and the consumption and the reception of those images by the people in an ever increasing mediatised global world.

The book is an exploration of how the media constructs the historical landscape of popular culture through inclusion and exclusion of those facts that are continuously repeated at the expense of others that are never presented. At this point, one might pause and marvel on the alacrity and forthrightness of a traditional historian to acknowledge that history is constituted by its own admission of failures in its many branches of studies, extending from objectivism to postmodern scepticism. Our sense of history, that is to say, the very perception of our history, is coloured by the manner in which some facts find constant resonance while others languish in obscurity. "To understand how these imagined landscapes are created, reinforced

or transformed, we need to look both at the political and at the aesthetic economy of mass media" (17). She goes on to suggest

that most people do not learn about history by studying primary evidence in the archives or at archaeological sites. Instead, what we encounter are representations of the past which reach us thorough the filters of other people's interpretations and imaginations: through the work of the novelists, the lens of the photographer, the graphics of the comic-book artists. (238)

True, but neither do people learn about the practice of medicine by watching *ER* on television. The privileging of mass media over documents in historical analysis is a bold but misguided move to instigate the discourse of history into the arena of public sphere.

Speaking of the public sphere, the arduous task of making history a compulsive subject matter in schools has taken on an urgent quality these days not only in Japan but many other post-industrialised countries, including the United States. More and more senators and academics are proposing various remedies to correct this neglect of history in schools. Television and films have shared the blame for sensory deprivation and destruction of the historical imagination of the younger generation for many decades now. The crisis of history between Japan and South Korea in 1998 did not occur due to some economic or political incident between these two nations. It occurred over the interpretation of history in a Japanese history textbook that, according to the South Korean protestors, distorted the history of Japanese colonialism in China and South Korea. The protests got so heated that one of the groups of protestors "cut off their fingers with meat cleavers as a gesture of protest." (4) East Asia's 'textbook wars' are just one of the many instances when the subject of history teaching has intruded upon the public sphere in the mode of a crisis. The rewriting of history as a nationalist project in postcolonial historiography has created a crisis or a backlash in the recent colonialist and imperialist historiography. From Ernst Nolte to Yukichi Fukuzawa, we have witnessed a revisionist history being marketed to conservative clientele.

The latest conservative backlash in Japan has become more intensified recently after the 'Korean Wave' hit the Japanese media in early 2000. The Japanese media were inundated with South Korean television programs that became extremely popular with Japanese women. This and the dominance of the South Korean singer Rain -- the subject of a recent front page article in *The New York Times* -- in popular culture have created the latest in xenophobic Korea bashing, what was termed the 'Hating Korean Wave.' *Times* readers and others will be well-served if they also read Morris-Suzuki's book, which lays out in detail the historical background of Korea bashing that first raised its ugly head in 1998 with a revisionist/nationalist publication of a Japanese school history textbook by the Society of History Textbook Reform, whose main aim, according to Morris-Suzuki, "was to combat the 'masochistic' view of Japan's past, which, they believed, had been imposed on Japanese schoolchildren ever since the pacific war." The group is identified as "the assassins of memory," after the title of Pierre Vidal-Naquet's book, whose main purpose is to "obliterate" the memory of the 1937 Nanjing Massacre and to confound the shameful history of "comfort women" from the pages of Japanese history textbooks in school (7).

Her first chapter, under the heading 'The Past is not Dead', is an answer to those who, along with Francis Fukuyama, celebrated the death of history not so long ago. But where Fukuyama and others considered the 'March of History' to have reached its logical end in the dissolution of the Soviet Union -- their celebration was an attempt to redirect the course of history from

the angle of its incompleteness to a completed project -- there is no such theoretical expediency to be found in Morris-Suzuki's book. The problem with Fukuyama was not that he followed in the footsteps of Hegel and Marx in realising the discourse of History, but the way he usurped and misapplied the end of history to the concept of liberal democracy. Neither Marx nor Hegel thought the march of history would culminate in the declaration of market dominant, corporate affiliate democracy. For Hegel never used liberal democracy as the highest point of historical evolution and neither did Marx presuppose communism as the end of history, but as the beginning of history.

The second chapter deals with the rise of the nineteenth century realist historical novels of Walter Scott and Tolstoy that embodied the narrative of 'social change'. Morris-Suzuki's main thrust in this chapter is to explore what role historical fiction played in the reshaping of the imaginings of the past. This is unquestionably the strongest and most illuminating part of the book, especially since it tries to examine the origin of the historical novel and its relationship to readers which evolved in the early nineteenth century and through which gradually the idea of nation itself was historicised. Since then novels have continuously exploited history as a trope to allegorise the present. Here Morris-Suzuki also touches upon the issues of translation in facilitating a worldwide diffusion of the novel, which created a sense of history in which "the world of the Roman empire, of medieval and Enlightenment Europe acquired a certain global aura, a central place" amongst educated elites around the world. It is only now after the introduction of genealogical and postcolonial interpretation of the novel in the late twentieth century that these European influences are being resisted and challenged.

Morris-Suzuki is most vulnerable, theoretically speaking, on the subject of postmodernism and its approach to historiography. The subject of postmodernism and the historiography of Subaltern Studies and their nexus to historical relativism in the book requires a bit of attention. She writes:

Most recently...postmodern and poststructuralist concepts have had a growing influence on intellectual life in Japan and South Korea (and to a lesser extent in China). Indeed, many of the most outspoken opponents of the *new nationalist historiography in Japan* have been deeply influenced by these ideas. They have read their Foucault, Derrida and subaltern studies. They are conscious of the fact that all narratives are constructed and contestable, and wary of the contests for power concealed within claims to universal scientific truth.... This problem is accentuated by the fact that some (though not all) of the Society's members use a kind *ersatz postmodernism* to add substance to their nationalist view of the past. (Emphasis mine, 10-11.)

In accusing postmodernism of providing legitimacy to a historical relativism in which all events are opened to question Morris-Suzuki should have taken into account that by simply raising the issue of historical debate about national identity, the revisionist historians have managed to produce a discourse that did not exist before. Her worst apologetic tendency to the dominant discourse of history is displayed in the disingenuousness of her definition of marginality. By identifying the minoritarian discourse of history, whose origin lies in postcolonial, diasporic and Subaltern Studies (going all the way back to Gramsci and Marx), and that challenges the dominant view of history, with that of the revisionist historians, who deny or put the Holocaust in a relative perspective, Morris-Suzuki partakes in a calculated misreading of history, aligning herself with those for whom history has been an instrument of epistemological control. It is this kind of deliberate obfuscation, where the discourse of

minorities is shifted away from its legitimate heirs and foisted upon a minority of fascist historians, that the book truly reveals is intellectual prejudice. By calling Nolte and others representatives of a minority community, whose voice can no longer be suppressed because of the irresponsible act of postmodernity, Morris-Suzuki has fallen far below par in providing a balanced account of the oppositional discourse of history. The revisionist historians might very well represent a minority community, but their voice belongs to the dominant tonality of a certain discourse with much wider public recognition and institutional cover. The taboo on the question of national identity has been revoked by these new historians' conservative backlash, and now one can proudly reclaim the present on a false claim on the past.

Similarly, Morris-Suzuki's critique of Hayden White is tied to her general critique of postmodern scepticism. It is rather puzzling that she, who advocates a position of scepticism herself has problems with White's reading of Oliver Stone's *JFK* (1991). She takes exception to White's characterization of *JFK* as a postmodern text that blurs the ontological boundaries between history and fiction because, she argues, the film remains tied to the conventions of Hollywood aesthetics (the genre of a lone individual fighting against corrupt forces of the state) -- despite its disruptive and dislocated chronological experimentations. What she misses here, which Vivian Sobchack correctly points out in her introduction to White's essay, is the idea that these new technologies do not so much bring a new kind of representation as they 'alter' or transform the very nature of that representation (*The Persistence of History: Cinema, Television, and the Modern Event*, Routledge, 1995). What is radical is not the story of *JFK*, but the *technique* of storytelling of *JFK*, which makes it possible to understand the radical nature of manipulation of technology and that this nature of manipulation is inherent to digital technology. And once the nature of manipulation is grasped as inherent to digital technology, the 'events' themselves are no longer exempt from manipulation.

For Morris-Suzuki, "historical truthfulness... involves a kind of ongoing dialogue, through which we listen to an expanding repertoire of voices from the past, tell and retell the stories that we have heard, so define and redefine our position in the present." (28) Thus the historical discourse of Spielberg's *Amistad* (1997) undergoes a radical transformation on the Internet, where the story acquires a multiplicity of resonances that undercuts the initial message of American idealism and freedom. The same story is repeated with variation, with actual and imagined documents, with real historical experiences transmitted through letters and documents, and additional voices that are never heard in the film.

Yet Morris-Suzuki's valorisation of the Internet over the medium of film (the characteristic division of hot and cold medium) is less than convincing, despite her claims that it enriches the dialogue of history by offering the same historical materials in different forms and, therefore, changing historical expression. It is not the facts but the representation of facts that is under scrutiny. There is no objective fact, but only contested ideas about what that fact is. Unfortunately, in Chapter Six, what we get is not a deepened relationship between media, history, and memory but 'the wonders of the Internet.'

Although the book claims to be on 'Media, Memory, History', there are gaping holes in coverage of both the media and memory. What is glaringly absent in her historical account of the media is any sustained analysis of the representation of history in newspaper, radio, and television. A book that excludes the discourse of history in those fundamental aspects of the media is simply incomplete. In her discussion of the Internet, Morris-Suzuki misses a golden opportunity to explore the difference between the role of the mass media, such as television and radio, owned by corporations and controlled by the government in many countries, and

the Internet, whose archival memory is not subjected to same level of corporate and governmental control.

To conclude, despite Morris-Suzuki's professed claim that she is primarily concerned with the historical knowledge of everyday life, the book mostly deals with the grand narratives of the history of the Holocaust and the atomic bombings and their representations in various media. When Michel de Certeau theorized the sociology of everyday life, he emphasised the subversiveness of everyday life, where history is short-circuited by the sociology of living. Quotidian history belongs to the non-historians who view history with a considerable degree of scepticism, a view much derided in this book. Everyday history is very much a narrative of the margins; it is not how the grand narratives of history transform everyday as the disparate lenses of the media view them. Such an account is entirely missing in the book.

# Screening the Gothic

By Lisa Hopkins

Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005. ISBN 0-292-70646-4. 10 illustrations, xvi+170pp. £12.95 (pbk), £38.00 (hbk)

Icons of Grief: Val Lewton's Home Front Pictures By Alexander Nemerov & Horror Film & Psychoanalysis: Freud's Worst Nightmare By Steven Jay Schneider (ed.)

## Icons of Grief: Val Lewton's Home Front Pictures

By Alexander Nemerov

Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005. ISBN 0-520-24100-2. 57 illustrations, xii+213pp. £15.95 (pbk), £38.95 (hbk)

## Horror Film & Psychoanalysis: Freud's Worst Nightmare

By Steven Jay Schneider (ed.)

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## A review by Martin Fradley, University of Manchester/University of Central England, UK

It has become a widely-accepted critical truism in recent years that the horror film has displaced the Western as the genre with the largest body of academic literature devoted exclusively to it. These three volumes are amongst the latest additions to that scholarly *corpus*, and each in turn provide readers with hugely divergent approaches to cinematic (and also, in the case of *Screening the Gothic*, televisual) manifestations of gothic horror. Indeed, the horror film's one-time status as the most marginal and maligned of popular genres seems little more than a quaint anachronism today. Sharing with Gothic literature a fashionably meteoric rise in credibility within the Academy during the 1980s, sober analysis of horror cinema as *the* popular barometer of social, cultural and historical fears and anxieties has since become a staple of undergraduate courses and broadsheet articles. Perhaps the main question to ask here, then, is what new perspective(s) -- if any -- can critics offer when the study of the genre is already seemingly exhaustive?

Lisa Hopkins' *Screening the Gothic* comes adorned with an intriguing blurb on the reverse cover, describing the contents therein as -- amongst other things -- "groundbreaking", "brilliant", "radical" and "surprising". Such promotional hyperbole is far from uncommon, of course; nevertheless, the limitations of this study are rendered transparent from the author's own answer to a question posed at the start of her introduction: "What is the Gothic? *In*



*literary studies*, the term is generally applied to a body of writing produced in England between about 1750 and about 1820" (xi: my emphasis). In its attempt to redraw the (tenuous) boundaries between the 'Gothic' mode and the amorphous abjection of mere 'horror', however, *Screening the Gothic* rarely moves beyond the narrow and unnecessarily schematic confines of this opening gambit. Hopkins' primary focus is on screen adaptations of 'Gothic' fictions -- "films which have been adapted from novels and which have had changes made to them in the process" (xiii) -- from canonical works like *Jane Eyre* (1847), *Dracula* (1897) and the proto-Gothic of *Hamlet* through to popular twentieth century fantasies such as *The Fellowship of the Ring* (1954) and *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (1997). Yet the potentially fascinating dialectic between literary classic, critical analysis, audience expectation/reception and film (re)interpretation is largely sidelined here in favour of casual literary aloofness underpinned by a distinct tone of unapologetic cultural pessimism. In fairness, there is little duplicity about exactly where Hopkins' intentions lie: as early as the second paragraph of the first chapter the author states that the three adaptations of *Hamlet* under discussion "precisely encapsulate in miniature" her central thesis that, on screen, "to court the Gothic explicitly is to banish it; to introduce its trappings is to foreclose on its spirit" (1). While I confess to having some sympathy with Hopkins on this point, it nevertheless leaves the reader -- and, in particular, the reader with an interest in screen studies -- with the fairly depressing prospect of a further 150 pages of tired, not-as-good-as-the-book rhetoric.

Hopkins' discontent with the adaptations under discussion is essentially twofold: firstly, she argues, in contradistinction to the uncanny chill provided by the original texts the playfully postmodern and relentlessly self-conscious environs of contemporary cinema and television can only deliver a vaguely "pleasurable *frisson*" (xvi); and secondly, *Screening the Gothic* insists that the materialist underpinnings of many of the source novels are displaced in their screen versions by a pop-Freudian concern with individual psychology -- a trait, Hopkins argues, that is "an inevitable consequence of filmmakers desire to ensure that the ensuing work can continue to speak to a contemporary audience, without being bound to the conditions of its own time" (xiii). Thus, she goes on to argue, "the classic genre marking of the Gothic in film is doubleness, for it is the dualities typically created by the Gothic that invest it with its uncanny ability to hold its darkly shadowed mirror up to its own age" (xi). However, it is implicit from the outset that, for Hopkins, the mirror held up by contemporary screen adaptations reflects only the narcissistic individualism and Jamesonian depthlessness of late capitalist culture.

Time and time again in *Screening the Gothic* a work of literary fiction is held up against its screen double, and time and time again the latter is found wanting: film adaptations "cut through all of the suggestive ambiguities of the novel to provide a simple and clear-cut answer" (xv) and "flattens[s] out complexities in characters' psychology" (29); adapters "sacrifice" the "minute circumstantiality" of novels (28) which are invariably "richer and more probing" than their on-screen versions; and films are always already "fundamentally a simplification of the book" (36). This approach is typified in Hopkins' discussion of H.G. Wells' *The Time Machine* (1895). Whereas the novel posed "some very disturbing questions about the nature and future of man", *Screening the Gothic* finds that the 2002 film adaptation does little more than miscast poor Samantha Mumba and glibly provide "some very pat answers" (53). This dismissive critique reaches its apogee during a discussion of the 1971 Italian adaptation of *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* (which Hopkins symptomatically misidentifies as being released two years later). After a brief anecdote detailing the mixture of mirth and

contempt displayed by a class of undergraduates when viewing the film, Hopkins then delivers her most stinging blow to the film's credibility:

the very presentation of Redemption Films video version of the film undermines any attempt to take it seriously: the inside of the box lists the other titles in the series as *Vampires with a Whip*, *Venus in Furs*, *Requiem for a Vampire*, *Chill of the Vampire*, *The Naked Vampire*, and *Succubus*. As still further encouragement, the back of the case assures you that the play is notorious, that Oliver Tobias (Giovanni) appeared in *The Stud*, and that the camerawork was done by the man who photographed *Last Tango in Paris* (60)

It is probably worth pointing out the distributors would have been foolish *not* to draw attention to the camerawork given that it is that of Vittorio Storaro, the Oscar-winning cinematographer who also worked on such laughably low-rent productions as Bertolucci's *Il Conformista* (1970), *Strategia del Ragno* (1970) and *The Last Emperor* (1987), Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* (1979), and Warren Beatty's *Reds* (1981) and *Dick Tracy* (1990)! Clearly no *cineaste*, Hopkins' later musings on the ambiguity surrounding whether the subjective narrative accounts in many Gothic fictions are grounded in external reality "or the product of a disturbed psyche" (75) uncannily mirrored this reader's frequent bafflement when working through the pages of *Screening the Gothic*.

This insistence upon absolute fidelity to the source texts effectively disables *Screening the Gothic* from ever really engaging with important questions concerning the inevitable shifts in tone and emphasis that come with adapting novels a hundred years or more after they were first published. In her discussion of Ang Lee's version of *Sense and Sensibility* (1995), for example, Hopkins complains that in mobilising a distinctly post-feminist stance ("an emphasis that is very different from that of the novel"), screenwriter Emma Thompson "has herself pirated the novel by suggesting that patriarchy can be effectively challenged, in ways that [Jane] Austen herself does not concede" (39). Rather than asking what this film offers to late-twentieth century audiences in terms of its discourse(s) on gender relations, Hopkins simply grumbles that it is 'different' to the book, eliding in the process a significant body of critical material which has teased out the proto-feminist sensibilities of Austen's original work. Moreover, in singling out Thompson for criticism Hopkins also overlooks -- or is simply indifferent to -- the context in which the film was released, where many reviews and articles about the film interpreted the feminist emphasis of *Sense and Sensibility* as the screenwriter's bitter response to her highly public split from then-husband Kenneth Branagh. Similarly, Hopkins seems astonished that in the big-screen adaptation of *Mansfield Park* (Patricia Rozema, 1999), "we actually see Henry [Alessandro Nivola] and Maria [Victoria Hamilton] making love" (50: my emphasis), as if the lovers' scandalous elopement in Austen's novel could have been interpreted in anything other than sexual terms. Again, this pedantic literalism finds the author annoyed at, say, *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1993) making (sexually) explicit what is only "coily suggested in the novel" (110), when only the most naïve of readers could find anything particularly "coy" in Stoker's voraciously psychosexual gothic fantasy.

*Screening the Gothic* is undoubtedly readable and is certainly accessible enough not to alienate to the crossover market it appears to be aimed towards. Yet its literary prejudices are difficult to surmount, and I was left wondering who exactly would enjoy this book. The most obvious flaws in the book's film analysis (an emphasis on dialogue rather than, say, editing, *mise-en-scene* or performance; a distinct lack of sustained critical or contextual engagement

with the adaptations; a tendency towards the polemical perhaps more befitting a broadsheet article) all betray *Screening the Gothic's* desire to appease a middlebrow audience.

The relationship between gothic horror and Freudian psychoanalysis has always been particularly overdetermined, and it is this densely-woven conundrum that exists at the discursive core of *Psychoanalysis and Horror Film: Freud's Worst Nightmare*. Like Hopkins, editor Steven Jay Schneider notes from the outset the enormous debt the genre owes to Gothic literature, highlighting in turn the perverse preoccupations and shared structures that exist between Gothic fantasy and Freudian thought. Rejecting the notion that the Gothic simply crudely anticipated the Freudian imaginary, Schneider draws on William Patrick Day's (1985) historicist supposition that the two modes are incestuously related cousins, "responses to the problems of selfhood and identity, sexuality and pleasure, fear and anxiety as they manifest themselves in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries" (7). This mirroring is also illustrated by Barbara Creed -- whose influential Kristevan tome *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (Routledge, 1993) is given a not entirely undeserved critical mauling in Michael Grant's contribution to the volume -- in her essay 'Dining with Dr. Hannibal Lecter'. In addition to outlining the well-known parallels between Freudian terminology and the cinematic apparatus -- 'projection', 'screen', 'identification', 'censorship', and so on -- Creed points out that Freud's volumes often read uncannily like horror movies, filled as they are with themes and images of "[c]astration, sexual abuse, hysteria, perversity, excrement, bestiality, animal phobias". "Like Freud's dreams and case histories," she argues, "the horror film was quick to explore the nature of perversity" (188-189).

However, the essays in Schneider's edited collection frequently -- and perhaps inevitably given the virulent turn against the discipline -- slip away from exclusive focus on the horror genre *per se* and instead engage more broadly with the status of psychoanalysis both within and without Film Studies. The wider debate over psychoanalysis' (continuing?) role in the evolution of Film Studies is acknowledged in the original contributions by Robin Wood and Noël Carroll which bookend the collection. Wood's impassioned (if somewhat humourless) conflation of Freudian/Marxist analysis in 'An Introduction to the American Horror Film' (1979) arguably still stands as the single most important piece of writing on the genre, while his highly politicised analysis of popular film echoed the synthesis of Lacan and Althusser that would underwrite the dominant theoretical approach to cinema in Anglo-American circles from the mid-1970s. Carroll, meanwhile, remains a leading figure amongst the small-but-influential gang of common-sense revolutionaries that comprise the 'post-Theory' cognitivist-philosopher brigade. Despite -- or more likely *because of* -- their contrasting methodological approaches, both Wood and Carroll sound unmistakably weary here. The former mourns the collapse of the "radical political commitment" (xiv) of the late 1960s-70s he saw perversely mirrored in the American horror films of the period, regretfully citing Romero's belated *Day of the Dead* (1985) as "the last great American horror film" (xvi).

In addition to Wood, Carroll and Creed there are also essays by notable scholars of horror cinema such as Andrew Tudor, Stephen Prince, Linda Badley, Cynthia Freeland, William Paul, Michael Grant and Jonathon Crane. Both Elizabeth Cowie and Slavoj Žižek also offer high praise for the book's contents on the dustcover, but even the latter's typically enthusiastic preamble ("Everyone in cinema and cultural studies should just grab this collection, sit down and learn!") cannot disguise the fact that ploughing through nearly 300 pages assessing the pros and cons of psychoanalytic film theory is an exhaustingly masochistic experience. *Horror Film and Psychoanalysis'* rhetorically essential strategy of foregrounding a self-

conscious strain of theorizing -- a mode which, the editor anticipates, "will help pave the way for future scholarship on the horror film -- of whatever theoretical persuasion -- committed to dialogue, progress and conceptual openness" (5). These are admirably progressive intentions, for sure, and Schneider certainly means to go beyond the jokey post-Freudian self-awareness that so irritated Lisa Hopkins (though the editor's slyly tongue-in-cheek dedication -- "For Mom and Dad, with love" -- is surely a knowing gesture towards being all-too-conscious of the presence of the unconscious).

The perennial complaints about the use of a totalizing psychoanalytic paradigm are, extremely briefly, twofold: firstly, psychoanalysis' tendency towards ahistorical, universalising explanations that are circular and self-justifying in their logic; and secondly, the reliance upon apparatus theory's construction of an abstract and idealized spectatorial 'subject' which bears little or no relation to the individuals who actually constitute film audiences. As an antidote to this outmoded critical monolith, Schneider posits "a minimal, epistemically neutral use of psychoanalytic theory" in which "[t]he clarification and delimiting of one's position should certainly be among the tasks of the psychoanalytic horror film scholar" (11-12). In other words, Schneider argues the case for a *productive pluralism* in the theoretical approach to horror cinema:

because it is neutral with respect to the underlying truth or falsity of the theses and explanatory models it invokes, the mode of psychoanalytic film theorising advocated here is in principle capable of being buttressed by non-, possibly even *anti*-, psychoanalytic film theoretical explanations of certain 'deep' features of cinematic horror, e.g., the co-mingled affective responses of pleasure, fear, and disgust generated in many viewers by horror film narratives and images. (13)

Although many readers in the UK may well be a little suspicious of the editor's invocation of a strategic 'third way' out of this conceptual dead-end, there is plenty of promise in the position Schneider advocates here. It is a pity, then, that so few of the essayists included in this volume really get to grips with the pluralistic method so intelligently outlined in the introduction. An honourable exception is William Paul's excellent 'What Does Dr. Judd Want? Transformation, Transference, and Divided Selves in *Cat People*', the single most incisive and intriguing piece on Val Lewton/Jacques Tourneur's dreamlike 1942 film this writer has come across in quite some time. Combining close formal and textual analysis with a gently sophisticated mobilisation of psychoanalytic concepts, Paul's analysis is highly sensitive to the film's thematic and metaphorical resonances, helping in turn to elucidate the convolutions and complexities of -- to paraphrase *Cat People*'s opening intertitle -- the depressions in the text's consciousness. Rather than using psychoanalysis as a tool with which to master *Cat People*'s enigmatic sensuality, 'What Does Dr. Judd Want?' emphasizes the film's own gently meta-textual discourse on psychoanalytic motivation and the mysteries of the unconscious. Unlike the standard use of psychoanalysis in Hollywood films of the period, Paul argues, *Cat People* refuses to neatly explicate character motivation; instead, the film's radical aesthetic strategies reject empiricist interpretations of human psychology and foregrounds "the conflicting impulses within its central characters," inducing in the viewer "the kind of sensation we might have upon waking from a dream of apprehending that which we can't quite remember" (175).

Unfortunately, much of the remainder of *Horror Film and Psychoanalysis* fails to live up to Paul's admirably high standards. The first section -- entitled 'The Question of Horror-

Pleasure' -- is a case in point. All four contributions included here provide detailed and thoughtful theoretical speculations on viewers (un)pleasurable investments in horror films, prompting one to stop and recall at this juncture how the single most influential piece of Lacanian film theorising -- Mulvey's 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' (1975) -- illustrated its thesis through exclusive reference to two horror films: Hitchcock's *Psycho* and (somewhat more obliquely) Michael Powell's *Peeping Tom* (both 1960). Yet no matter how lively the prose or how democratic the platform (in the spirit of debate encouraged by the editor, Tudor is allowed to respond to his critics elsewhere in the volume in an afterword to his widely reproduced 'Why Horror? The Peculiar Pleasures of a Popular Genre'), there is always a nagging sense of theory chasing its own tail (though, admittedly, the chase is rarely without insight). Perhaps most damning is the extremely limited references to specific film texts in each of the authors' arguments, a trait which only seems to confirm the oft-repeated criticism from the more empirically-minded members of the film studies community that the proponents of Theory are more interested in justifying the internal machinations of their own paradigm than in offering original insight into actual (horror) films themselves.

The second section of the book, 'Theorizing the Uncanny', is also a little too *heimlich* for comfort. Cynthia Freeland's contribution, 'Exploring the Uncanny in *The Double Life of Veronique*', makes no bones about the author's desire for a "cognitivist science-based approach" to "supplant psychoanalysis" in its exploration of how social experiences interact with "what seems to be hard-wired in the various emotion systems" (103) of spectators. Even putting aside ...*Veronique*'s (Kieslowski, 1991) dubious status as a 'horror' film, Freeland admits that her unadventurously methodical reading of the text can only "emphasize what viewers *may* think and feel in response to the depiction of gender in relation to *DLV*'s themes and style" (103: my emphasis). A methodologically modest claim, for sure, but one whose speculative basis doubles almost exactly for psychoanalytic theory's tendency towards conceptual guesswork as to the unconscious investments and desires of film viewers *vis-à-vis* specific film texts. Indeed, the only thing remotely "hard-wired" here is the curious desire to demystify the enigmatic melancholy of Kieslowski's film: thankfully, the limitations of Freeland's approach prevent her from scratching more than the glacial outer surface of ...*Veronique*'s ethereal layering.

A letter to *Sight & Sound* recently suggested that "[t]he most important ingredient in a horror movie is the sadness associated with it" (December 2005: 96). Rarely has this astute comment about the melancholy at the heart of horror cinema been better illustrated than in producer Val Lewton's frugal output for RKO during the early to mid-1940s. Alexander Nemerov's *Icons of Grief: Val Lewton's Home Front Pictures* is the latest addition to an increasingly weighty body of critical work attached to these quietly beautiful horror films recently afforded a prestigious region one DVD box-set release in 2005. Nemerov distinguishes his own historicist work from the bulk of criticism by moving away from what he sees as the standard view of Lewton ("he made the most of small budgets; he emphasized the unconscious motivations of human beings; he favoured darkness and the unseen generally so his audiences could imagine horror instead of see it"), a view he sees as not wrong *per se*, but instead simply "too correct" (9).

Nemerov's central thesis in the exhaustively researched *Icons of Grief* is both original and highly persuasive, and his main contention is neatly synthesised in the opening sentence: "*World War II haunts the horror films of Val Lewton*" (1: my emphasis). Restating the truism that Lewton's movies are typically celebrated for their portrayal of the unseen, *Icons of Grief* argues that the "melancholy beauty" of these films is grounded in the otherwise hidden,

censored or disavowed sorrow caused by the conflict overseas. Unlike the "sterilized and abstracted" (3) depictions of conflict that appeared in mainstream war films of the period, RKO's "gentle, sweet and sad" (2) genre pieces instead brought "the fact of tragedy intensely before the American public" (4). The "icons" of the title refers to a series of minor figures that feature in each of the four films primarily under discussion: Irena (Simone Simon) in *Curse of the Cat People* (von Fritsch & Robson, 1944); Finn (Skelton Knaggs) in *The Ghost Ship* (Robson, 1943); Carre-Four (Darby Jones) in *I Walked with a Zombie* (Tourneur, 1943); and the Gilded Boy (Glenn Vernon) in *Bedlam* (Mark Robson, 1946). As ostensibly marginal to the narrative as they initially appear to be, these figures nevertheless constitute Val Lewton's "vocabulary of the tragic, a static visual language of grief" (3) that is endlessly haunted by the war:

These minor figures visualize the murmurs of grief and lost gestures of mourning, transient and sensuous as the touch of a finger on nylon, that moved beneath the home front's official slogans. They try to commemorate the inchoate sway of sadness that otherwise remained inarticulate and concealed amid the unsettling gleam of brave smiles and clenched teeth (4-5)

Nemerov's prose here is entirely typical of the appropriately lyrical style he employs in order to capture the mournful visual poetry of Lewton's modestly understated films. Emphasizing the producer's love of Dickens, *Icons of Grief's* focus on the significance of a series of minor characters united by a striking "kinetic immobility" (7) entirely at odds with classical Hollywood's usual narrative thrust and forward movement. Instead, argues Nemerov, these inert minor characters -- enigmatically frozen in time and space rather than, say, artificially fixed in freeze-frame -- uncannily evoke the "deathly stillness" of the individual frame, becoming in the process akin to commemorative effigies, "a fixed portrait of the dead, not unlike the first icons" (26). This funerary symbolism and the movies' eye for social deprivation and characters on the margins (figures whose continual structuring presence "asserts inequity and conflict in the social world" [73]) are the films' latent representation of the war and its discontents. Through the use of extremely close textual analysis, a wide range of textual cross-reference (particularly in relation to star personae and performance style), *Icons of Grief* makes a persuasive case for the all-too-significant insignificance of life's minor players; "for where," asks Nemerov, "but in the most overlooked corners, and in the briefest moments, does one expect to find something like the past?" (11-12). Thus, in the catatonic torpor of Darby Jones' memorably fleeting appearances in *I Walked with a Zombie*, the author finds evidence of both "the violent subjugation *and* the emergent power of blacks during the war" (112: original emphasis) as well as intimations of African-American alienation from the united front of the war effort. The ethereal Simone Simon in *Curse of the Cat People* -- seen only by a child 'cursed' with the loneliness of the imaginative and chastised by her parents for her "morbid" daydreams -- functions as a figurative representation of the painfully unspoken reality of off-screen ghosts. And in *The Ghost Ship*, Skelton Knaggs' bit-part "accentuat[es] the symbiosis between minor player and a state of lifelike sorrow and pain" (67). For Lewton, then, the minor mode was the only emotionally authentic way to register the war's effects, an attempt to "capture the tragedy of a true inconsequence, to dramatize the forgotten in a memorable way" (169).

There are arguably methodological problems with *Icons of Grief*, not least in Nemerov's unapologetic auteurism. For sure, Lewton's enthusiastically proactive role in each of the films he produced is well-documented, and his creative influence is on many levels indisputable given the aesthetic and thematic consistency of RKO's output during this period. Yet there is

more than a little overdetermination in the fevered insistence upon Lewton as absolute creative centre, especially when the producer was surrounded by not inconsiderable talents such as Mark Robson, Jacques Tourneur and Robert Wise, not to mention the assorted screenwriters and production designers whose talents helped realise "Lewton's" vision. It is, to appropriate Nemerov's own term, a little *too obvious* -- even fetishistic -- to position the notoriously modest Lewton as the centrifugal creative force behind these films. To this end, whilst the stress on the only partially assimilated Lewton's double consciousness is certainly rhetorically forceful (the Russian *émigré*'s sensibility is faultlessly described as a combination of "tabloid gunshot and deep old-world tragedy" [6]), it also lapses occasionally into the kind of empty anti-Americanism found in *Screening the Gothic*. Detailing the pulp novels Lewton churned out before being employed by Hollywood, Nemerov repeatedly finds them to "teem with satire of American attitudes", voicing the producer-to-be's "sardonic distance from the national propensity to ... dull conformity, common sense and insipid entertainments" (27). This is undeniably an accurate representation of the movies, wherein bland American normalcy is invariably contrasted unfavourably with the shadowy depths of 'foreign' otherness. However, the notion that the films accurately represent Americans' inability to deal with tragedy and their naïve isolation from the realities of the conflict (a Eurocentric perspective presented almost as self-evident fact here) is problematic to say the least. Take the following passage:

Americans do not know how to grieve. They might even barely know that a war is on. Death is all around, yet inside the American home the rituals of repression based on hearty togetherness, optimistic slogans and cheerful making-do drown the plaintive song of the dead (30)

However, and in the curious manner of disavowal, it is surely on some level *precisely* this quietly morbid ambience that drew audiences repeatedly to the hugely successful horror films that Nemerov holds as emblematic of all the home front turned its eyes from. If, as Nemerov contends, the tragedy of the war was repressed in mainstream public discourse, presumably RKO's output of the era functions as its inevitable, mournful return. Perhaps, too, it is the author's historicist resistance to psychoanalytic metaphors which prevents him from acknowledging this; or, indeed, from delving too far into the Freudian territory that this often "uncanny" *oeuvre* would seem to encourage. Nevertheless, *Icons of Grief* is to be applauded for its hugely insightful journey into the alluring visual whispers of the Lewton-text, a language that has always been there, "awaiting discovery like a message encoded in special ink that requires a chemical bath to be discerned, or like a body that has been concealed behind the plaster and lathing that finally, with the deterioration of the wall, begins to show through the cracks" (10). It is an enduringly resonant truism of the gothic mode that one cannot escape the long shadows of the past, and it is a lesson that -- frequently quite brilliantly -- both Lewton's films and *Icons of Grief* teach us, sadly, again and again.

# High Comedy and American Movies: Class and Humor from the 1920s to the Present

By Steve Vineberg

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£17.99 (pbk)

## A review by James Russell, De Montfort University, UK

At the beginning of *High Comedy and the American Movies*, Steve Vineberg rightly observes that the subject and setting of American comedy films are rarely taken seriously by critics. While there is a small but substantial branch of film studies which has explored the relationship between humour, performance and audience address since the silent period, comedy movies are themselves rarely interpreted by scholars as valid social documents or commentaries. Vineberg sets out to partially redress this situation by focusing in detail on the history of one significant but critically neglected subgenre of American film comedy: 'High Comedy', or the 'Comedy of Manners', a filmmaking trope perhaps best embodied by George Cukor's 1940 version of *The Philadelphia Story*. According to Vineberg, high comedy is "elevated in both style and subject matter... distinctly verbal, aimed at educated audiences... and class is a felicitously inescapable boundary" (1). Although he goes to identify thirteen formal and thematic elements which distinguish high comedy from other subgenres, his key point is that high comedy invariably concerns itself with the morays of a witty educated elite -- usually, but not exclusively, an aristocracy of sorts. For Vineberg, high comedy is an arena where American discomfort with the concept of class difference can be played out. Vineberg effectively assumes that high comedies can be analysed in order to discover how popular attitudes towards the moneyed classes may have changed since the 1920s, and the chapters which follow attempt to carry out this work.

In the first chapter Vineberg looks to the European roots of high comedy, which originated in long standing theatrical traditions which stretch back to the 17<sup>th</sup> Century. Like the stratified world they depict, high comedies are a European import to American shores, and Vineberg begins by examining the films of a number of European émigrés in the 1920s, particularly Ernst Lubitsch and Noel Coward. Thus, considerable attention is devoted to *Private Lives* (Sidney Franklin, 1931), *Design For Living* (Ernst Lubitsch, 1932) and *The Shop Around the Corner* (Ernst Lubitsch, 1940) as well as a number of American productions which seem, to Vineberg at least, highly influenced by European theatrical conventions. For the most part, Vineberg offers engaging critical accounts, focusing on formal, narrational, and theatrical elements, rather than offering a systematic analysis of the ways that such films were conceived of, or received, by Hollywood and the American public. In the next chapter, Vineberg argues that high comedy became a clearly American genre in the 1930s and 1940s, as filmmakers looked to Broadway, rather than the European stage, for inspiration. At this point, *The Philadelphia Story*, along with numerous other films, is addressed, and again Vineberg focuses on assessing the entertainment value and quality of such productions. Although, at points Vineberg observes that high comedy intrinsically functions as a form of social satire, his analytical approach never really addresses that which is being satirised.



Rather he concerns himself exclusively with content, more in the manner of a film critic than a historian or theoretician.

A subsequent chapter moves on to assess depictions of celebrity, which Vineberg sees as a distinctly American form of aristocracy, and then the author shifts his attention to relatively marginal high comedies of the 1970s and 1980s. Although Vineberg recognises that the heyday of high comedy is long over by this point, he nevertheless argues that its spirit has been kept alive by directors such as Paul Mazursky and Robert Altman. In particular, Vineberg sees Mazursky's *Bob and Carol and Ted and Alice* (1969), and Altman's *Nashville* (1970) as key entries in the genre. Indeed, Vineberg describes *Nashville* as "the finest example of high comedy ever made in this country" (139). He then goes on to assess much of Altman's other work, including the Raymond Chandler adaptation *The Long Goodbye* (1973) and *Gosford Park* (2001), before concluding with a evaluation of Fred Schipisi's *Six Degrees of Separation* (1993) which Vineberg sees as 'complicating and deepening' the legacy of high comedy.

Film studies scholars who have encountered any recent writing on genre theory will undoubtedly recognise that Vineberg's work is problematic in some regards. He effectively defines his own corpus of films, and spends an inordinate amount of time policing the self defined boundaries between subgenres. For example, early on he insists that 'screwball comedy' and 'romantic comedy' are the same thing, and he frequently declines to address some key productions because they are, in his estimation, romantic comedies, or satires. However, Vineberg's choices become increasingly capricious as the book goes on. *The Long Goodbye* and *Gosford Park* are certainly about the moneyed classes, but they are not comedies, which would surely preclude them from assessment in an account that was, at least in its early stages, preoccupied with maintaining generic boundaries. Furthermore, the chapter structure suggests a generic continuity which is, in itself, difficult to accept. Many scholars, including Tino Balio, Richard Maltby, Steve Neale and Rick Altman, have seriously destabilised almost all of the assumptions which underpin Vineberg's account -- that genres can be identified by critics, and then closely constrained; that genres have a long life which can stretch over many decades; that marginal genres are important to the industrial and cultural import of the film industry; finally, that such productions exists in a self contained universe, the boundaries of which are defined primarily by the critic.

In addition, Vineberg ultimately fails to seriously address the social significance of high comedy, despite his intentions. The benchmark for this sort of approach is clearly Brian Taves' exemplary work on adventure films, *The Romance of Adventure: The Genre of Historical Adventure Movies* (University Press of Mississippi, 1992). Like Taves, Vineberg is perhaps excessively preoccupied with maintaining the boundaries of the subgenres he has identified, and both works are also often fairly descriptive. However, Taves ultimately offers an illuminating account of the ways that his self defined American adventure films deal with the legacy of British colonialism, and the long lived spectre of the Civil War. Although his methodology can be questioned, Taves' conclusions are wide ranging and perceptive. By contrast, Vineberg focuses exclusively on content, and never really demonstrates the same sort of commitment to positioning his films within broader social trends or attitudes. The voice of the ordinary viewer is absolutely silent here, which is a shame. From the modern viewpoint it is sometimes difficult to see what incredibly verbose, self absorbed films like *The Philadelphia Story* really did offer run-of-the-mill American moviegoers. Unfortunately, Vineberg is more interested in documenting his own response, and this line of enquiry remains unexplored.

Steve Vineberg is principally a theatre scholar and film reviewer for the mainstream American press, so it seems churlish to complain that this is not a particularly rigorous scholarly account, or that it is not enmeshed in the complexities of genre theory. Vineberg looks to the theatrical origins of such productions, because this is his principal area of interest, which could be commended. Many recent writings on stardom and acting have noted that the theatrics of film performance are rarely interpreted or discussed, and Vineberg provides an interesting insight into what such work might look like. Furthermore, his review-style accounts are written in a lively, accessible manner, which should certainly hold the general reader's attention more successfully than a more detailed and measured account might do. However, academic readers seeking a serious, well researched exploration of the ways that class and comedy have come together over the last eighty years, should head back to the archives. Vineberg began by observing that these films have not yet been taken seriously enough by scholars. Unfortunately, this remains the case today.