FilmMatters

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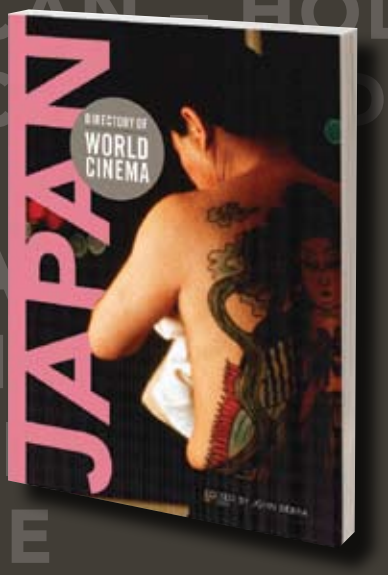
QUAI DES BRUMES

AN AMERICAN APPEAL



DIRECTORY OF WORLD CINEMA

"This was never intended to be a conventional film guide, as the overall aim was always to discuss Japanese cultural life and history as expressed through the medium of film." – John Berra

The Directory of World Cinema aims to bring a new dimension to the academic study of film. The directory is intended to play a part in the distribution of academic output, by building a forum for the study of film from a disciplined theoretical base.

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FRONT COVER IMAGE
Michele Morgan from Marcel Carne's 1938 film *Quai des brumes* (Credit: Cine Alliance / Pathe / The Kobal Collection)

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Film Matters (ISSN: 20421869) is published four times per year by Intellect, The Mill, Parnall Rd., Fishponds, Bristol BS16 3JG, UK. The current subscription rates are £33/$33 (personal) and £99/$99 (institutional). Postage is free for the UK and the US, £9 for EU countries and £12 for the rest of the world.

Editorial

By Tim Palmer & Liza Palmer

In recent years, the field of film studies has seen a tremendous upsurge in publishing – more books, more articles, more dedicated websites and blogs. So why a new journal? The answer is simple: *Film Matters* is the first peer-reviewed journal for undergraduate writing about cinema. An increasing number of academic programs the world over now offers courses on studying cinema; a rising number of qualified and interested writers on film is emerging internationally. This new journal is an outlet to reflect, and publish, the work produced by this growing pool of talent.

What else makes *Film Matters* different? To recognize the shaping role of faculty mentors on these undergraduate writers (as well as the influence of their home program), each article will also acknowledge the person and program that nurtured its newly published author. Our focus, in this inaugural issue and beyond, is emphatically global and emphatically expansive, ranging from work on the most widely circulated of mainstream texts to the more experimental projects of the avant-garde. Revisionist pieces about well-documented issues will mingle with new essays on overlooked filmmakers and neglected international centers and periods of film. Despite the pessimism advocated by many conventional sources of film criticism, the editorial outlook at *Film Matters* is resolutely optimistic. We believe that, thanks if nothing else to the broad landscape of DVD releases, especially among specialist labels, more fascinating and once obscure world cinema texts are available for consideration than ever before. *Film Matters* seeks, above all, to take stock of this new, broadening canon of global cinema, past, present and future.

Many of the writers published in *Film Matters* plan on postgraduate and long-term careers teaching, researching and writing about cinema as academics. Some will keep up their interests on a personal basis, as cinephiles, impassioned analysts of world filmmaking. Either way, this journal will keep showcasing the best, most original and innovative writings of these future film scholars.

Liza Palmer
Liza Palmer is Creative and Fine Arts Librarian at Randall Library, University of North Carolina Wilmington. She also serves as Review Section Editor for the journal *Film International* and Co-Editor-in-Chief of the magazine *Film Matters*, both published by Intellect. Her research interests involve the cinema of the American Avant Garde with a particular focus upon the works of Stan Brakhage, Maya Deren, and Kenneth Anger. Recent publications include: "Les Enfants Terribles: An Interview with Françoise Marie" in *Film International*, issue 6.4; and "Self-Made Myths: Strategies of Promotion Among Avant-Garde Filmmakers" in *Film and Television Stardom*. Ed. Kylo-Patrick Hart. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008. 90–104.

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Tim Palmer is Associate Professor of Film Studies at the University of North Carolina Wilmington. He is the author of *Brutal Intimacy: Analyzing Contemporary French Cinema* (Wesleyan University Press, forthcoming 2010) and co-editor of *Directory of World Cinema: France* (Intellect, forthcoming 2011). His research has appeared in *Cinema Journal*, *Journal of Film and Video*, *Studies in French Cinema*, *The French Review*, *New Review of Film and Television Studies* and *Film International*. His work has also been published in anthologies like *The Cinema of France* (2006), *France at the Flicks: Trends in Contemporary French Popular Cinema* (2007), *Film and Television Stardom* (2008) and *Framing the World: Explorations in Ecocriticism and Film* (2010, forthcoming).

IMAGE CREDITS, FALL 2009
À bout de souffle (Les Productions Georges de Beauregard, Société Nouvelle de Cinématographie (SNC)) / Alice Guy- Blaché (Kino International) / Australia (Twentieth Century Fox, Bazmark, ScreenWest, Dune Entertainment III, Ingenious Film Partners) / *Jean Cocteau* (Life magazine) / Cry Freedom (Universal Pictures, Marble Arch Productions) / *La Haine* (Canal+, Cofinergie 6, Egg Pictures, Kasso Inc.Productions, La Sept Cinéma, Les Productions Lazennec, Polygram Filmed Entertainment, Studio Image) / La Haine (University of Illinois Press) / *Heathers* (New World Pictures, Cinemarque Entertainment) / *Historical Dictionary of French Cinema* (Scarecrow Press) / *Jean Cocteau* (Reaktion Books) / *Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (Criterion Collection) / *Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (Ministère de la Culture Française de Belgique, Paradise Films, Unité Trois) / Rosalie Kunoth (Susanne Chauvel Carlsson and the H.C. McIntyre Trust) / *Monsoon Wedding* (IFC Productions, Mirabai Films, Key Films, Pandora Films, Paradis Films) / *Monsoon Wedding* (Criterion Collection) / Fanta Régina Nacro (Les Histoires Weba) / *A Night of Truth* (Acrobates Film, Les Films du Defi, France 3 Cinéma) / *A Night of Truth* (BFI) / Pépé le Moko (Paris Film) / *Les poupées russes* (Lunar Films, Studio Canal, France 2 (FR2), Canal+, Ce Qui Me Meut Motion Pictures, TPS Cinéma) / *Quai des brumes* (Ciné-Alliance; Jean Gabin still courtesy of www.doctormacro.info) / Rabbit-Proof Fence (The Australian Film Commission, Australian Film Finance Corporation (AFFC), HanWay, Lotteries Commission of Western Australia, Olsen Levy, Rumbalara Films, Showtime Australia) / *Sixteen Candles* (Channel Productions, Universal Pictures) / *Some Kind of Wonderful* (Hughes Entertainment, Paramount Pictures) / *Teen Dreams* (I.B. Tauris) / Zulu (Diamond Films)

Colonial Nation:

History and Identity in Baz Luhrmann's *Australia*

By Carolyn Lake

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KEYWORDS: Australian film, Australian history, colonization, historical representation

ABOVE Rosalie Kunoth as Jedda in *Jedda*

AS BENEDICT ANDERSON and many others have since shown, the media is a powerful discursive site that constructs nations, histories and identities, or in Anderson's words, "imagined communities" (6–7; Carter 6–9, 182–209). *Australia* (Luhrmann, 2008) reflects this paradigm more explicitly than any other Australian film before. It makes claim to the Australian nation most obviously through its title but also through its promotion, both as a film and together with tourism campaigns, through its mythologizing of Australian history and through its allusions to Australian literature, film, geography and people – whether accurate or not.

Australia received mixed reviews, both in Australia and abroad, with many Australian critics taking issue with its historical inaccuracies (with no credited historical advisers on the film, this is a salient objection) and its narrow representation of the Stolen Generations. Many critics simply claimed it was a bad film, "a fraudulent and misleading fantasy," while others applauded it, saying it gave "Australians a new past" (Greer; Langton, "Faraway"). The incongruence between history, as an academic discipline, and historical representation in film has been argued elsewhere, without much consensus (McGrath), and although the role of history will be discussed here, it is not within the scope of this article to debate the feasibility or merit of historical "truthfulness" in popular culture. Rather, this article is concerned with the use of national mythologizing in film, its functions and its consequences.

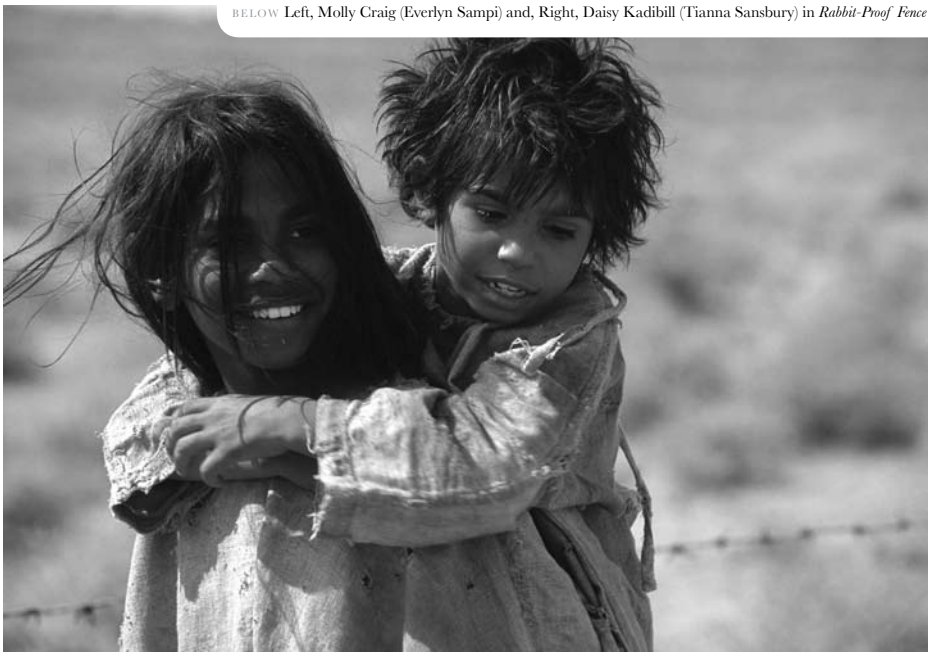
As Luhrmann so often stated, *Australia* is an epic, an ambiguous term that, apart from signalling its intended scope and projected box office sales, offers little indication of what the film is about. It could be described as a romance, a western, or an adventure film, and it is in fact a messy pastiche of all these genres. Set in the Northern Territory of Australia during the late 1930s and early 1940s, the film depicts a clichéd meeting of two people. In the male lead, there is the very Australian Drover (Hugh Jackman), known mythically by no other name, who is the infallible Australian stereotype: male, egalitarian, resilient, independent and rough, yet can wear a tuxedo if the occasion calls for it. Alongside him is Lady Sarah Ashley (Nicole Kidman), a "genuine aristocrat" who sails from England, intending to sell her husband's property, Faraway Downs, believing him to be having intimate relationships with "the native women." Upon arrival at Faraway Downs, Sarah discovers that her husband has died, her accountant is a drunk and her station manager, Neil Fletcher,

is likely stealing her cattle for the villainous King Carnie, the largest cattle exporter in the region. With 1,500 cattle left wandering, Sarah employs the help of Drover to transport them to Darwin in time for an army contract. On the way a romance develops between them, and despite having to cross the disastrous Kuramen Desert (which does not actually exist), Sarah and Drover make the deadline, beat King Carnie and, as a number of reviewers commented, this is exactly where the movie should end, instead of going on for more than another hour.

This mammoth-length feature, however, contains more than a romance-adventure quest. Luhrmann also jammed in the bombing of Darwin and set the film against one of the most shameful elements of Australian history, the Stolen Generations. When Sarah arrives at Faraway Downs, there are Aboriginal people working and residing on the property: a "housemaid," Bandy Legs; a child born of European and Aboriginal parentage, Nullah; and Nullah's mother, Daisy. The inclusion of a Stolen Generations story in *Australia* cannot be understood without first grasping why this part of Australian history is so pertinent to ITS.

In 1997, the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) presented the Australian government with its report of the "laws, practices and policies which resulted in the separation of Indigenous children from their families by compulsion, duress or undue influence" entitled *Bringing Them Home* (Commonwealth of Australia). The report found that the main objective of removing children was to assimilate them into the non-Indigenous community; that the forced removal breached fundamental human rights; and that from the 1940s onward, the removals were a gross violation of international prohibitions on genocide and racial discrimination (Dodson 128). The *Bringing Them Home* report is, to this date, the highest-selling government-commissioned publication produced in Australia (Whitlock 198). For many Australians, their history suddenly changed in 1997. As Drusilla Modjeska wrote of that year, "I am sure I am not the only one to have had the sensation of waking up to find myself in an Australia I barely recognise. Or, rather, more to the point, in an Australia I would rather not recognise" (Modjeska 159).

In light of *Bringing Them Home* (Commonwealth of Australia), Australia's very conception of nation – to the extent that it was built on community and related to land – suddenly became morally illegitimate. This national identity crisis is one way of explaining the resurgence of historically based Australian films during the late 1990s and 2000s, as an attempt to create new collective memories for a new collective past. The *Bringing Them Home* report, along with the landmark *Mabo* and *Wik* High Court Native Title judgments, popular history books, such as Henry Reynolds's publications, and television projects, such as the Special Broadcasting Service Corporation (SBS) miniseries *The First Australians* (Perkins, 2009), generated a new public discourse of history, nation and identity. "Aboriginal history" was beginning to move into the public spheres of television, literature and mainstream politics. It is in this context that films such as *Rabbit-Proof Fence* (Noyce, 2002), *The Tracker* (de Heer, 2002) and *The Proposition* (Hillcoat, 2005) emerged. All of these films, in differing ways, "attempted to displace the nation's myth of origin from the sacred trenches of Gallipoli to the immense, historical crime scene of the colonial frontier" (Collins 281). Three years and many Australian films later, Baz Luhrmann's *Australia* premiered.



BELOW Left, Molly Craig (Everlyn Sampi) and, Right, Daisy Kadibill (Tianna Sansbury) in *Rabbit-Proof Fence*

This national identity crisis is one way of explaining the resurgence of historically based Australian films during the late 1990s and 2000s, as an attempt to create new collective memories for a new collective past.

Because of the way national identity is inherently tied with national history, this backtracking over Australia's history through film is an integral process for reconciling Australia's current identity crisis. As Felicity Collins writes of post-*Mabo* cinema in Australia, "this unrooted memory of a traumatic colonial past has decisively displaced cultural nationalism's bush legend and its ethos of mateship as a sign of an egalitarian nationhood" (Collins and Davis 281). And this is exactly why Luhrmann's *Australia* had so much riding on it. Despite what Luhrmann's intentions may have been, the title said it all. In light of recent historical and political developments, Australia was searching not only for an identifiable past but a promising future. But, rather than *Australia* "backtracking" (Collins and Davis 7) or interrogating Australian history, a more inclusive and accountable history, it held true to most of the national myths that have been ignorantly espoused since the nineteenth century.

Broadly speaking, the most enduring national myth for Australia has been the "bush" (Turner 34–36). From the day the first fleet arrived in 1788 and found unpleasant weather (they had not anticipated the reversal of seasons from England) to the release of Luhrmann's *Australia*, the bush has been a dominant national marker. Australian landscape, as represented in film, is "typically vast, even 'epic' . . . [t]he land is challenging, as it must be for heroes, but it can be tamed" (Carter 197). *Australia* strongly upholds this narrative tradition, despite being produced in the twenty-first century. The media coverage of *Australia*'s production and postproduction invokes this idea of a mythic

and dangerous Australian land. As one reporter wrote, "This [Australia] is the real McCoy, big and parched. Bloody beautiful. The idea of shooting a movie in such hostile terrain, one that would suck the last drop of gumption out of Ray Mears, is not to be entertained lightly" (Dawson 2008). It is true that a proportionally large part of Australia is virtually uninhabitable. Look at a rainfall map of the country and you will notice the massive empty space in the middle. However, this element of the Australian environment is not one that many Australian people can directly relate to, either now or in the early twentieth century.

Colonies, and later cities, have almost exclusively been on the coastal regions of the continent. Most Australians are more familiar with beaches than they are "untamed wilderness." Yet, historically, Australia has mythologized itself within a bush paradigm: "unarguably harsh in its extremes, bizarre in its affection of beauty, it is just these most harsh and bizarre aspects of the land which we perversely enshrine in our national character" (Turner 36). This personification of land is evoked again in *Australia* through the character Drover. Drover has a rough demeanor, preferring to sleep under stars rather than under a roof. He insists on droving during the dry season despite financial security. Indeed, just as the land needs to be tamed and civilized by the settlers, Drover needs to be tamed by Sarah. Like the binarism of Sarah and Drover, the bush legend is not Australian so much as it is *not* British, a sturdy man of antiauthoritarian, egalitarian principles fighting the land in the vastness of nowhere.

Although Drover is at home on the land, Sarah is not. The character of Neil Fletcher reminds us of this when he remarks on Sarah's arrival in Darwin: "She won't last, a delicate English rose withers in the outback." But Sarah does last, and this can be attributed to her partnership with Drover. It is Drover who literally comes to the rescue to transport Sarah's cattle to Darwin after she fires Fletcher. It is Drover who gets her served a drink in the front bar, and it is Drover who manages to save the children from Mission Island. Although Sarah does try to recapture Nullah, her passive approach does not compare with Drover's action-packed search-and-rescue escapade. Drover and Sarah's relationship ties back again to the land. When the two characters kiss, rain falls on the drought-stricken Darwin. When they consummate their relationship, monsoonal storms appear, the land becomes rejuvenated, birds fly and rivers flow. When Britain is soon to leave Australia defenseless against Japanese attack, it is the very British Sarah, together with the very Australian Drover, who save the land.

BELOW Lady Sarah Ashley (Nicole Kidman) and Nullah (Brandon Walters)

This relationship between myth and land has deeper consequences, creating a settler discourse around land that displaces any notion of dispossession from Indigenous peoples.

This relationship between myth and land has deeper consequences, creating a settler discourse around land that displaces any notion of dispossession from Indigenous peoples. Early in *Australia*, Nullah tells Sarah that she is like the Rainbow Serpent, that she will heal the land. But Sarah will do more than heal the land; she will own it. Do Sarah's healing powers justify her ownership? Sarah's mythic propensity to cultivate the land is curiously similar to the settler's ability to develop agriculture. The broad meaning of *Terra Nullius* is land belonging to no one, land over which no one has sovereignty. This includes but is not limited to an expression of sovereignty through the development of agriculture. Sarah's adoption of the title of Rainbow Serpent, the title that seems to distance her from the status of colonizer, invader or dispossessor, comes eerily close to the doctrine of *Terra Nullius*, the doctrine that "justified" European colonization of Australia. Rather than attempting to circumvent Indigeneity, by naming Sarah the Rainbow Serpent, Indigenous discourses are appropriated by European ones, constructing these alternative meanings and histories.

Throughout *Australia*, there is a tension amongst Neil Fletcher, the former manager of Faraway Downs; King Carnie, the infamous cattle baron; and Sarah. Both men want to purchase Sarah's property, and both offer her various propositions throughout the film. In one particular discussion of the property between Fletcher and Sarah, Fletcher argues that his family has lived at Faraway Downs for three generations and that his father had died working the land on which they stand. Fletcher's response invokes a Lockean conception of ownership, that the labor he and his family have spent on the land constitutes ownership, also invoking the philosophical position of "squatters" in colonial Australia. Sarah insists she rightfully owns the property because her deceased husband had purchased it. Unless Sarah's husband had purchased the property by way of treaty with the Indigenous peoples living there, her ownership rights are as illegitimate as any other colonial's. At no time during the nearly three-hour film does any character, Indigenous or non-Indigenous, suggest that neither Sarah nor Fletcher is morally positioned to be on the land in the first place – a stark omission considering *Australia* was heralded as giving "Australians a new past" (Langton, "Faraway").

A recurrent theme throughout *Australia* is "story." The film opens with Nullah narrating; he recounts that the most important lesson he has learned is "tellum story." One of Drover's

most famous lines in the film reiterates a similar message: "Most people like to own things, you know, land, luggage, other people, makes them feel secure. But all that can be taken away, and in the end, all you really own is your story." Drover tells this to Sarah on their first encounter, as he is driving her from Darwin to Faraway Downs. This is another area where the film unfortunately falls short of its intention, wandering vaguely among its subplots and returning most frequently to its central romance. But what of the 1942 Darwin bombing? Moreover, what of the other framing story, that of the Stolen Generations?

Luhrmann engages with the Stolen Generations history primarily through the character of Nullah. Early in the film, Nullah's mother, Daisy, dies and with his father suspected to be the morally corrupt former manager, Neil Fletcher, Nullah is effectively orphaned. Like other scenes in *Australia*, this narrative element is powerfully reminiscent of the Australian film *Jedda* (Chauvel, 1955). *Jedda* was a first for Australian film in three ways: it was the first Australian feature film to be shot in color, the first to include credited Aboriginal actors in lead roles and the first to cinematically represent the Stolen Generations. Although *Jedda* is today seen as "sickening and, at the same time, laughable in its racism," it has become an iconic Australian film (Langton, "Well" 47).

Like *Jedda*, *Australia*'s Aboriginal child is not taken in the literal sense but orphaned. And as in *Jedda*, Nullah is taken in by a non-Indigenous woman, Sarah. Sarah is medically unable to have children; the comparative character in *Jedda*, who interestingly has the same first name, Sarah McMann, has recently lost a child. So, in both films, the orphaned Aboriginal child is taken in by a well-intentioned non-Indigenous woman, and both women have at least symbolically lost the opportunity of motherhood. Whereas *Jedda* was made during the height of the Indigenous child removal policies, *Australia* was made with the benefit of hindsight and with the indisputable historical awareness that *Bringing Them Home* (Commonwealth of Australia) has afforded Australians. Yet Luhrmann makes the same narrative choices as *Jedda*, representing the Aboriginal child as in need of a family and a home, with a benevolent non-Indigenous woman willing to do just that. The five decades that have lapsed between these two films have not, unlike other Australian films,[1] given *Australia* any greater insight.

The conventional narrative structure of cinematic representations of history is to explore the past through the experiences of individuals. This is the way story and myth have functioned for centuries. This convention is not limited to film: museums also increasingly use stories for representing the past. As Bain Attwood writes, "it [an exhibition] tells a story in which it treats an event as symbolic of a general phenomenon that really happened, which is how myth commonly relates the past" (Attwood 107). No reasonable person expects absolute historical accuracy in film, but they would expect that a film's narrative be at least thematically true to the events it represents. Yet, it is difficult to reconcile Luhrmann's Stolen Generations story with the themes that emerged from the *Bringing Them Home* report a decade earlier. With film acting as a powerful arbiter of social memory, this incongruence is an issue worthy of critical consideration (Collins 277). Australians might be shy about their own history, even ignorant, but we should know enough to know that *Australia*'s depiction of the Stolen Generations does not generally reflect the past and that it is not the story we should be sending to our national cinemas or cinemas abroad.

Although Noyce's *Rabbit-Proof Fence* was a "profoundly unsettling film" (Potter and Schaffer), *Australia* is merely cute. Nullah speaks in a cutesy version of Pidgin, a simplified version of English formed for easy communication between colonizers and Indigenous peoples (Greer). He is innocent and naïve, liking Sarah's shaky rendition of "Over the Rainbow" – after all, he did dub Sarah the Rainbow Serpent. Nullah is not afraid of Sarah or Drover, nor should he be, despite Sarah's early mistakes with respectful language; both characters are good-natured, well-intentioned colonials, neither racist nor sexist; Drover must have been the most liberal man that side of the equator. Not only does he ride with women and find them "easy to get along with," but his conveniently deceased wife was Aboriginal. This fact exonerates him from any historical accountability one might want to impose upon him. And although Sarah did not marry an Aboriginal man, for she was fresh off the boat from England, she symbolically and literally saves Nullah numerous times throughout the film. As one reviewer so aptly put it, "it's a perfect film to see if you want to feel great about being white" (Zachariah).

Luhrmann deals with the tragedy of the Stolen Generations, not by Nullah being taken from his family and community and then institutionalized (though he is taken *from Sarah* and sent to "Mission Island" for a period), nor by being made to work in inhumane conditions for no pay, but by being unable to go "walkabout" with his grandfather, King George. The walkabout problem is

BELOW Lady Sarah Ashley (Nicole Kidman) and Drover (Hugh Jackman) in Baz Luhrmann's *Australia*

At no time during the nearly three-hour film does any character, Indigenous or non-Indigenous, suggest that neither Sarah nor Fletcher is morally positioned to be on the land in the first place.

representative of assimilation. To say, as some reviewers did, that *Australia* does not attempt a discussion of mid-twentieth-century discourses on race is to judge the film too harshly. *Australia* does, at least subtlety, attempt to discuss the complexities of assimilationist policy. The following dialogue is the key scene in which this takes place:

> SARAH. What's wrong?
> DROVER. I'm not used to people making decisions about me, that's all.
> SARAH. I was just expressing an opinion. Captain Dutton was telling me about this wonderful school of the air. It's conducted all over the country.
> DROVER. He wants to go walkabout with King George.
> SARAH. That's ridiculous. He's a little boy. It's not safe.
> DROVER. He would be safer in Arnhem Land [Aboriginal land in the Northern Territory] than he would be hanging around here. You can't change him Sarah.
> SARAH. I thought you said it has nothing to do with you.
> DROVER. It doesn't. It's just sooner or later you're going to have to let that boy go.
> SARAH. I don't know what you're talking about.
> DROVER. If he doesn't go through ceremony, he'll have no country, no story, no dreaming. He'll be all alone.

This key dialogue, and Luhrmann's "walkabout" ending, is how the film deals with and reconciles past Australian practices of segregation, assimilation and child removal. In fitting with mainstream cinema's problem-resolution formula, Nullah's eventual walkabout is presented as the literal (in the capacity of this individual story) and symbolic (defying the assimilation ideologies) solution to Australia's history. This formulaic approach is strengthened by the film being bookended with reference to factual policy and governmental acknowledgement of past injustices. Together, with Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's apology to the Stolen Generations and Nullah being allowed to go walkabout, the problems of the past appear resolved.

Nowhere in Sarah and Drover's discussion is an interrogation of the racialized inferior/superior assumption that "justified" the segregation and assimilation in Australia. Sarah shows a lack of understanding toward Aboriginal culture, but this is narratively accredited to her being a recent arrival in Australia; after all, Drover knows what he is talking about. Sarah's benevolence combined with Nullah being an orphan excuses Sarah from any well-intentioned mistakes. Drover, equally, did marry an Aboriginal woman, so he is no racist. Considering all the narrative ties between *Australia* and *Jedda* (even Drover's dog is named Jedda), it is a pity that Luhrmann did not further explore what *Jedda* briefly suggested:[2] that civilization, which is just a Western conception of society, is only normative when seen from the perspective of that "civilized" society. In much the same way that notions of the primitive are dichotomized as inferior to it, civilization is no more than a discursive system used to justify racialized ideology, exploitation and land theft.

In 1993, Australian scholar Marcia Langton published an essay she had written to the Australian Film Commission. Her essay, "Well, I Heard It on the Radio and Saw It on the Television," was "an attempt to develop an anti-colonial cultural critique" about "the politics of representation" (Langton, "Well" 7).

> Textual analysis of the racist stereotypes and mythologies which inform Australian understanding of Aboriginal is revealing. The most dense relationship is not between actual people, but between white Australians and the symbols created by their predecessors. Australians do not know and relate to Aboriginal people. They relate to stories told by former colonists. Film, video and television are powerful media: it is from these that most Australians "know" about Aboriginal people. The Aborigines that Australians "know" are Bennelong, Jedda and Marbuk in Chauvel's *Jedda*… They are safe, distant distortions of an actual world of people who will not bring down the neighbourhood real estate values (Langton, "Well" 33.)

What Langton discussed here is just as important and relevant now as it was in 1993. Film allows for a vicarious experience and it encourages identification. For Australian audiences, this identification was amplified. The title of *Australia* tells us this is "our" film, the film that will show our identities and our histories. As Langton recognized, film has a powerful capacity for constructing subjectivities. So, although an audience might not expect historical accuracy on-screen, films such as Luhrmann's do discursively create and perpetuate social and historical memories, and this is how many Australians relate to their country and its peoples.

So, what subjectivities does *Australia* construct? There is Drover, the quintessential Australian, who works hard and rough, enjoys a drink and is always up for a fight. There is Lady Sarah Ashley, the British aristocrat, who comes to tame the wild Drover, raise the country's orphaned children and after a scene wearing a tie during the drove to Darwin, resorts back to a dress and scarf to live happily ever after. There is Nullah, the boy who likes *The Wizard of Oz* (Fleming, 1939), who prophesizes Sarah's healing capacity and whose story is essentially bringing together two non-Indigenous people on the land stolen from his ancestors. There is Bandy Legs, Sarah's housemaid, who, although allowed to ride for the drove, is back to serving tea and biscuits silently once all the adventuring is done. There is Drover's sidekick Magarri, who is, like Bandy, allowed no agency and runs when Drover calls. At the end, Magarri dies, Bandy has disappeared, Nullah gets to go walkabout, and Drover drives off into the sunset with Sarah at his side. All is well for Australia, but is it really? **/END/**

ABOVE Lady Sarah Ashley (Nicole Kidman)

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Endnotes

[1] In particular relation to *Jedda*, see *Night Cries: A Rural Tragedy* (Moffatt, 1989).

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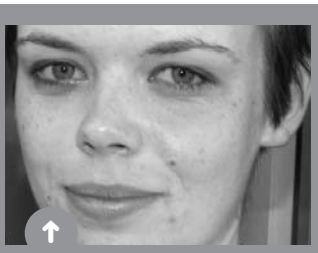
[2] In a commonly cited scene between the characters Sarah and Doug McMahon, Doug asks Sarah to consider the validity of her assumptions on "civilization."



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Department Overview

The Department of History was opened with Flinders University itself in 1966. Over the last four decades, the department has established an impressive reputation in teaching and research, with specializations in Australian, European and international history. The department encourages an interdisciplinary approach to history, with innovative opportunities for learning and research.

BELOW Denzel Washington as Steve Biko in *Cry Freedom*

The Dual Representation of the Social Problem Film:

Commercial Apartheid Movies of the 1980s

By Brian Ford

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KEYWORDS: *Cry Freedom, A World Apart, A Dry White Season*, Apartheid, South Africa

IN THE LATE 1980S, three commercial films that addressed life under South Africa's apartheid government were released to a mass, international audience. *Cry Freedom* (Attenborough, 1987), *A World Apart* (Menges, 1988), and *A Dry White Season* (Palcy, 1989) were unique: prior to them, no commercial movie with an antiapartheid theme had been produced. South African filmmakers, under decades of restrictive measures from their government, had been largely unsuccessful in spreading an antiapartheid message through cinema across their own nation, let alone the international community. Coupled with growing international interest in South Africa's social and human rights crisis, a solution finally emerged as foreign filmmakers and producers began to take interest in South Africa's failed government, leading to the arrival of the big-budget apartheid movie. Each of these films tried to promulgate an antiapartheid message while retaining marketability to an entertainment-hungry audience, relying heavily on emotion, melodrama and a personal story to relate apartheid's horrors to an alien audience. The pictures were well received by critics and audiences, garnering strong returns at the box office and numerous international film festival nominations and wins. Still, many were quick to criticize the films for the common misconceptions and misrepresentations in their narratives. Critics attacked, in particular,

the films' white-centered perspectives, the absence of any profound political discussion offering solutions to South Africa's predicament and their reliance on Hollywood formats, such as the melodrama and the white-black buddy relationship, thereby distorting the events and figures that the movies were based upon. By reexamining the historical context and aesthetics of these three 1980s commercial apartheid films, using contemporary media and human rights theories, we can begin to understand the complexities of the social problem film, its transnational derivations and its engagements with issues of social injustice.

From a South African perspective, before the 1980s, it was twenty years of stagnation. Not since *Zulu* (Endfield, 1964), the story of the 1879 Zulu warriors' defeat of British forces, had South African cinema achieved international acclaim. Under permanent and oppressive governmental regulation of the film industry and the conservative holding groups that controlled it, South African cinema had a crippling homogeneity that, for two decades, produced essentially unoriginal films void of substance. Independent films that challenged apartheid could only be produced and distributed clandestinely, never making it very far outside the nation's borders. In 1963, the Publications Control Board, a censorship panel, was established and immediately banned the screening of *Zulu* for black audiences. From that point on, films that carried any message critical of the government, apartheid or South African society stood no chance of finding production approval or distribution. Further undermining a more liberal cinema was the dominance of the South African Theatre Investments Company (Satbel). Armed with right-wing Afrikaner capital, Satbel controlled the production, distribution and exhibition of cinema in South Africa from 1969 to 1986 (Tomaselli 1988). Antiapartheid cinema existed during this era and included several landmark South African films – such as *The Guest* (Devenish, 1977) and the documentary *A Land Apart* (Persson, 1974) – but these films were far apart and few in number because of the massive obstacles that stood in the way of their production, exhibition and distribution. As a result, the national cinema of South Africa in the 1960s and 1970s produced mostly generic and uncontroversial films. It was only in the 1980s that the film industry saw promise again.

In 1980, the government offered large tax concessions for national film investors, and in 1986 Satbel was sold to progressive-minded owners willing to challenge the nation's social and political issues. This led to the production of several hundred commercial films over the following ten years, but the majority of these films were still superficial, with most of them poor imitations of American movies (Maingard 164). Spurred by the promising, recent changes, liberal South African filmmakers became increasingly restless with their industry's limitations. Luckily, the mid-1980s brought a growing foreign interest in their cause. Writers, directors, producers and actors from in and outside of South Africa began to seek new ways to bring the nation's struggle to the silver screen and to a mass, international audience.

BELOW Michael Caine as Lieutenant Gonville Bromhead in *Zulu*

Under permanent and oppressive governmental regulation of the film industry and the conservative holding groups that controlled it, South African cinema had a crippling homogeneity that, for two decades, produced essentially unoriginal films void of substance.

By the mid-1980s in America, the antiapartheid movement was at its peak. Protests were being staged on college campuses, news coverage filled household television sets and Jesse Jackson and Randall Robinson pressured Congress to take action against the apartheid government (Nixon 82). A lifelong activist against racism and prejudice, British director Richard Attenborough adapted a 1970s antiapartheid novel with the intention of bringing South Africa's struggle to the American and British public. Produced in the United Kingdom and released in 1987, *Cry Freedom* was the first large-scale effort to deal with apartheid on international screens. With the prospect of a new market in the American public and media, it was able to find $21 million in financial backing from Marble Arch Productions (Yarrow 87). Featuring stars Kevin Kline and Denzel Washington, the film was based on the story of Steve Biko, a Black Consciousness leader who was murdered in police detention in 1977. Prior to shooting, Attenborough admitted that the "sufferings, defiance, political ideas and murder of a black South African leader stood no chance on their own of succeeding as a major movie" (Nixon 82). As a result, the film killed off Biko early on and inserted a white male protagonist, a journalist friend of Biko's. The last hour and a half became a melodrama about the journalist and his family, ignoring Biko's philosophy and ideas. By using "Hollywood's formula for dealing with the 'third world'" (Nixon 82) – such as star actors, a white-black buddy drama, a white protagonist and the deradicalization of Biko's personal philosophy – the film was designed to penetrate a broader, overseas audience. Many critics of the film were angered by the suggestion that a political solution to the apartheid fundamentally lay in an integrated buddy movie, but this prioritization of marketability over accuracy was soon to become a model for introducing apartheid to foreign audiences.

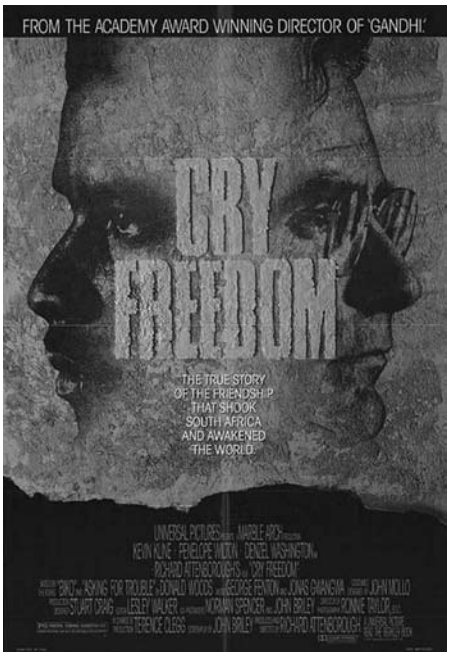
The following year, two native South Africans, director Chris Menges and writer Shawn Slovo, released *A World Apart*. Similar to *Cry Freedom*, it was a transnational effort that demonstrated how South African cinema, and its voice against apartheid, had been forced to rely on the international community to be produced. To avoid the complications of shooting the film in South Africa, they used British financing, shot the film in Zimbabwe, and coproduced it using United Kingdom and Zimbabwean companies. The story focused on the South African police's detention of Slovo's activist mother, Ruth First, in the

1960s. Following *Cry Africa*, *A World Apart* was tailored for box office success, appeasing its profit-expectant financiers. Slovo and Menges deradicalized the details of First's life, effacing her radical Marxist ties and omitting any mention of her support of the militant wing of the African National Congress, who viewed violence as an indispensable tool in the fight against the government (Nixon 87). The movie hooked its viewers with an emotional slant by showing the personal destruction apartheid wreaked upon a white family, centralizing the tender mother-daughter relationship. Again, star power was wielded by casting American actress Barbara Hershey in the lead role as the mother. It was a drastic improvement upon *Cry Freedom*, largely owing to an improved focus on authenticity, specifically the social contexts to the characters' hardships. Because it was a tale of apartheid destruction through the eyes of a white family, it was unapologetic about its perspective. Although the film may have alienated itself somewhat from the nation's 75% black population, it was conscious of its target market – white filmgoers outside of South African borders. It was more emotional and less transparently manipulative than *Cry Freedom*, and with its success at British and American film festivals, and its respectable box office results, it did bring to light the issues of apartheid by balancing political issues with mainstream, conventional drama.

The last of the international antiapartheid 1980s films was *A Dry White Season*, built upon the same "third-world Hollywood" production model established by *Cry Freedom* and *A World Apart.* The director, a black South African woman, Euzhan Palcy, had the ambition of creating a film "about South Africa entirely from the POV [point of view] of black characters" (Nixon 88). However, she quickly discovered that "nobody wanted to put money into a black filmmaker making a movie about blacks in South Africa" (Nixon 88), thus she travelled to Hollywood with a toned-down screenplay adapted from André Brink's 1979 novel, *A Dry White Season*. This version turned the project into a white-black buddy story about 1970s South Africans dealing with the realization of apartheid's shortening life span. She received a production investment of $9 million from MGM and secured Marlon Brando as the lead, who agreed to do the film unpaid. Though Palcy's silver screen version of apartheid was notably "blacker" than its predecessors, introducing a multidimensional black character who remained present for the entire film, a key structural device, it could not escape the same commercial movie pitfalls of its predecessors. It used a linear plot, relied heavily on a male friendship that transcended the color divide and Hollywood legends Brando and Donald Sutherland took lead roles for white audiences to which to relate. As was the case with *A World Apart* and *Cry Freedom*, no solution for apartheid on the macro level was offered.

In terms of their projects, Attenborough, Menges and Palcy all clearly stated their intentions. Attenborough declared that *Cry Freedom* was an effort to "reach the unknowing and uncaring" (Yarrow). Menges echoed the sentiment, stating: "The more we all know about what's going on in South Africa the more joyful I'll be" (Insodorf). Palcy, equally, argued that, "Film is the perfect medium for enlightening people about the apartheid" (Britt). Each filmmaker firmly believed that these movies had the power to turn the oblivious Western viewer into a witness to South Africa's struggle. Unquestionably, each film succeeded in reaching audiences. In addition to grossing more than $12 million at the U.S. box office alone, *Cry Freedom*, *A World Apart* and *A Dry White Season* combined earned ten British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA) Award nominations and two wins, four Cannes nominations and three wins, and four Academy Award nominations. However, any commercial film that tries to address a human rights conflict immediately detaches itself from social reality (as exemplified by the various inaccuracies of the apartheid films), creating potential problems, as illustrated by a number of modern media and human rights theorists. The studies mentioned next examine these films' legitimacy, despite their pretensions to being vehicles for raising awareness in the antiapartheid movement.

In direct contrast to the goals of these antiapartheid filmmakers, media and human rights theorist Thomas Keenan questions whether simply informing the public about a human rights crisis will translate to action. In Keenan's article, "Mobilizing Shame," he argues that in the case of the current Iraq War, the 1992–93 U.S. military raid in Somalia and the Kosovo War in 1999, there was an oversaturation of media coverage that undermined the camera's ability to mobilize shame. Keenan claims that increased media coverage has constructed a sense of comfort about war criminals and rendered coverage of human rights crises innocuous. In particular, he discusses an event that occurred in the village of Mijalic during the Kosovo War in which Serbs looted and destroyed the Albanian town in plain sight of reporters, even waving at their cameras. Keenan asks whether this symbolizes the complete inadequacy of media coverage to prevent violence. His conclusion to "Mobilizing



BELOW A poster for *Cry Freedom*

Shame," actually asks, "What difference does all this exposure make, here and there?" Rather than offering an answer, he suggests, "Only time and force will tell" (448).

Though Keenan's argument that media coverage of human rights crises has developed invalidity might lack concreteness, it is a part of a similar vein of skepticism shared by other theorists about the effectiveness of media in combating violence and injustice. Wendy Hesford's article, "Documenting Violations," attacks the notion that simply reporting trauma will translate into empathy in the viewer, and, furthermore, that said empathy will lead to benevolent action. Hesford defines a line between "witnessing" human suffering and merely being a "consumer of others' suffering," stressing the "need to configure rhetorical listening and witnessing in ethical terms, recognizing the ongoing state of and need for action" (130). Her article contends that all too often, media representations of suffering fail to produce witnesses because of the unrepresentability of trauma.

Wendy Kozol, in "Domesticating NATO's War in Kosovo/a" suggests that regardless of good intentions, reliance on exploitation of race, ethnicity, gender and sexuality to relate a human rights crisis to Western audiences can produce more harm than good. Using the examples of photojournalism from the recent Middle East conflicts (such as the Iraq and Afghanistan wars), Kozol first isolates this trend within Western news sources, attempting to heighten the effect of the story. Criticizing the use of the common American racial stereotype of Islamic barbarianism with regard to a recent news broadcast in Afghanistan, Kozol states that "U.S. cameras

turned to pictures of Afghani women veiled in burkas while reporters described their oppression and hailed their liberation through American and allied military intervention" (32). Kozol believes that to exploit visible cultural characteristics is to cement the hegemonic attitude of American imperialism, rather than move toward an equal, unified humanity. *Cry Freedom*, *A World Apart* and *A Dry White Season* all focused on white perspectives for the purpose of relating the films to mass Western audiences, even diminishing the stature of the black characters at times. Does Kozol's cautionary advice apply?

Perhaps one of the most sound assessments of the dangers of producing media to document social injustice and disseminate awareness is Michael Ignatieff's "Is Nothing Sacred? The Ethics of Television." Here, Ignatieff reflects that, although "television has contributed to the breakdown of barriers of citizenship, religion, race and geography that once divided our moral space," it conversely renders its audiences powerless spectators to the suffering of others: "Tourists amidst their landscapes of anguish." Ignatieff points out the beneficial effect that media coverage has had on famine and war, recalling how continuous pressure from television on European governments during the 1984 Ethiopian famine compressed time and space, leading to more than sixty million pounds of food being donated to famine relief agencies in Britain alone within a year of the famine's first coverage in October 1984. However, Ignatieff cautions that the same immediacy of television can lead to misanthropy because of television's tendency of "pointing to the corpses rather than explaining why violence may, in certain places, pay so well" (25). Reflecting upon media coverage of modern civil wars – such as Lebanon, Bosnia and Rwanda – Ignatieff points out that television's role in those conflicts was to synthesize and broadcast a quick, black/white, right/wrong stance on a complex, deeply rooted conflict. Ignatieff warns that this approach is illegitimate and can spread a dangerous, misplaced sentiment of misanthropy among its vast audiences – "that the world has become too crazy to deserve serious reflection" (25).

Applying these media theories to films such as *Cry Freedom* unearths troubling questions. Beneath the harmless guise of a mainstream film designed to generate empathy and spread awareness for a movement against a racist government, are there dangerous, unintended side effects? In Ignatieff's model, the films are guilty of presenting a political, economical and social crisis as a far simpler situation than it is in reality, obviating solutions to racism at the macro level, even insinuating that biracial friendship will lead to a happy personal/social ending. Kozol's article resonates particularly in terms of the films' use of white perspectives as an empathetic way into everyday social horrors; however, it could be argued that the explicit message of racial equality in each of the movies might balance out such problems. It is also important to keep in mind that no financier would readily spend millions of dollars on a project that risked losing money for lack of potential audience. Without creating a film with characters and a plot that widespread Western audiences could immediately relate to, there would have been *no* international feature film about apartheid. In the case of Keenan and Hesford, there is no quantifiable way of measuring the films' beneficial roles, versus apartheid, in creating witnesses. Because of this, it is necessary to contextualize these films within the decline of apartheid.

The demise of South Africa's government was the result of an intricately woven web of national and international disownment, ranging from the divestment campaign to the boycotts of culture, sport, trade, oil and military hardware. In *Homelands, Harlem, and Hollywood South African Culture and the World Beyond,* Rob Nixon asserts, "No other post-World War II struggle for decolonization has been so fully globalized; no other has magnetized so many people across such various national divides, or imbued them with such a resilient sense of common cause" (introduction). The failure of South Africa's apartheid government reflected, then, the rapid acceleration of globalization and the growing importance and power of transnationalism. Television made it possible for audiences across the world to watch "nightly reports of massive resistance to apartheid, the growth of a democratic movement, and the savage police and military response" (Knight). The result of the highly publicized antiapartheid movement in the 1980s was "a dramatic expansion of international actions to isolate apartheid, actions that combined with the internal situation to force dramatic changes in South Africa's international economic relations" (Knight). The United States's Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act of 1986 perhaps best exemplified the incredible power of the civil movement against apartheid. The act banned new U.S. investments in South Africa, prohibited the import of South African products and sales to their police and military. Vetoed by President Ronald Reagan and then overruled by Congress, it marked the first time in the twentieth century that a U.S. president had a foreign policy veto overridden, testament to the growing power of the antiapartheid movement (Knight). Before judging the commercial apartheid films of the 1980s as successful documentations of a human rights crisis, or generators of empathy and witnesses, we need to understand that ultimately the same transnational forces and antiapartheid movement that led to the – perhaps compromised – production of *Cry Freedom*, *A World Apart* and *A Dry White Season* also, in turn, led to the demise of apartheid. The films were simply reflections – or mediascapes, in Appadurai's equation – of a global, cultural economy, configured by the vast political, economical and social factors that dictated the failure of the apartheid government.

The commercial social problem film prioritizes entertainment first in its portrayal of trauma and injustice, for the simple fact that a feature film large enough to reach a mass, international market must be backed by financiers and studios with very deep pockets. This equates to movies that follow formulaic, Hollywood conventions, providing a level of accessibility for audiences and profitable returns for its producers. Keeping in mind the mainstream feature film's rigid norms and structures, it is difficult to critique this type of movie when it becomes a vehicle for human rights coverage, because its first priorities will always be to make profits, disseminating awareness only as a side effect. Any benefit it provides to a social movement will be just that – spreading awareness to those who watch it. Nothing mandates a high standard of accuracy and representation in the film, or a self-consciousness of the consequences its representation produces outside of connecting emotionally with the viewer.

When analyzing the commercial social problem film, perhaps it is most salient to look at *what* it represents rather than *how* it represents its subject matter. Regardless of whether the millions of filmgoers who watched *A Dry White Season* left theaters as witnesses or spectators, the sole *existence* of a transnational multimillion-dollar production (one that also managed to lure Brando out of his ten-year retirement) testifies to the power of the transnational antiapartheid movement. Because they were each a product, side effect and catalyst in the global system of social change, the commercial apartheid films of the 1980s were perhaps most valuable as a collective gauge of public concern over a looming social crisis. The most useful function of the social problem film, with regard to a human rights movement, may well be its ability to unite a common viewer, maintaining its vitality within the globalized network of forces that shape conflict resolutions and actions against human rights crises. **/END/**

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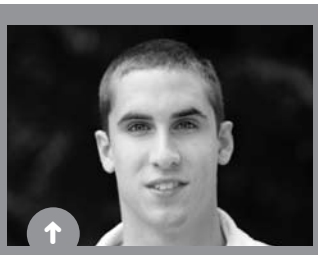

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Department Overview

With a strong undergraduate curriculum of production and studies, a burgeoning doctoral program in screen arts and a faculty of award-winning scholars and media makers, the University of Michigan's Department of Screen Arts and Cultures offers a vibrant intellectual and artistic community in the Midwest.

Quai des brumes:

An American Appeal

By Jamie Marie Wagner

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KEYWORDS: *Quai des brumes*, Marcel Carné, Jean Gabin, Jacques Prévert, reception, American audiences

ABOVE Nelly (Michèle Morgan) and Jean (Jean Gabin) in *Quai des brumes*

IT IS COMMONLY NOTED in critical discourse on *Port of Shadows* (*Quai des brumes*, Carné, 1938) that the fatalism of the narrative spoke almost explicitly to the social and political climate of France and the French audience at the end of the 1930s. The growth of Muslim immigration from Northern Africa and the social implications of the Sino-French War at the end of the nineteenth century put in question the very nature of French national identity. The Popular Front had fallen with the end of the Blum administration in 1937, really taking with it the hope of the working-class man to overcome economic depression through socialist and communist ideals. Fascism was spreading through Europe, the Nazi regime had begun to amass neighboring territory and, by the release of Marcel Carné's film in May of 1938, the German occupation was widely considered to be inevitable. As a result, according to film historians such as Rodney Whitaker, the themes of escape, fatalism, the invalidity of action and the pervasive fear of isolation so prevalent in poetic realist films really resonated with the pessimism, the defeatist hopelessness of the French audience (239).

The critical and financial success of Carné's *Quai des brumes* among American audiences in the late 1930s and early 1940s, however, is much less discussed by film historians and is not immediately understandable. Unlike the economically fragmented and ultimately more artistically inclined French film industry that produced works such as *Quai des brumes*, the American film industry in the 1930s, based on the classical, vertically integrated Hollywood studio system, was very much a business based upon economic concerns. Peter Stead, in *Film and the Working Class*, argues that films produced in Hollywood during the Great Depression, so dependent upon the "'financial wizards' of the Chase Manhattan and other banks," reflected conservative upper-class "values and ethos" almost exclusively, sometimes those "of Washington, nearly always of Wall Street, and more often than not the views of Californian business interests" (77, 82). Gregory Black similarly describes how, "as long as the [American] industry was determined to reach the largest possible market," it was "susceptible to economic blackmail, whether it came in the form of a Legion of Decency, state censorship boards, American businessmen, or foreign governments" (118). In this way, many historians note that the Motion Pictures Producers and Distributors Association (MPPDA)'s Production Code, which carefully regulated film content, was

developed "to maximize the worldwide appeal of Hollywood films" to the broadest domestic and international market (100), believing that the elimination of all material that could be considered politically, socially or morally controversial would prevent the marginalization of any particular demographic, "including foreign viewers" and not limited to differences in "age, religion, or political opinion" (Palmer 3). The result, according to Stead, was a tradition of American film as "slick and meaningless entertainment running along well-established and endlessly repeated lines," often relying on social escapism and the praise of armed forces and other well-established institutions (77).

As suggested by Georges Sadoul, possibly the first and most influential French film historian, the American audience, so accustomed to optimism, inspirational propaganda and neatly coherent narratives, should have been hostile to the moodiness and pessimism of Carné's film (Palmer 10). In a review by Frank Nugent in the *New York Times* in anticipation of an American screening in October 1939, "the theatre's old habitués" were expected to respond with "profanity" to the "sordidness and futility" of Jacques Prévert's screenplay, as well as to the film's departure from the formal "requirements . . . usually [made]" by the American viewer: "swift tempo, a tidy dove-tailing of plot, with the conflict clearly described and resolved and all the little plus and minus marks coming out even." The *Variety* magazine review in June of the same year suggests that, as a result of the film's "spotlight" on "despicable characters" and its "sordid and unreasonable" story, the "success" of *Quai des brumes* was "doubtful outside of France" ("*Le Quai*").

My intention, then, is to justify *Quai des brumes*'s success with an audience so ideologically and culturally different from the one for which it was created. We will examine, initially, analyses by both French and American film historians of the social and political appeal of Carné's film to its domestic audience, notably the ways in which it spoke to the disappointment of French progressives after the dissolution of the Blum Administration and also to the general population's anxieties about the approaching war. By then considering the conditions of Hollywood productions in the same period, the factors that perpetuated the optimism and ideological conservatism of American film in the 1930s, it will be clear how the defeatism so appealing to and reflective of the mentality of the French audience was antithetical to the ideology of Hollywood. Consequently, this article will analyze certain tendencies in American film production, aesthetics, reception and critical discourse, in the 1930s and into the 1940s and 1950s, that will help explain *Quai des brumes*'s appeal to the American audience.

To begin with, the theme of isolation, as proposed by Michael Temple and Michael Witt, expressed the disappointment of French leftists, a feeling of abandonment after the fall of the Popular Front (96). According to Dudley Andrew, the characterization of Nelly as something of an orphan reflects this feeling of abandonment, of having been "betrayed by the fathers of the Republic," and she is left in the hands of Zabel, a tyrant, a symbol of the Nazi and fascist governments under which the French people would inevitably find themselves (331). In this way, the victory of Jean over Zabel at the film's end would have felt like vengeance to the French people, vengeance against both the inefficient Populists who had left them behind – in the words of Robin Bates, the "authority" that had failed at "protecting them" – as well as vengeance against the oppressive forces by which they were presently confronted (37).

Many contemporary cultural commentators on *Quai des brumes* also suggest its appeal to the French ideology during a period of masculine crisis, as men of the French military and government felt threatened by the political upsets of the late 1930s. The Third Republic, which had been posited as the patriarch of a new French society, ultimately found itself unable to protect Marianne – the traditional maternal symbol for the French nation (Slavin 184). Furthermore, according to Bates, powerful individual leaders – such as Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin and Benito Mussolini – challenged the masculine image of the French military – the only solution being faith in a French fascism, under the power of Maréchal Pétain, as another solitary masculine force (26, 27). In this way, Jean's victory over Zabel – an effort to protect a feminine innocent – suggested not only the reaffirmation of French masculinity but the protection of the motherland from the tyrannical men who threatened to oppress her.

Rodney Whitaker describes another salient cultural context: a somewhat self-deceptive calm in French society – particularly within the French military – just before the German occupation in 1940. This so-called *drôle de guerre* (roughly "funny war") expressed the French people's refusal to confront the harsh reality of their political condition (248). Whitaker notes that this ideology is apparent in *Quai des brumes* in both the theme of escapism and its convoluted social realism. According to Colin Crisp, the port setting of Le Havre represents a confrontation, or "mediat[ion]," between the darker "social reality of France" and its fundamental obsession with fantasy, the belief that there may be an escape, a pathway to a better life (96). Dudley Andrew believes that, although *Quai des brumes* is often described as "realist" for its depiction of working-class issues, the truth is that these issues are never directly addressed by the film. Instead, according to Andrew, *Quai des brumes* situates only the common, recognizable dilemmas of the "petit-bourgeois moral code" – love, betrayal, despondency, virginity – in a working-class milieu (16). In his celebrated biography of Marcel Carné, Edward Turk takes a similar stance, noting that although Pierre Mac Orlan had written his 1927 novel *Le Quai des Brumes* – adapted for screen a decade later by the poet Jacques Prévert – to expose the gritty social implications of the First World War, Carné "barely acknowledge[s] class differences," merely exploiting the atmosphere of unrest among the middle-class to explore more traditional and universal human themes (109). Altogether, this abstraction of real, contemporary issues and characters allowed the French audience an escape from direct confrontation with their social condition.

Some critics point to the racial and social tensions of the 1930s, believing that the French were in a fundamental crisis of national identity, particularly in response to the rise of Algerian immigration. Jonathan Driskell, for example, notes the way Michèle Morgan's Aryan softness – "fair hair and blue eyes" – is contrasted with the darker, more ethnic features of Michel Simon's Zabel, the characterization of whom, as a cowardly, conniving small-time merchant and pretty criminal, is reflective of certain conventions of anti-semitic discourse (64–65). Equally, Christopher Faulkner describes the perceived threat that colonization served to the French understanding of its national identity. The fog of Le Havre, in this way, becomes a symbol of dissolved racial and geographic borders ("Affective" 13).

The most significant theme in *Quai des brumes*, however, as far as its appeal to the French audience at the time of its release, was its depiction of the inevitability of man's fall to a tragic fate. According to Pierre Leprohon, the protagonist in poetic realist films "is not at all inherently evil; destiny has got him in its grip and traps him in a criminal act alien to both his nature and his intellect" (Crisp 244). In this way, Jean is a sympathetic character who exists with dignity in context of the relative moral system of the underworld – taking the righteous, necessary social retribution of Zabel into his own hands, for example – but he is a powerless victim of his social condition, unable "to

escape from the trap of social reality" (96). Most prominently, as a veteran of the colonial army, Jean is a victim of a corrupt, exploitative military institution, and he reflects, in the words of Carole Aurouet, "the demoralization and the profound pessimism of men who were . . . requisitioned" after the fall of the Popular Front (194). According to Turk, Jean's description of the fog of Tonkin in the opening scene is emblematic of the conditioned mindlessness of military violence: "When the truck driver asserts that Tonkin never has fog, Jean responds by thumping his finger against his forehead: 'No fog? There certainly is. All within there'" (113). Jean goes on to describe his incongruously absent mentality in combat. "It's nothing to shoot," he explains. "You no longer understand anything . . . It's as if reality were slipping away." In this way, Carné's hero is pushed to murder through social injustice. Unlike Lucien's criminality, an act of personal empowerment to "cloak his insecurity" (Turk 118) and purposely linked by Carné to the cowardice of Hitler's Schutzstaffel (SS) (115), the violence of Jean against Zabel is an unfortunate necessity, described by Sadoul as another "petty social injustice," "an added misfortune" (83). Furthermore, even Michel Krauss – who speaks to the French romantic ideal of the engaged artist – falls victim, in the words of Sadoul to "a world that cannot support the highest aspirations of man" (Faulkner, "Debates" 174). Instead, he is socialized to experience nothing but tragedy. "Despite myself," Krauss describes on-screen, "I always paint the things that are hidden behind other things. A swimmer, to me, is a drowned man." According to Alan Williams, the flawed protagonists in poetic realist films "may be seen as unwitting internalizations of their social conditions" (238).

The dual representation of Nelly, as an idealized innocent and an inadvertent agent of her lover's end, presents women as another scapegoat, another inescapable force working against the tragic hero. Such a depiction speaks to centuries of French literary tradition and resonates with both Catholic and French national sentiment. According to Bates, Nelly is a symbol of purity threatened by a corrupt oppressor, and Jean shows himself as a hero when he "assert[s] his . . . manhood," sacrificing himself to save her (35). In this way, she becomes an agent of his moral redemption; she is a woman who facilitates his transcendence, and, as "product of her combination of the humble and the divine," she "conform[s] to the Christian female archetype" of the Virgin Mary and Joan of Arc, both figures with "strong national resonances" in French culture (Driskell 63, 64). More importantly, however, because his return to Zabel's apartment leads incidentally to his murder by Lucien, Nelly takes on the role of the femme fatale, and, as Susan Weiner describes, the woman is posited as one of the many unstoppable "metaphoric forces in contemporary life" that contribute to the inevitable fall of man (141).

BELOW Jean Gabin in the title role of *Pépé le Moko*

The American audience, so accustomed to optimism, inspirational propaganda and neatly coherent narratives, should have been hostile to the moodiness and pessimism of Carné's film.

Altogether, the fatalist tone of *Quai des brumes* appeased the French audience in its particular historical moment. According to Williams, the message of Prévert's screenplay is that "for the most wretched of the earth (those, precisely, with the greatest need of a redeeming transcendence) nothing of any value can be done, no change effected at this time, in this world. They can only die, or come to accept their prisons" (242). As protested by a number of leftist leaders after the occupation, including notably the filmmaker Jean Renoir, the thought that there can be no independent action taken against the destructive forces of fate allowed the French people to surrender to their German occupiers with dignity. According to Temple and Witt, "Jean Gabin's wait for his inevitable death at the break of day is clearly an allegory for Europe's expectation of war after the Munich compromise with Hitler in 1938" (96). Turk suggests that Gabin's acceptance of his fate with silent resignation affords him an "admirable" dignity – unlike Lucien and Panama, the respective childish rebellion and hysteric self-delusion of which are mocked in the film as symptoms of cowardice and insecurity (114). In a similar way, Bates argues that the box office failure of the critically acclaimed *Rules of the Game* (*La Règle du jeu*, Renoir, 1939) is a result of its refusal to allow the French audience to indulge self-pity and a feeling of fatalism. Renoir's Octave, at the end of the film, "tak[es] responsibility for his own failure . . . acknowledges his shortcomings and refuses to blame scapegoats or fate" – which is exactly what the French people were generally trying so hard not to do (49).

Even so, *Quai des brumes* is inseparable from the atmospheric gloom and fatalist ideology that so contrasted with optimistic Hollywood films of the 1930s. To justify its critical acclaim and relative popularity among American audiences at the time of its release, we can begin with its most obviously appealing attributes. As described by Ginette Vincendeau, films such as *Quai des brumes* contained a "formal visual beauty" and "cultural prestige" that "formed a strong contrast to Hollywood" (147). The clash is particularly stark, according to Jonathan Munby, with an American cinema in the 1930s that represented, "the Golden Decade of formula and genre consolidation" – the

formal and thematic "standardization" of brightly lit and systematically produced Westerns, musicals and gangster films produced to maintain economic stability (83). Andrew cites the reaction of Italo Calvino to Duvivier and Gabin's *Pépé le Moko* (Duvivier, 1937) as an indication of contemporary awareness of the essential distinction between French and American film: "The French cinema was heavy with odors whereas the American cinema smelled of Palmolive" (188). Frank Nugent, of the *New York Times*, although apprehensive toward the audience's reception of Carné's fatalist tone, praises *Quai des brumes* as "a remarkably beautiful motion picture from the purely pictorial standpoint." His review is emblematic of the tendency of American critics in the 1930s to praise French films, "often for outscoring Hollywood in artistry, taste, and maturity of content and execution" (Andrew 13). Andrew notes as well the continued popularity of poetic realist films among artistic and intellectual circles in America into the 1940s, those that found its expressive pessimism toward social issues to be a mark of culture, of higher sophistication than the blatant, somewhat propagandistic imagery of social and psychological realism. As previously noted – although realist genres were supposed to contain historical and regional specificities and although *Quai des brumes* had many political resonances with its French audience – Carné's adaptation of Mac Orlan's novel focused much more on universal human themes than on contemporary social realities. In this respect, according to Naomi Greene, the essential "mood" and "atmosphere of melancholy poetry that corresponded to deeply felt emotions" in *Quai des brumes* could speak just as effectively to nonregional audiences (174). Along these lines, Sadoul and Nugent both suggest that a more pessimistic tone could appeal as "novelty" to the American audience, so overwhelmed with the optimism and moral uplift of Hollywood films (Sadoul 114). "As a steady diet," wrote Nugent, Carné's "strange haunting drama" would "give us the willies," but "for a change, it's as tonic as a raw Winter's day."

This essential American optimism, of course, was a result of the political and economic dependencies of the American film industry, which arguably wished to blind its audience to the aftermath of the Great Depression. John Bodnar, in *Blue Collar Hollywood,* suggests that this political conservatism resulted from the industry's fear that "disturbing social scenes and explicit politics" or any "extreme forms of partisanship" could marginalize key demographics (47), as "no single political doctrine – conservative or radical – could generate mass support at either the ballot box or the ticket booth" (3). Other critics suggest that influence from advocates for both political factions led to a more equivocal treatment of morals and politics. Bodnar also proposes, for instance, that leftist progressives called for films that promoted faith in "socialist ideals of diversity, inclusiveness, and cooperation" (xx), whereas the political right wanted audiences to align with the "old virtues of personal integrity" and the restorative democratic power of U. S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt (FDR) and the New Deal (Stead 91). The immensely successful *Stagecoach* (Ford, 1939), for example, was praised by socialists for its depiction of "diverse racial and social groups" in "a community of free [and] tolerant" citizens (Bodnar xx), who could "trust their resources to achieve common goals and success through collective efforts" (May 149). By contrast, the acclaimed adaptation of *The Grapes of Wrath* (Ford, 1940) dismisses the socialist solution presented by John Steinbeck in the novel, opting instead for the message that "there was no real threat to America as long as faith was put in the ordinary American and in particular in the ordinary family unit" (Stead 95). In sum, 1930s films reflected a desire to garner faith in established social and political conventions and to "offer hope" that the American people "could endure hard times" (Bodnar 46). According to R. Barton Palmer, writing about American film noir, the Production Code was tailored to approve only films that ended cleanly, restored social harmony and promoted faith in the status quo (5). Even director Frank Capra described Hollywood realism as the depiction of social issues for the purpose of instilling audiences with faith in the uplifting power of American integrity (Bodnar 53).

Although the fatalism of *Quai des brumes* might seem to oppose the tenets of American optimism, we can propose ways it spoke uniquely to the ideals of the American audience. To begin with, the American cinema – and American ideology as a whole – has a long tradition of glorifying the individual over collective society. According to Bodnar, the 1930s American gangster hero, such as Rico Bandello of *Little Caesar* (LeRoy, 1931), "exemplified the doctrine of an independent man," one able to pursue his "personal dreams" despite the realities of "economic and political exploitation in the nation [by] unregulated capitalists" (11). Although the 1930s gangster hero achieves success by subverting "conventional standards and morals" (10), Lary May notes that he encourages the audience to "shift [its] moral viewpoint," in that the criminal protagonist actually adheres with honor to his own particular ethical code (142). Mike Chopra-Gant equates the gangster hero with the classical western, because the film's "affirmat[ion] of the deep-rooted American value of individualism... [reflects] the fundamental tenets of American libertarianism." Palmer describes the 1930s detective protagonist in the same way, arguing that he navigates – and ultimately overturns – the underworld only by grasping its particular system of moral regulations (3). Andrew suggests that, although the French audience would interpret Gabin in *Quai des brumes* as a metaphor for the universal man, overcome by a haze of indeterminate forces, the American audience would have viewed him as "an individual against a background of poverty, crime, [and] violence," who, by avenging the woman he loves, operates with integrity according to his "wholly personal moral code" (269).

Furthermore, despite Jean's death at the end of the film – and despite his lapse into violent criminality by murdering Zabel – many critics suggest that *Quai des brumes* hints at moral redemption. As Sadoul claims, Gabin's triumph over Nelly's corrupt guardian represents "a sense of revolt against the society which has produced this inhuman world, and hope in the people who wish to free mankind" (Faulkner, "Debates" 174). Sadoul elsewhere proposes that this hope can be found in the love between Jean and Nelly – as a delusion of the possibility of a better world (115). A 1939 review by the British *Monthly Film Bulletin* also notes that the ship's climactic departure, as well as the spotty dog's escape to pursue its dead master, represents the possibility for us, if not the protagonist, to "[transcend] mere hopelessness" ("*Quai*"). Although this optimism may seem like a stretch, it gains validity when compared to the fall of the noir hero in 1940s American film. Although *Quai des brumes* elicits sympathy from the audience – pity for the fated characters and pity for their own condition – the noir, according to Palmer, offers no moral restoration, nothing "sympathetic or redeeming about the grasping, venal, and perverse characters" (10). John Houseman, in an influential 1947 article on "today's hero" in the *Hollywood Quarterly*, defines the noir protagonist as one with "no discernable ideal to sustain him," an "aimless [creature] without brains, without skill, without character, without strength, without courage, without hope" (162). In this regard, the ultimate destruction of the noir hero was attacked by critics such as Sadoul as "repulsive and pessimistic," part of a world without hope for regeneration, "without being illuminated at the end by a small ray of light" (10). Although

ABOVE Jean (Jean Gabin) in *Quai des brumes*

Quai des brumes*'s pessimistic tone differs from the restorative tendencies of similar American films, only in that it refuses to answer arbitrarily the questions it raises for the sake of narrative clarity or social conservatism.*

the French audience, as before observed, relied on the depiction of human weakness in the late 1930s to excuse defeat and justify surrender, among an American audience, "human weaknesses and passions," according to Andrew Dickos, "receive[d] no kind reception in a social order structured to deny their existence" (65). Recognizing the possible redemptive morality of Gabin's love and self-sacrifice is thus essential to understanding the appeal of *Quai des brumes*'s fatalism to an otherwise unforgiving and self-empowered American audience.

It is likely, however, that the American audience may have simply ignored the fatal outcome of *Quai des brumes* in favor of its romantic hope and the moral fulfillment of the death of Zabel. Although the 1930s gangster hero was ultimately punished at the end of the film for his moral transgressions – a restorative ending required by the Production Code Administration (PCA)– these measures were arbitrarily implemented by the film industry as a means of catering to audience demand for unsavory content, "lur[ing] back reluctant patrons with the erotic, the naughty, and the violent," while avoiding the contestation of moral reformers (Palmer 3). In reality, according to Munby, the gangster hero's "misfit status was key to his attraction" (54). Stead similarly asserts that the gangster's rebellion is what ultimately appealed to the audience, regardless of the punishment he meets in the end: "Audiences always remembered their initial 'brio' rather than their ultimate demise" (176). As a result, there is a definite possibility that *Quai des brumes*'s pessimistic tone differs from the restorative tendencies of similar American films, only in that it refuses to answer arbitrarily the questions it raises for the sake of narrative clarity or social conservatism. Carné himself expressed his refusal to interject his own voice between the film and the audience, to attempt to impose a preferred reading on his work (Andrew 325). Bodnar speaks to this as well, proposing that unlike official censors, the reactions of 1930s viewers and critics actually approved of moral ambiguities and controversial issues and themes. "Seldom," Bodnar notes, "does one find in reviewers' reactions any sense of real moral outrage like the kind that could be found in censorship debates during the production or in reform or religious groups who often reacted to films with hostility" (46). In this way, the difference in tone between fatalistic poetic realism and optimistic Hollywood genre films is more likely a result of the intervention of the American film industry than a difference in an audience's ideology or desires.

It is also possible that the sense of moral redemption achieved through Jean's love for Nelly, suggested by Sadoul, may have influenced the rhetoric used to market Carné's tragedy to the American audience. Historians such as Mike Chopra-Gant often note that American noir films were frequently advertised, as evident in available pressbooks and reviews, as "lighter, more optimistic genres" (14) – romances, comedies or musicals. *Notorious* (Hitchcock, 1946), for example, was promoted in its pressbook as a "suspense and romance" and reviewed in the *New York Times* as a "romantic melodrama" (13). Palmer describes the advertising of noir films with a similar conclusion, asserting that because "films now thought of as dark were marketed for American viewers like all other Hollywood products," it was difficult for the contemporary audience "to see them as different in any substantial way" (28). According to Houseman, whereas Raymond Chandler's 1939 novel *The Big Sleep* had been a "cynical, hardboiled, and quick-moving" narrative, "the unraveling of an elaborate tangle of interrelated events," the approach to the 1946 film "is basically romantic," a lure for an American audience so entranced by Humphrey Bogart and his seduction by the "rising and very lovely" Bacall (161–62). In this way, it is very probable that the American audience may have dismissed the gloomy pessimism of *Quai des brumes* in favor of its implicit romantic possibilities.

A final point is that *Quai des brumes*, because it resonated with French political thought prior to the Second World War, may have appealed to the American audience as evidence of the righteousness of political isolationism. As Crisp describes, Jean's initial desire is to be left alone, a desire which is undermined from the film's beginning by the attachment of the spotty dog and then by his own increasing attachment to Nelly (372). According to Dickos, Jean's death is that of "an outsider who [has become] involved" in the struggles of those around him, sacrificing himself in the process (45). Although FDR was advocating rearmament and economic support of the war effort years before the United States joined actively in the combat – and although the American public was in no way faced with the anxiety of possible domestic conflict – if one can justifiably infer so much about the social, political and ideological resonances of *Quai des brumes* with the French audience, it is not unreasonable to suggest some political implication for the American viewer.

Overall, we can conclude that the formulaic genre films and optimistic, restorative narratives of 1930s Hollywood resulted more from the political, industrial and economic conditions of the industry than from any particular preference by the domestic audience. As a result, the unexpected popularity of Marcel Carné's *Quai des brumes* can be attributed to the appealing novelty of its rich visual artistry and sentimental pessimism, especially because the dignified romanticism of Jean Gabin may have allowed the American viewer to transcend or to ignore the otherwise disorienting tone of fatalistic defeatism – the tone that, as exhaustively discussed by film critics and historians, resonated so profoundly with the French audience just before the German occupation.

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Department Overview

The Department of Cinema at Denison University combines instruction in film and video production with education in film studies, with a special emphasis on film aesthetics. It is the only undergraduate department in the state of Ohio dedicated exclusively to the study of cinema.

Reviews
DVD

New Release

BELOW Shefali Shetty as Ria Verma in Mira Nair's *Monsoon Wedding*

Monsoon Wedding
(2001) India
Director: Mira Nair
Runtime: 114 minutes
DVD
USA, 2009

Produced and Distributed by The Criterion Collection (Region 1)

RELEASED IN 2001 AND RECEIVED with resounding critical praise, Mira Nair's *Monsoon Wedding* – which won the Golden Lion at the Venice Film Festival – is a hearty comedy that explores traditional values concerning family and marriage in relation to the contrasting actuality of modern-day life. The story revolves around a family in New Delhi that has come together for the arranged wedding of Adita. Adita has never met her husband-to-be and must move to the United States following the wedding. As if this were not enough to plague her mind, Adita is in love with a married man who cannot bring himself to leave his wife. In the midst of this dilemma, the rest of the characters struggle with a variety of other intricate issues, the result of which is a mostly delightful family film riddled with moments of both humor and sorrow.

One of the more poignant scenes occurs late in the film when certain members of the family are conversing on the subject of kissing and the youngest, Aliya, declares that she knows all about kissing. She claims it is "gross," saying, "You open your mouth and he sticks his tongue in. Yeah, don't you know? That's how older people kiss." This revelation unnerves another character, Ria, whom, the film alludes, was molested at a younger age by her uncle, Tej. After her short rant, Aliya leaves the group and curls up next to her mother, claiming she wants to go to bed. Ria watches in shock as Tej walks over and offers to take Aliya out for a drive since she is "tired and cranky" – a confrontation ensues, as a result, bringing the film suddenly into a realm of despair. In these moments, the viewer is fully drawn into the tragedy behind the charming, almost whimsical vibe that has existed thus far in the film. In essence, while one is laughing the whole way through, Nair is still able to take a firm grasp of the heart strings and yank viciously – so tightly as to squeeze tears out of nothingness. With such scenes, Nair demonstrates rather clearly that she is a master of her craft.

As is typical of a Criterion release, the film is presented in a restored high-definition digital transfer and offers a collection of supplemental features, including an audio commentary, featuring Nair, that provides a great deal of insight into, and interesting conversation concerning, the feature; a theatrical trailer; and two video interviews – Nair interviewing actor Naseeruddin Shah and a conversation between the director of photography (Declan Quinn) and the production designer (Stephanie Carroll). In Shah's occasionally humorous interview, he explains his love of film and how it shaped his development as an actor; the dialogue between Quinn and Carroll is a brief account concerning how the look of *Monsoon Wedding* was created.

Without a doubt, however, the highlight of this release is its collection of seven short films by Nair. Three of the films are documentaries: *So Far From India* (1982; 50 minutes), *India Cabaret* (1985; 60 minutes) and *The Laughing Club of India* (2000; 35 minutes). The other four are fiction films: *The Day the Mercedes Became a Hat* (1993; 11 minutes), *11'09"01 – September 11* [Segment: "India"] (2002; 11 minutes), *Migration* (2007; 19 minutes) and *How Can It Be?* (2008; 9 minutes). All seven, which encompass a total runtime of just over three hours, feature an introduction by Nair, resulting in a collection that not only offers a more intricate glimpse into the director's work but also provides a plethora of fascinating

insights from Nair herself. Finally, topping off the release is a booklet featuring a synopsis of each short film as well as an essay by travel writer Pico Iyer. In it, Iyer discusses a variety of topics that includes the blending of genres in *Monsoon Wedding*, Nair's career as a filmmaker and an in-depth analysis of the film. Ultimately, this release reflects the extraordinary quality that Criterion has come to be known for, and it does not disappoint. /END/

Author Biography
Steven Harrison Gibbs, an undergraduate student at the University of North Carolina Wilmington, is seeking a major in Film Studies and a minor in Creative Writing. His key interests lie in screenwriting, film theory, Asian cinema, and poetry. He maintains a blog dedicated to film news and reviews at *http://filmfoxhole.blogspot.com.*

TOP Parvin Dabas as Hemant Rai
BOTTOM Vasundhara Das as Aditi Verma

BELOW Delphine Seyrig stars in *Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles*

Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles, (1975) France

Director: Chantal Akerman
Runtime: 201 minutes
USA, 2009

Produced and Distributed by The Criterion Collection (Region 1)

WATCHING A MINIMALIST FILM can be torture or pure fascination, depending on the viewer. *Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* can be called a minimalist film without any objection. The film, restored and released by the Criterion Collection, follows three days in the life of a housewife, minus the husband. The viewer simply watches her daily routines from grocery shopping to her afternoon prostitution, which supports the household. As the film progresses, the audience realizes that Jeanne's routine life is beginning to unravel. Ivone Margulies, author of "A Matter of Time," an article in a booklet inside of the DVD, says about the film, "the amplified concreteness of her images creates a visible instability: as the shot goes on, the viewer becomes aware of his/her own body, restless and then again interested" (4). This captures exactly what the film instills in the viewer.

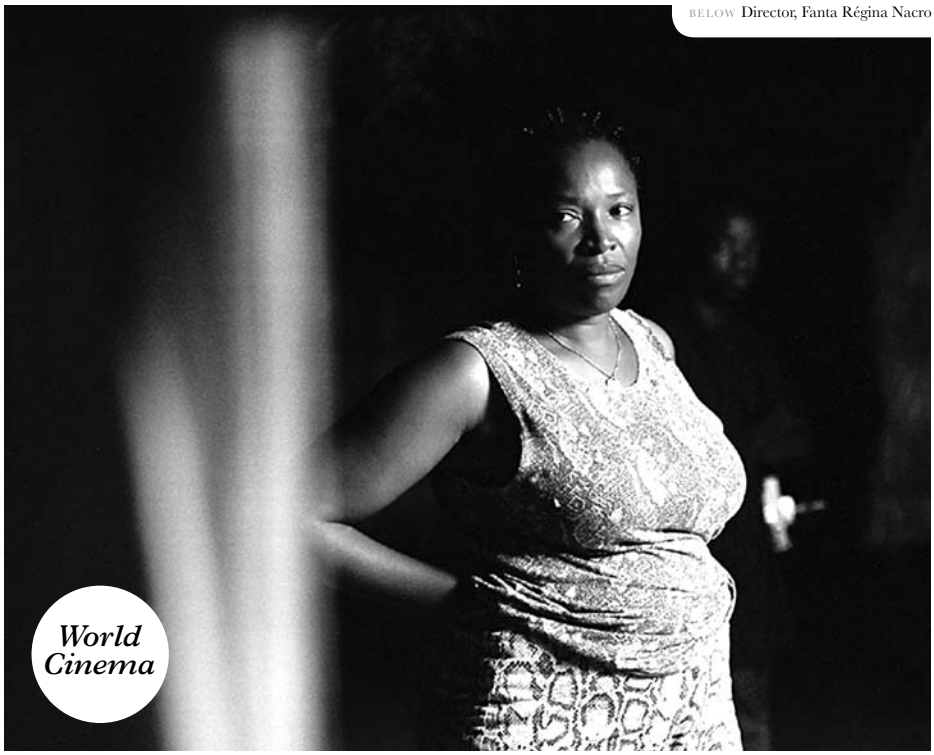
A scene in the film, which helps the audience to understand Jeanne's comfort and satisfaction with her routine life, shows Jeanne preparing dinner; a neighbor stops by to drop off her infant. The audience cannot see the neighbor and there is no dialogue to explain why this person has left her child with Jeanne, who then finishes preparing dinner, checks on the child, and gets ready for her afternoon lunch. The doorbell rings, prompting Jeanne to take the child to the door. The interaction lasts three minutes and uses a static camera to capture Jeanne in a long shot. As soon as she gives the child back, Jeanne's body language suggests that she is ready to shut the door and continue with her lunch. However, the neighbor has plenty to say, talking about how she does not know what to make for dinner. Jeanne confidently replies, "Wednesdays it's breaded veal with peas and carrots," as she continues to shut the door ever so slightly. Her weight begins to shift from one leg to the other as she listens to her neighbor talk about dinner. At the end of the longest conversation in the film, Jeanne shuts the door with a smile, which vanishes as she walks back to her lunch. As this scene suggests, Jeanne likes routine and, when it is interrupted, tries to adjust.

The DVD is packed with special features, including a 69-minute documentary on the making of the film and interviews with the star and director. The documentary called *Autour de "Jeanne Dielman"* takes the audience

inside the making of this film. One might think that with little dialogue, this would be a simple acting job. After viewing the documentary, this assumption is corrected. The documentary shows actress Delphine Seyrig questioning Akerman about certain actions, asking why her character should do something slower or faster, to which Akerman cannot directly respond. At another point in the documentary, Seyrig tells Akerman she thinks her character should smile, to which Akerman politely responds she did not picture it that way. Seyrig complains she feels like she has no creative input in the film because every action is already written out in detail. The documentary, using such footage from the set, allows the viewer to understand what it takes to make a minimalist film. *Jeanne Dielman* is minimalist, but so hypnotic it will grab you and never let go. **/END/**

Author Biography
Krista Henderson is a Film Studies major at the University of North Carolina Wilmington. She is minoring in English and enjoys writing about film. Her favorite minimalist film is Robert Bresson's *A Man Escaped* (1956).

TOP Delphine Seyrig stars in *Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles*



BELOW Director, Fanta Régina Nacro

World Cinema

The Night of Truth
(2004) France
Director: Fanta Régina Nacro
Runtime: 100 minutes
UK, 2004

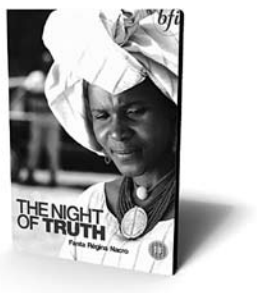
Produced and Distributed by the BFI (Region 2)

The Night of Truth tells a story about two warring factions in a fictitious African country. Both sides are trying to make peace and decide to meet for a night of negotiations and understanding. The night of eating and drinking is filled with revelations by both sides regarding the war and comes to an interesting and surprising ending.

The cast, composed of "untrained actors and handheld camerawork" (DVD insert), pulls off deeply emotional scenes. The artwork painted on the walls of buildings in the town by its people shows both the beauty of the culture and its tragic past and present – this while being stylistically minimalistic in production. The film uses a lot of handheld, but it does not come across as feeling like a documentary or any more realistic than *Blood Diamond* (Zwick, 2006), for instance. However, some of the most poignant elements of this film are the sequences of viciousness. A particularly striking example: shots of dead bodies in the rivers almost seeming to contaminate or soil the waters with the blood. It would seem gratuitous if not for the centrality of the real-world problem that creates the conflict in the story.

The film itself is spoken in French and subtitled in English; the DVD has no other audio or subtitle options and is devoid of any extra features. It comes with a small six-page booklet, featuring information on the film and an interview with the director. This film deserves some supplemental material for an audience who, like me, will be curious for more information and have many questions for the filmmakers when done watching it. **/END/**

Author Biography
Curtis Carey studied film and media for about five years after receiving an associate's degree with double honors. He has studied at the New York Film Academy and the University of North Carolina Wilmington. Carey has more than two years of news production experience and has worked on some small film projects.



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Critical Thought

Teen Dreams: Reading Teen Film and Television from Heathers *to* Veronica Mars,
Roz Kaveney, (2006)
New York: I.B. Tauris, 232pp., ISBN: 1845111842 (pbk), $18.95

BELOW Left, Ginny (Blanche Baker) and, Right, Samantha (Molly Ringwald) in *Sixteen Candles*
BOTTOM J.D. (Christian Slater) and Veronica (Winona Ryder) in *Heathers*

IN THE GRAND TRADITION of trashing the academy, Roz Kaveney in *Teen Dreams* elevates the oft-ignored canon of teen movies to the level of high art. She takes the time to define and delineate the genre, focusing her energies on its nascency in the 1980s. Kaveney begins her discussion with director John Hughes and the way he set the conventions for the genre, in both the films he wrote, and those he wrote and directed. She begins with Hughes because she argues that he crystallized many of the generic tropes of teen film in terms of narrative and character, and she remains on this plane throughout her discussion, disregarding, at least in this book, the films' formal and stylistic structures.

Kaveney sails breezily through those films by Hughes that have become canonical for the genre, from *Sixteen Candles* (1984) to *The Breakfast Club* (1985) to *Pretty in Pink* (1986) to *Some Kind of Wonderful* (1987), before rounding out her conversation with *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* (1986). She moves swiftly through each film, bringing a certain wry charm to her interpretation, and connects the dots for the reader who is not fluent in the films. She examines the symbolism of names and discusses the performance of actors – giving equal weight to the writing of the films – the proficiency and evolution of Hughes's style and the differences between him as a writer-director and him as a writer solely, for those films that he wrote but did not direct.

After establishing the parameters of the teen film, she graduates to a deeper level of interpretation in a chapter titled, "The Friends Who Are Bad for You," which focuses primarily on the Mephistophelean nature of *Heathers* (Lehmann, 1988) and the tropes it has set for the consequent films that deal with high school hierarchies, bad girls and young women with no agency.

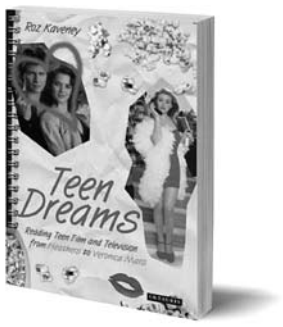
Having set up this trend with *Heathers*, Kaveney reads the film's progeny in a television show titled *Popular* (Murphy, 1999–2001) and the films *Saved!* (Dannelly, 2004) and *Mean Girls* (Waters, 2004), before moving into the world of adaptations in *Clueless* (Heckerling, 1995), *10 Things I Hate About You* (Junger, 1999) and *Cruel Intentions* (Kumble, 1999). Her interpretive readings work especially well here, as there is a natural symbiosis between the high art of literature and the considerably lower art of the teen film, and in fact these passages come closest to her lofty aims.

She spends much of her time mucking about the mire of the girl cliques and catty backstabbing of high school before diplomatically moving on to "The Trouble with Boys," which covers the homosocial relationships and gender studies in the crass comedy of *American Pie* (Weitz, 1999) and *The Girl Next Door* (Greenfield, 2004). After this brief interlude, Kaveney returns to her primary concern, the role of girls in these films – particularly those that turn some of the conventional pitfalls for high school girls into a celebration of strength and competency.

In "On Being Good at Things," she offers *Bring It On* (Reed, 2000) and *Bend It Like Beckham* (Chadha, 2002) as proof that high school may hold some redemption for those willing to push themselves to succeed. This chapter leads easily into the last chapter, which focuses on *Veronica Mars* (Silver and Thomas, 2004–07), the television show about the adventures of a teen detective of the same name. A clear fan of the show, Kaveney lauds the performance and the writing, and the positive message that is the backbone of the show.

At the end of her study, Kaveney concludes with the urgent exhortation to include the films of teen dreams in the canon of art to hold onto the hope of youth; she claims the reason for continued and voracious spectatorship goes far beyond the cheap thrills of reliving the first stirrings of high school sex and prom disasters. She elevates the form to valid expression, finds the art in the cafeteria, the beauty in detention. **/END/**

Author Biography
Emily Caulfield is a senior in the Film Studies Department at the University of North Carolina Wilmington. Her focus is on criticism and history, particularly of often-overlooked cinemas, such as teen films or B-movies. Her favorite movie is Paul Verhoeven's *Showgirls* (1995).



LEFT Keith (Eric Stoltz) and Watts (Mary Stuart Masterson) in *Some Kind of Wonder*
BELOW The multi-tasking Jean Cocteau

Director Profile

Jean Cocteau
James S. Williams, (2008)
London: Reaktion Books, 192pp.,
ISBN: 186189354X
(pbk), $16.95

IN *JEAN COCTEAU*, James S. Williams delves into the idiosyncratic life of the seminal French director, establishing a running thesis regarding Cocteau's influence as a gay aesthetician and interdisciplinary artist. As a leading Cocteau scholar, Williams has previously written a book-length study solely on the films of Cocteau, also titled *Jean Cocteau*. To break new ground in this second study of Cocteau, Williams addresses the events of Cocteau's life as well as his other artistic endeavors, such as theater, drawing and poetry. Although the book is comprehensive and easily accessible to both the Cocteau scholar as well as undergraduate readers, there remain some unanswered questions regarding Williams's Coctelian theories.

Published in Reaktion Books's Critical Lives series, *Jean Cocteau* is arranged in chronological order, covering the life and art of Cocteau from birth to death. This creates a systematic flow to the information given, which produces a digestible biography-style progression to Williams's argument. Citing incidents in Cocteau's early life, Williams elaborates his claim that Cocteau's oeuvre was birthed out of Cocteau's formative desire to be loved by those surrounding him. Williams writes descriptively regarding Cocteau's precocious start, relaying the fact that Cocteau was a product of his influences in his artistic beginnings. During this period, high art practitioners – such as Serge Diaghilev and Vaslav Nijinsky of the Ballets Russes – drew the young poet into "an openly gay artistic milieu" (47). This emphasis is carried throughout the book, as Cocteau establishes himself as a gay artist. The use of detailed anecdotes enhances Williams's evocative prose to relay the events of Cocteau's life with candor. Culling his evidence from Cocteau's journals as well as other scholarly Coctelian works, Williams crafts a portrait of Cocteau that is somewhat biased; referring to Cocteau's run-ins with the French Surrealist avant garde, the author sides with Cocteau (naturally), citing Surrealism founder André Breton's hatred toward Cocteau as "a lethal combination of personal jealousy, ideological contempt and ugly homophobia" (76). As a Coctelian scholar, Williams has every right to portray Cocteau in a pleasing light, but his reliance upon Cocteau's point of view at times hinders some questions that could be further delineated regarding Cocteau as a gay aesthetician, particularly considering Cocteau's notoriety for revising his personal history.

Concerning Cocteau's personal and sexual relationships, Williams treats his material with sincerity and a lack of sensationalism. Addressing the notorious relationship between Cocteau and his muse, actor Jean Marais, Williams writes with candor about Marais as Cocteau's ideal embodiment of masculine beauty. Cocteau's opium addiction, which was a major part of his life and generally glossed over by other writers, is explored in a nonjudgmental way by Williams, who regards it as part of Cocteau's myriad personal struggles. Focusing his argument on how Cocteau's life informed the openly gay artistic manifesto supporting his work, Williams addresses Cocteau's filmic works in relation to his ongoing thesis, as Cocteau had "absolute faith in cinema as the tenth muse and a vehicle for pure poetry" (148). Because the book is not simply a critical study on the films of Cocteau, those seeking such a take may wish to read Williams's 2006 book prior to this biography. Ultimately, Williams painstakingly crafts a seminal study on the life and art of Jean Cocteau with a flair for language and a scholarly knowledge of his subject, but this effervescence is at times lost within the bias the author appears to hold regarding Cocteau's genius. **/END/**

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Williams, James S. *Jean Cocteau*. New York: Manchester U P, 2006. Print. French Film Directors.

Author Biography

Hannah Hundley is a senior in the Film Studies Department at the University of North Carolina Wilmington. She has a penchant for Guy Maddin, extravagant costume design, and extremist postcolonial feminist film theory (naturally). Hundley sets her sights on a future career in film archiving and librarianship.

TOP From Left to Right, Saïd (Saïd Taghmaoui), Hubert (Hubert Koundé), and Vinz (Vincent Cassel)
BOTTOM Vincent Cassel as Vinz in Mathieu Kassovitz's *La Haine*

La Haine

Ginette Vincendeau, (2005) Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 128pp., ISBN: 0252073320 (pbk), $15.00

GINETTE VINCENDEAU'S *LA HAINE* serves as a great companion for fans of the 1995 Mathieu Kassovitz film of the same name. This book analyzes all phases of the production of *La Haine*, spanning from the formation of the story to the critical and box office reception of the film. The first section of this reference tool examines the preproduction aspect of *La Haine*. Vincendeau gives the reader access to the life of Kassovitz, helping to explain how he was able to make this film while also looking at what popular cinema and music Kassovitz was influenced by during that time. In addition to detailing events throughout the preproduction process, this book also offers insight into the three stars of the film: Vincent Cassel, Hubert Koundé and Saïd Taghmaoui. Vincendeau examines why these specific actors were chosen for their respective roles, revealing what Kassovitz hoped the performers could bring to each of their characters.

From the conceptual analyses, Vincendeau moves on to analyze the narrative choices and filmic techniques in the second section. She discusses how this film utilizes international, especially American, influences (music, style, fashion) but at the same time remains very French. For non-French viewers who may have misunderstood scenes or gotten lost in translation, the author also explains popular French influences, language choice and slang terms, and how they were used in the film. By including fascinating examinations of recurring themes and motifs used throughout the film, Vincendeau arouses in the reader the desire for multiple viewings. A viewer who has seen *La Haine* once is inspired to see it a second time; a fan who has seen it ten times will likely go for eleven.

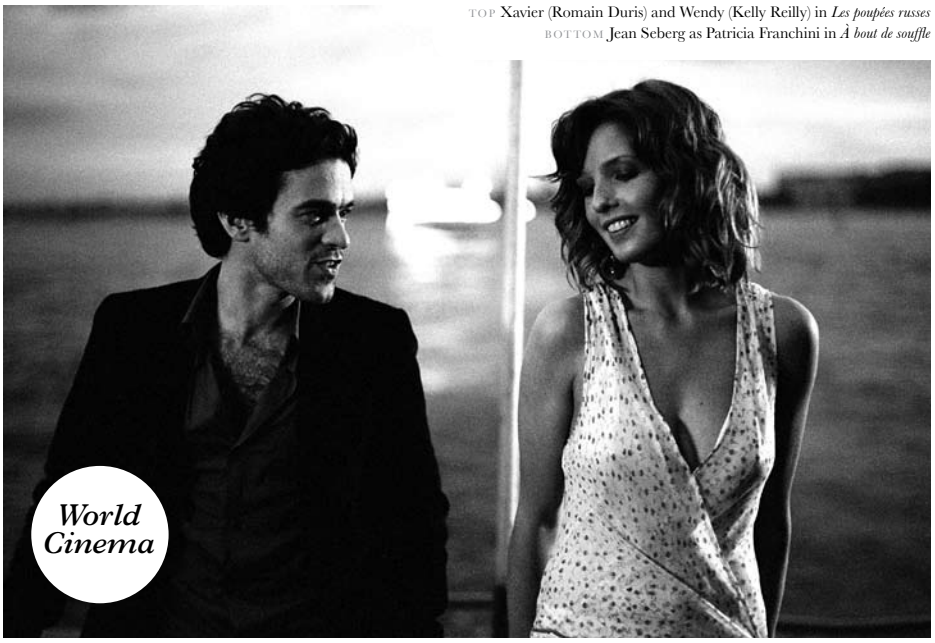
The third and final section of the writing includes mention of the film's box office performance as well as its numerous awards, and critical and popular reception. Though concise, this portion of Vincendeau's analysis gives a good overview of not only how this

film was received but also why it received the reception it did. Though the film was largely considered a stunning success, Vincendeau presents opinions from both sides of the argument. Opposition to the film was not as widespread as Kassovitz had expected or hoped, but Vincendeau writes of the various opinions of the police, certain inhabitants of *banlieues* and others who found this film to be an unfair representation of Parisian reality.

In addition to the biographical and historical information that composes the bulk of the book, Vincendeau also includes appendices, which detail statistical information and provide factual charts. Included in the appendices is information such as box office performance and scene breakdowns. One of the more interesting diagrams in this section is a film breakdown analyzing the running time of the film versus the times that appear on title cards interspersed throughout the film. Though the appendices alone make this an interesting read, for fans of *La Haine* this book could be the answer to any lingering questions they might have. **/ END /**

Author Biography
William Reid Peters is an undergraduate film studies student at the University of North Carolina Wilmington. Peters's focus is on writing and producing films; in addition, he is minoring in digital arts.

ABOVE From Left to Right, Vinz (Vincent Cassel), Saïd (Saïd Taghmaoui), and Hubert (Hubert Koundé)



TOP Xavier (Romain Duris) and Wendy (Kelly Reilly) in *Les poupées russes*
BOTTOM Jean Seberg as Patricia Franchini in *À bout de souffle*

Historical Dictionary of French Cinema

Dayna Oscherweitz, MaryEllen Higgins, (2007) Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 457pp., ISBN: 9780810854918 (hbk), $95.00

AS NOTED BY DAYNA OSCHERWEITZ (Southern Methodist University) and MaryEllen Higgins (Allegheny Campus of the Pennsylvania State University), the history of French cinema is too rich and vast for any single book to contain; however, these authors of the *Historical Dictionary of French Cinema* have compiled a concise collection of both factual history and the effect of individual directors, films and movements.

A chronology and introduction provide enough information to appease the seasoned French film watcher without overwhelming those who are new to the nation's seventh art. The dictionary portion opens with *Breathless* (*À bout de souffle*, Godard, 1960) and concludes with director, producer and screenwriter Claude Zidi. Extensive attention is concentrated on movements and directors from the *nouvelle vague* of the 1950s and the *cinéma du look* of the 1980s. Other movements in French cinema, such as *le cinéma de l'absurdité* of the 1970s, are represented only by entries for its trademark director, Bertrand Blier (1939–), and the career it launched for his main actor, Gérard Depardieu (1948–). The book does feature several welcome surprises, though, such as the entry specifically on women in French film. This entry is less of a history of French women in film but more of a summary of the female film figures who also have individual entries. Directors Alice Guy, Claire Denis and Agnès Varda are mentioned as well as classic actresses Catherine Deneuve and Brigette Bardot, and the more recent Juliette Binoche and Audrey Tautou.

However, for all of the book's insight, it is lacking in one arena: popular French cinema. Although there is information on Godard and Guy, there is not an entry for writer/director Cédric Klapisch [responsible for *The Spanish Apartment* (*L'Auberge espagnole*, 2002), a movie that launched its sequel, *Russian Dolls* (*Les Poupées russes*, 2005)] or the film *The Dinner Game* (*Le Dîner de cons*, Verber, 1998), a box office smash that will soon be getting its American remake. Popular contemporary French films are often lost on American audiences, because the films never make it out of their home country as a result of improper distribution. One way this book could have really filled a niche is by introducing

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BELOW Director, Alice Guy-Blaché

American cinephiles to the lighter side of French cinema.

The book's extensive reference selection, however, profoundly makes up for this oversight. It includes several lists of websites separated into subgenres as far reaching as contemporary French cinema and general theory and criticism as well as niche topics, such as colonial and postcolonial cinema and gender in French cinema. The book also provides an extensive list of periodicals and websites where readers can learn more about the seventh art in either French or English.

Although lacking in the realm of contemporary and popular French cinema, the dictionary does provide a comprehensive and user-friendly guide to those who need either a quick refresher on or an introduction to the thriving national cinema of France. **/END/**

Author Biography

Lynn Thomas is a twenty something, newly transplanted Brooklynite finishing her BA in Film Studies at Hunter College in New York City. She enjoys using other people's Netflix accounts and then writing about the films in her blog: *www.notesfromthebackrow.wordpress.com.*

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PLEASE EMAIL SUBMISSIONS as Microsoft Word email attachments to Liza Palmer *(palmerl@uncw.edu)*. Submissions should be received by September 1, 2010. Questions should be referred to Liza Palmer.

Preview of FM 1.2

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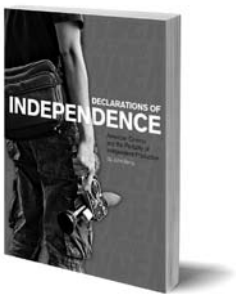

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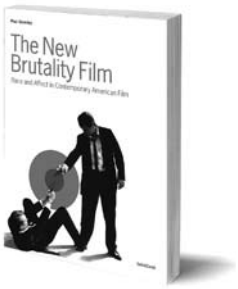

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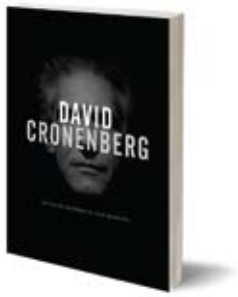

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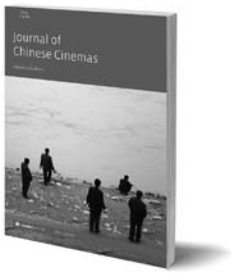

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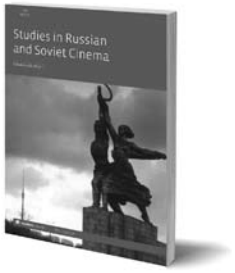

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