

reader is often perceived as a threat as she blatantly defies Victorian feminine ideals, where selflessness and care for others are central. Jo March in *Little Women* is sometimes cast as an isolated reader. Golden convincingly argues that these “four pictorial types are reliable indicators of ideologies that govern women’s reading practices. As visual formulas, they inscribe cultural attitudes and, in some cases, manage our perception of women’s reading as a socially sanctioned subversive act” (140). Furthermore, she shows that these visual images of women readers interact with the written narrative in which they appear.

For a scholar interested in questions concerning nationhood and national identity, Golden’s study is at times frustrating as it does not deal with these questions despite its transatlantic approach. However, Golden’s book still has many strong points. The primary contribution that this study makes is to draw attention to an often overlooked aspect of nineteenth-century fiction. While we today consider illustrations to belong strictly in children’s books, in the 1800s they were an important part of the narrative. Golden’s study exposes a field of exploration which can give us new insights into the fascinating world of nineteenth-century fiction.

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Helle Porsdam, ed. *Coming to a Theater Near You: Det moderne USA set gennem film*. Odense: Syddansk Universitetsforlag, 2005. 247 pages. ISBN 87-7674-047-1.

As will be apparent from the title, this volume of essays combines an American and a Danish context in a way that is unusual in our academic studies. It focuses throughout on American film, but since the language of choice is Danish, the book’s intended audience must necessarily be a national rather than an international one. The essays are also conceived and written in such a way as to make them accessible to ordinary people with an interest in modern American films, but without any scholarly background in American Studies. In my opinion, this volume should be extremely valuable to secondary school and university teachers and students of American Civilization, and not just in courses on popular culture. The extent to which the Danish text will be perceived as a problem by students in the other Scandinavian countries, is hard for me to say, but in comparison to the extraordinary challenges posed by spoken Danish, the difficulties involved here ought to be surmountable by anyone with a serious interest in the subject.

In addition to the editor’s judicious and succinct introduction, the volume consists of 17 essays on a wide variety of topics involving American film as expressions of various aspects of American culture. The great majority of contributors are Danish academics from Syddansk Universitet in Odense, who with this book continue to impress this reader as a powerhouse of American Studies in Scandinavia. *Coming to a Theater Near You* is structured in five chapters of three or four essays each, each dealing with a particular aspect of the book’s subject. The first chapter focuses on American identity, using *Dead Man*, *Gangs of New York*, and *The Godfather* (especially Parts I and II) to make its points. The subject of Chapter II is religious belief

and “Americanness” (*The Apostle, The Matrix, A Few Good Men*). Chapter III, on Hollywood and American history, focuses on postmodern war movies, *JFK, 13 Days*, and *The Patriot*, while Chapter IV is entitled “On Power, the Military, and Honor,” paying most attention to *Saving Private Ryan, The Thin Red Line, Gladiator*, and *We Were Soldiers*. In the final chapter, on the U.S. as a multicultural society, the films selected for analysis are *Do the Right Thing, Lone Star, Monster’s Ball*, and *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*.

The general impression made by all these essays is that they cover their wide variety of cultural subjects in a most insightful and accessible manner. This is popularization at its best, utilizing the general familiarity with Hollywood movies that exists not just in Denmark, but throughout large parts of the world, in order to illuminate a great many central characteristics of American culture. This basically fortunate situation is not without its own problems, however. As Helle Porsdam observes in her Introduction (my own translation):

For the result is that it is increasingly American movies that constitute our shared frame of reference, which we tend to refer to when we want to tell each other something important. The relationship we develop, then, to the country of the United States and its inhabitants, is at one and the same time both very intimate and very distant. It is intimate because the great amount of American popular culture we consume results in our knowing more about the U.S. than about even our closest neighbors, Norway, Sweden, or Germany. The problem is, however, that much of the information and many of the impressions we receive, are not always the most relevant ones. They may even be quite misleading, since the realities of American popular culture may often seem to be quite far removed from the real United States.

But even with this necessary *caveat*, it seems clear that the advantages to be gained from using cinematic representations of American history and culture far outweigh the potential problems, especially when it comes to teaching students at a fairly elementary level. It should also be remembered that most Americans perceive and understand their own culture more frequently through the lenses of Hollywood than through the more detailed and accurate knowledge available in academic circles.

In a volume of this kind, which relies on the reader’s at least relative familiarity with the films chosen for discussion, it will always be a challenge to find the right balance between presupposing a more detailed knowledge than is realistic on the one hand and spelling out plot lines and other facts more extensively than necessary on the other. Some of the films will of course also be better known than others, and therefore require less descriptive information to function as illustration of the observations made. On the whole, the essays do a good job of negotiating this tension, although every reader will have different opinions about how successful each essay is in striking an optimal balance in this respect.

Which of the essays in *Coming to a Theater Near You* deserve special mention in a short review like this, will obviously be a matter of personal taste. This reader had a hard time choosing between so many interesting contributions, but ended up with the following quartet: Niels Bjerre-Poulsen’s “Hvor blev Amerika født? *Gangs of New York* som national skabelsesmyte” gives a fascinating glimpse into the socio-economic and political realities behind the dramatic events of this popular Martin

Scorsese movie, providing the reader with important historical information that puts phenomena and events like Tammany Hall and not least “the New York City Draft Riots” of 1863 in their proper perspectives. The social importance of the gangs, the role played by the voluntary fire brigades, the hopeless squalor of a place like Five Points – the explication of the significance of these phenomena makes the re-viewing of the movie a much more meaningful experience.

Jørn Brøndal’s “*The Godfather* – en saga om Amerika og etnisk identitet” focuses on Francis Ford Coppola’s trilogy from 1972, 1974, and 1990. As everyone who reads this review will know, these movies, where especially the first two have been generally critically acclaimed, attest to the modern public’s (both domestically and internationally) fascination with the role of the Italian-American mafia in U.S. society. Brøndal singles out three particularly central themes for analysis here. The first one is the presentation of the U.S. as a cold, cynical, and thoroughly corrupt capitalist society. The second one focuses on the tension between being an “American” and being an Italian American. And the third theme, which Brøndal sees as the main one in the entire trilogy, can be formulated as the complex interplay between crime (“business”) and family life, which is ultimately responsible for the films’ aura of tragedy. Among the many interesting observations that constitute Brøndal’s elaboration of these themes, one might perhaps mention the timely reminder that the *Godfather* movies must also be seen as a significant representative of the *new ethnicity* movement that became so important from the late sixties onward.

In her essay on “*The Matrix* – amerikansk teknofrygt og teknofetichisme,” Inger H. Dalsgaard takes off from the obvious fascination with advances in technology that has been particularly pronounced in the U.S., whether one looks at the role of the space program, the widely shared interest in science fiction, or the particularly American nature of much of cyberspace. However, this enthusiasm is often tempered by a skepticism and fear of what the ultimate results of these technological developments may be for human life as we know it. This fear is easily associated with another widespread phenomenon of modern American culture, namely the pervasive, paranoid (?) suspicion that behind the events of our ordinary lives there is a sinister plot hatched by organizations and institutions, governmental and otherwise, which are out to foil our plans and thwart our aspirations. In the Wachowski brothers’ *Matrix* movie from 1999, all these elements come together to create a memorable parable of a realistically threatening future that fascinates and repels at the same time.

Such a fascination with conspiracy theories, in a real-life context, is also in focus in Dale Carter’s essay, “Bag spejlet: Refleksioner over amerikansk historie, politik og samfund i Oliver Stones *JFK*.” Carter here convincingly shows how this controversial movie both illustrates perennial Hollywood themes and generic characteristics and represents an unsettling “factive” exploration of the ramifications of what is arguably the most traumatic event in modern American history. Whatever one may think about the plausibility of the plot of *JFK*, it provides an illuminating glimpse into the complex patterns that characterize the power play behind the scenes in American society.

As I hope to have made clear through these examples, *Coming to a Theater Near You* lives up to its promise of enriching our knowledge and experience of the modern

United States through its treasure trove of relevant films. If the editor and her crew could also find a way to get these essays translated into English, the book's usefulness would of course be greatly enhanced for a potential European audience.

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Laurie Hovell McMillin. *Buried Indians: Digging Up the Past in a Midwestern Town*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2006. ISBN 978-0-299-21684-9. \$24.95 paperback.

Trempealeau in western Wisconsin, on the banks of the Mississippi, is a town I had never heard of. Yet, it seems oddly familiar as Laurie Hovell McMillin begins to describe family gatherings, life on the farm, the Lions' fundraiser, the Duck Pond and the water tower, children's games, and high school antics. But this beguiling Midwestern charm began to unravel in the early 1990s as the past literally emerged out of the ground. At that point archaeologists from the Mississippi Valley Archaeology Center and local residents clashed over plans to reconstruct and preserve near millennium old Mississippian platform mounds found within the bounds of the town. McMillin uses the controversy over the mounds to tease apart different strands of historical claims on and to the land, and to uncover meanings buried deep in the prairie soil. On the one hand she introduces the powerbrokers of the town, who view outsiders and academics with great skepticism, and on the other she shares the suggestions of a Ho-Chunk historian that all of Wisconsin is a huge burial ground for Native bones. But the stories, connections, and rifts are far more complicated than that.

Trempealeau is a town settled primarily by northern or northwestern Europeans. It counts its origin back to French explorers in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. One or two token Indians also appear in the town's genealogy, but local history telling places them firmly in the past. The landscape tells a different story. Trempealeau Mountain, effigy mounds, burial grounds, platform mounds, arrowheads – Indians are everywhere, yet conspicuously absent in the life of the town. The high school mascot is an Indian, but real Indians are rendered invisible. "Our heads were full of Hollywood Indians, and our hearts were full of local pride" as McMillin explains it (135). The author finds it difficult to get to meet and interview local native people, and this illustrates just how wide the chasm is. Sometimes, however, interests converge for different reasons, as when the town fathers and Indian spokespersons both oppose the archaeological digs.

This book is both an intensely personal account of a specific place and all its connections, and a story that could have been set in any number of small towns in Middle America. McMillin consciously chooses the metaphor of archaeology for her account, as she seeks to uncover layer after layer of meaning and history connected to this land. The local and the general merge in a way that makes these stories attractive as well as thought-provoking reading. It is a book I would like to teach. *Buried Indians* is a postmodern history combining fact and fiction, feeling and analysis, subjectivity and debates over objective truth. Thus it is not a conventionally conceived historical study. Creatively, and somewhat eclectically, the author mines a variety of