

that we should therefore consider films ‘not as stories, but as reservoirs of information’ (p. 55).

Chapter four, titled *Escape to Fantasy*, looks at how post-war audiences preferred films that did not reflect their everyday lives but instead portrayed a sense of escapism. He does, however, explore two British films with wartime themes that were extremely popular: *The Way to the Stars* (Anthony Asquith, 1945) and *A Matter of Life and Death* (Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, 1946). Other chapters consider topics such as location work, sport in film, science in cinema, law in film, children on screen and cinema audiences, each featuring a wealth of cinematic examples to illustrate the points being made. A standout chapter is chapter five, *The Dark Secrets of the Mind*, which looks at how wartime and post-war British film approached mental illness, and the ways in which this differed from Hollywood. Particularly noteworthy is his analysis of *The Seventh Veil* (Compton Bennett, 1945), alongside his exploration of *Madonna of the Seven Moons* (Arthur Crabtree, 1944) which encompasses both the film’s historical context and an overview of medical history.

A wide range of sources are employed throughout the book, clearly divided in the bibliography under sections titled official papers; unpublished sources; reference websites, trade papers, yearbooks and newspapers; books and journal articles. Particularly poignant is the close of chapter four, which states that at the core of cinema lies ‘the illusion that the flickering shadows are real people playing out their lives for the audience’ (p. 67). Furthermore, while many of these stories have ancient roots, they are also interwoven with contemporary concerns. The problem, according to the author, is how to critically approach this since they are ‘difficult to compare and open to varied interpretations’ (p. 67). He concludes that, although anthropologists and ethnologists may be required in order to decipher these, this is no reason for not attempting the task (p. 67). These seem apt words with which to end this review.

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Francophone Belgian Cinema

JAMIE STEELE, 2019

Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press

pp. xi + 228, illus., bibliography, index, £75.00 (cloth)

Notwithstanding an upsurge of research efforts in the last two decades, Belgian cinema remains an understudied subject. This is particularly clear from the number of English-language book-length studies that take a more encompassing approach to Belgian cinema than a focus on the work of a 'single' artist, such as Chantal Akerman or the Dardenne brothers. Only three such books have been published: the Royal Film Archive of Belgium's trilingual film inventory *Belgian cinema* (1999), Philip Mosley's monograph *Split screen: Belgian cinema and cultural identity* (2001), and the *Directory of world cinema: Belgium* (2013), edited by Marcelline Block and Jeremi Szaniawski. A new book-length study on Belgian cinema, in this case focusing on francophone film production in Belgium, is thus most welcome.

Contrary to the previous books, Jamie Steele's book does not, as its title suggests, offer a complete history of francophone Belgian cinema. Instead, it focuses on the period starting in the new millennium, with the films chosen as case studies all being released between 2004 and 2014. Steele's book, based on his doctoral thesis (2014, University of Exeter), takes francophone Belgian cinema apart, which makes sense as the Belgian film industry principally consists of two connected but to a large extent separately operating film sectors, one in the Flemish Community and one in the French Community of Belgium. As the French Community is defined by its language, Steele labels its cinema as 'francophone Belgian cinema'. While this may seem logical, this terminology is to some extent problematic as it suggests that non-francophone films by definition do not belong to the cinema of the French Community, thereby excluding films such as Jaco Van Dormael's *Mr. Nobody* (2010, in English) or Vanja d'Alcantara's *Beyond the Steppes* (2010, in Polish, Russian and Kazakh). While the book on various occasions provides insightful analyses of the public and critical discourses on 'francophone Belgian cinema', a critical examination of its linguistic aspect is lacking.

Its introduction positions the book within the field of small cinema studies and dives into the complex national question in a Belgian context. The introduction is followed by six chapters. The first chapter provides a necessary and revealing contextualization for the rest of the book by outlining the realities of film production, distribution and exhibition in the French Community of Belgium. Steele clearly shows the structural reliance of the francophone Belgian film sector on a variety of public film support measures. Furthermore, the strong ties with, and dependence on, France is striking: coproductions with France account for no less than 66% of the French Community's total film production between 2001 and 2014, and francophone Belgian films mostly obtain (much) higher numbers of film admissions in France than in its domestic market.

The following five chapters concentrate on specific filmmakers: after the inevitable Dardenne brothers (chapter 2), the book focuses on Joachim Lafosse (chapter 3), Olivier Masset-Depasse (chapter 4), Bouli Lanners (chapter 5) and Lucas Belvaux (chapter 6). All of these filmmakers and their works deserve proper academic attention, but some reflections on the motivation to choose precisely these filmmakers, and not others, would have been welcome. While Steele criticizes the magazine *La revue toudi* to overlook the presence of women filmmakers (p. 19), his book does the same, thereby failing to reflect on or acknowledge this shortcoming.

Each of the five chapters provides a general consideration of the chosen filmmaker, after which one to three films are selected for a more in-depth analysis. Francophone Belgian cinema is examined ‘through the lens of two complementary notions of cinematic transnationalism and regional cinema’ (p. 178). While there remains some conceptual obscurity in this regard, Steele’s approach involves special attention to production and funding structures on the one hand, and to the representation of urban and rural spaces on the other. This combination proves to be fruitful for a deeper comprehension of the films.

The book is at its best when the films are placed in a broader context, for example by showing how the story of *Deux jours, une nuit* (Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne, 2014) relates to a wider socio-economic analysis of today’s society, or how *Élève libre* (Joachim Lafosse, 2008) relates to Belgian national traumas (i.e. the Dutroux affair). Particularly insightful are the analyses that take into account certain traditions in Belgian (as well as international) cinema: Steele convincingly examines the legacy of Henri Storck, Paul Meyer and Jean-Jacques Andrien in films such as *Folie privée* (2004, Joachim Lafosse), *Nue propriété* (2006, Joachim Lafosse), and *Cages* (2006, Olivier Masset-Depasse). This film historical dimension does not only provide the book with more depth, it also triggers a further examination of various other historical traditions and contemporary aspects of Belgian cinema. As such, Steele’s book may hopefully serve as a source of inspiration for students and researchers.

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Rule, Britannia! The Biopic and British National Identity

HOMER B. PETTEY R. BARTON PALMER (eds), 2018

Albany, State University of New York Press

pp. xxxii + 332, illus., bibliography, filmography, index, \$90.00 (hardcover), \$26.95 (paperback, ISBN 978-1-4384-7111-2)

The biopic, although always popular with gossip-hungry audiences, has seen uneven critical attention throughout film history: although as old as the cinematic medium itself, its mixture of fact and fiction often resulted in accusations of inauthenticity. At the same time, it has always played a particularly important role in defining national identity through its focus on lives deemed worthy of preservation in popular and cultural memory. British national identity is particularly problematic in this respect, as the editors’ preface to *Rule, Britannia!* emphasizes how the lack of common agreement on usage (English vs British, Celtic vs Anglo-Saxon, ethnic or linguistic communities) implies. The essay collection can be seen as a sequel to an