

Allert, Beate, ed. *Comparative Cinema: How American University Students View Foreign Films*. Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2008. 345 pp. ISBN: 0-7734-5166-8 hardcover, \$119.95.

Reviewed for Women in German by Christine Rinne

The contributors to this volume of eighteen essays are selected students from three of Professor Allert's graduate courses that were taught at Purdue University during 2006 and 2007. Each course focused on a unique selection of foreign films, all of which were produced from the 1920s through the 1960s. The students come from a variety of backgrounds and fields, which is evident in the interdisciplinary nature of the theoretical approaches and essay topics. The essays are organized into the following five sections: "Film Based on Signs, Images, and Sounds: East Meets West," "Temporality and Memory," "Orpheus Myth in Film," "Gender and Identity," and "Visions and Dreams: Personal, Public, and Political." Some of the films that are discussed and especially relevant to German studies include Lang's *Metropolis*, Staudte's *The Murderers are Among Us*, Resnais's *The Last Year in Marienbad*, as well as Bergman's *Wild Strawberries* and *The Seventh Seal*. For those interested in gender studies, the fourth section contains essays about films by Fellini, Buñuel, García Lorca, and Lang, though others directly or indirectly address the topic as well.

Allert has two primary goals with this fairly specific project. The first is to highlight the international background and diverse approaches of these students to a singular medium, and in this aspect she has succeeded, as the essays indeed cover a broad range. For example, Dongmei Xu's essay explores the impact of Chinese opera on Sergei Eisenstein's use of montage, while Tatyana Lyaskovets applies Deleuze to better understand time and stillness in Resnais's *Last Year in Marienbad*, and Benjamin Ortiz places Buñuel's *Viridiana* at the intersection of political, historical and theoretical periods. The scope is certainly extensive, and while this could enhance the collection's appeal for some, it may also prove to be a hindrance because there are too many essays to teach in one course and the topics are too broad for a single scholar's interest.

The editor's other aim with this distinctive collection is to begin to fill a gap in scholarship for some of these films. In the introduction Allert states that she had difficulty finding a textbook or reader to guide her courses, or scholarship on some of the lesser-known films. She hopes that these essays will be a first step in broadening our understanding of long neglected, but significant films. For this reason, there are only a few essays on the many silent films discussed in her courses, because extensive research on these films has already been published. In terms of Allert's second goal, this collection is again successful. Many of the essays would serve as excellent examples for graduate students in terms of how to apply a theoretical approach or structure an argument. For example, one section of the collection provides four analyses of Marcel Camus' *Black Orpheus*, including themes such as representations of the political, questions of spectatorship, and constructing identity. Because of the number of essays and their broad approaches, however, one could not use the entire collection as an instructional tool, although a selection might prove very beneficial.

The quality of the essays varies in terms of both content and style, because these were final seminar papers and they have not undergone the editing process that one would expect for a traditional collection of scholarly essays. Allert has achieved her goals of exploring her students' diversity, both personal and academic, and contributing new scholarship to the field of film

studies, though this collection will probably be most valuable as a source of selections for the classroom.

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