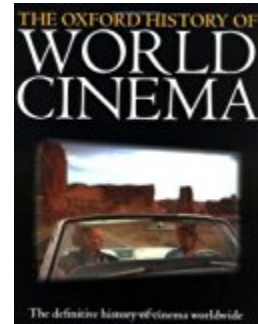


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, ed. *The Oxford History of World Cinema*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1996. xxii + 824 pp. \$45.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-19-811257-0.

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Detailed Attention

Although one might quibble with this hefty book's dust jacket claim that it is "the definitive history of cinema worldwide," the scope of Oxford's *World Cinema* is truly impressive. Edited by Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, this volume displays the talents of more than seventy-five contributors—an international who's who of film scholars, including Edward Buscombe and Roberta Pearson of the UK, Douglas Gomery and Charles Musser of the USA, and Thomas Elsaesser of the Netherlands. *World Cinema* is the first general history of film, since the last edition of the late Gerald Mast's *A Short History of the Movies*, to give full justice to the so-called "silent" film.

Part One, covering the years 1895-1930, nearly 200 pages, thoroughly incorporates the explosion of new research devoted to this area over the past decade. It is especially refreshing to the professional and potentially revelatory to the neophyte to explore the myriad aspects of the silent period that go beyond the distinguished careers of the Lumiere brothers, Georges Melies, D.W. Griffith, and Charlie Chaplin. This is particularly so regarding the European contributors during the critical years between 1909 and the outbreak of World War One. Areas that had previously been largely confined to specialized monographs, such as silent animation and the music used to accompany non-dialogue films, have full chapters dedicated to them, respectively.

Part Two, the "Sound Cinema 1930-1960," more or less deals with traditional topics—notably the rise of the Hollywood studio system during the 1930's and the concomitant evolution of Hollywood's classic stylistic forms and

genres, Italian neo-realism, etc. Also discussed are the cinemas of the totalitarian states, but these analyses go far beyond the usual cant regarding authoritarian propagandistic kitsch and Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* (1935). Eric Rentschler's chapter on Nazi film and immediate postwar German cinema is highly informative as well as a model of scholarly succinctness. And there is much, much more contained within the pages of Part Two. For instance, areas in broad-based film studies that have usually been ignored in the past receive detailed attention, including 1930s animation and the early cinematic efforts that took place in India and China.

The post-1960 "Modern Cinema," the focus of Part Three, again avoids a generalized linear approach to its subjects. Significantly, the chapters comprising the first section of Part Three are devoted to the impact of TV and assorted new technologies upon cinema. Like it or not, one cannot fully understand the "product" of today's industry without grasping the growing intimacy of their interrelationship. While the French New Wave and Brazilian Cinema Novo may not receive quite the amount of attention old hands might have come to expect, there are full chapters on such formerly neglected national cinema movements as the Chinese Fifth Generation, the massive domestic industries of Egypt and India, the struggling but dynamic sub-Saharan directors and the "new" cinemas of Australia and New Zealand.

The choice of illustrative photos for *World Cinema*, including a six-page section of color stills, is excellent—both in technical quality and textual appropriateness. The

photo captions appear to be accurate as well as pleasantly enlightening. Frame enlargements, rather than the usual plethora of studio publicity shots, dominate.

Finally, there are nearly one hundred page to page-and-a-half sidebars featuring the pantheon of film personalities, but also including a few individuals or characters one may not expect nor even recognize. For example, both Warner Brothers' inimitable animated star, Bugs Bunny, and Yevgeny Bauer receive special notice. Largely forgotten today, Bauer, with more than 80 credits to his name, is considered the most important filmmaker in prerevolutionary Russia.

Both the price and weight might discourage the choice of *World Cinema* as an introductory course text, but I would highly recommend that it be considered for such use—particularly should Oxford decide to publish a soft-cover edition.

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