

H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

James Morrison. *Passport to Hollywood: Hollywood Films, European Directors*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998. ix + 311 pp. \$21.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7914-3938-8.

Reviewed by Raymond Cormier (Longwood College)
Published on H-PCAACA (February, 1999)

Morrison has staked out what seems to be an original angle that one hopes will lead to further exploration, discussion and study. Put briefly, the book examines a series of films by directors of European art-cinemas—F. W. Murnau (Germany), Jean Renoir (France), Fritz Lang (Austria), Joseph Losey (American-British), Richard Lester and John Boorman (Great Britain), Milos Forman, and Ivan Passer (Czechoslovakia), among others, and attempts to assess their congruence or divergence from what Morrison seems to consider “Classic Hollywood patterns of patriarchal or hegemonic commodification” (my paraphrase).

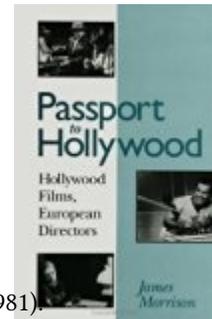
Drawing broadly on recent film theory, film history, and cultural studies, Morrison traces the influence of European filmmakers in Hollywood from the 1920s to the 1980s, endeavoring to illuminate the binary relationship between modernism and mass-culture in American movies. Morrison traces an arc between “high” and “low” culture, kitsch and avant-garde, European modernism and American mass- or pop culture. By interpreting important American films, the author also shows how these films illustrate key issues of cultural hierarchy and national culture over fifty years of American cinema. In addition, he inquires into the complex and often contradictory ways that these Hollywood movies conceptualize ideas about “foreignness,” exile/refugee, and sub-cultures. Like deep and focused readings of, say, a novel or poem, Morrison uses insightful close viewings ostensibly to demonstrate new connections among modernism, postmodernism, and American movies.

The nine or so films that come under scrutiny here are: *Sunrise* (1927), *This Land Is Mine* (1943), *Scarlett Street* (1945), *M* (1931 and the 1951 remake), *Petulia* (1968), *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest* (1975), and *Deliverance* (1972), and *Cutter’s Way* (1981).

Deliverance (1972), and *Cutter’s Way* (1981).

Chapter 1 studies *Sunrise* as an example of “Modernism’s Other;” Chapter 2 considers *This Land is Mine* as “representing nationality;” *Scarlett Street* is examined (Chapter 3) as a “film noir” illustration of cultural hierarchy and “masscult modernism;” Joseph Losey’s remake of Fritz Lang’s *M* Morrison is considered in light of 1950s “Un-American Activities” in Hollywood, as well as re-assessing Jean-Luc Godard’s critical writings on Hollywood film (Chapter 4). M. devotes Chapter 5 to Lester’s *Petulia*—emblematic of pretentious and strange art-cinema, wherein “Otherness” is “reinvented,” which the “New Hollywood” co-opts and subsumes. Chapter 6 probes “mythic self-consciousness and homosexual panic” in Forman’s *Cuckoo’s Nest* and Boorman’s *Deliverance*—while extrapolating from and embroidering upon the semiotic/Marxist ideas of J.-J. Goux, and making comparisons with *Mr. Roberts* (Ford/Leroy, 1955). It is the “new Hollywood Spectatorship” that M. reviews in his anatomy of *Cutter’s Way* (Chapter 7).

Apart from Morrison’s rather too-monolithic or just backward explanation of mass or pop culture, and his surprising omission of any kind of cross-cultural analysis, my main reservation about this book has to do with the mechanics of bibliographical citation. The work of following out references is infuriating, to say the least. Besides omitting Bakhtin, Barthes, Foucault, and Truffaut (writers who are cited within the text!) from his Bibliography (inadvertently?), M. fails to alphabetize properly several references in the middle of the Bibliography. He tends to cite authors in quick succession with no reference (e.g., Bettelheim, Leslie Fiedler). Chapter 6, in particular, was relentless in its dense tour-de-force style, leaving the reader far behind, hopelessly lost be-



tween the “Drew character,” the “Lewis character,” and the “Bobby character”—with no attempt to identify which actor played which role. One searches in vain for some bit of information about Boorman’s English background, what reasons led him to undertake this penetrating film set in Tennessee, what particularly British traits predisposed him to deal successfully with the American psyche, etc.

Caveat lector! You will have to view these films per-

haps more than once before reading and appreciating this book.

This review is copyrighted (c) 1999 by H-Net and the Popular Culture and the American Culture Associations. It may be reproduced electronically for educational or scholarly use. The Associations reserve print rights and permissions. (Contact: P.C.Rollins at the following electronic address: Rollinspc@aol.com)

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-pcaaca>

Citation: Raymond Cormier. Review of Morrison, James, *Passport to Hollywood: Hollywood Films, European Directors*. H-PCAACA, H-Net Reviews. February, 1999.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=2749>

Copyright © 1999 by H-Net and the Popular Culture and the American Culture Associations, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact P.C. Rollins at Rollins@osuunx.ucc.okstate.edu or the Reviews editorial staff at hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu.