

Richard Burt. *Medieval and Early Modern Film and Media*.
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Richard Burt's *Medieval and Early Modern Film and Media* addresses a very specialized audience. The conundrum posed by its title — what kind of film and media were available during this time period? — reflects the monograph's diverse aims. Obviously not focused on films or other electronic artifacts produced in the early modern and medieval periods, the text instead addresses, in part, cinema created about these historical eras. Only in part, however. Burt's treatise covers topics ranging from disparate films to Freud, alongside essays devoted to the professional undertakings of Stephen Greenblatt and Natalie Zemon Davis. Highly infused by contemporary theory, the book is less likely to be of interest to early modern or medieval scholars than it is to those working in film studies and contemporary culture.

Burt spends considerable time talking about — and creating — complex paratexts. His Acknowledgments section presages what is to come. I include an unusually lengthy quote from this segment in order to provide an accurate depiction of the rhetorical style Burt employs throughout his book:

I dedicate this book to my parents. My mother, Claire Hollingsworth Burt, grew up near Hollywood and her own early fascination with film and the Middle Ages inspired her young son's lifelong interest in knights and armor and the Middle Ages on film. (She named me after King Richard the Lionheart, though, like the Sex Pistols' Johnny Rotten, I have come to prefer Laurence Olivier's Richard III as role model.) I still fondly remember her taking me to see a road show exhibition of *El Cid* for my seventh birthday when it was released, and our excitement when the palace doors opened when the film began again after the entr'acte and the aged Roderigo appeared with a salt-and-pepper beard. I am delighted that the film was released by the Weinstein Company for its new, prestigious Miriam collection in January 2008 on a special two-disc DVD edition with a variety of extras while the present book was already in production. Even though the DVD transfer is apparently sourced from the 35mm

(internegative) used by Criterion for their laser disc edition rather than the original Super Technirama 70mm camera negative, it's wonderful to have the film on DVD complete with overture, intermission, and exit music. (xiii)

Following this excerpt, he offers descriptions of his father's and grandfather's contributions to his interest in cameras and related endeavors. Burt's writing style, as illustrated above, is the most distinctive feature of this monograph. Presumably designed to correspond to the substance of his argument while either intriguing or infuriating his readers, this mode of lengthy referentiality and intertextual rumination will undoubtedly limit his audience. Reading this book requires significant patience, as well as serious interest in the topics addressed. Burt uses rhetorical peregrination as a means to investigate his theoretical aims; individual readers can assess whether this method is successful. In general, the abundant information is relevant, but the technique quickly becomes tiresome.

The book consists of four chapters, an "epilogomenon," numerous epigraphs at the start of each chapter, and sixty pages of notes, which read like additional chapters. Individual sections are devoted to "The Medieval and Early Modern Cinematographosphere: De-composing Paratexts, Media Analogues, and the Living Dead Hands of Surrealism, Psychoanalysis, and New Historicism"; "The Passion of *El Cid* and the Circumfixion of Cinematic History: Sterotypology/Phantomimesis/Cryptomorphoses"; "Cutting and (Re) Running from the (Medieval) Middle East: The Return of the Film Epic and the Uncanny Mise-hors-scènes of *Kingdom of Heaven's* Double DVDs"; and "Le de'tour de Martin Guerre: 'Anec-notes' of Historical Film Advisors, Archival Aberrations, and the Uncanny Subject of the Academic Paratext." The epilogomenon is titled "Anec-Post-It-Note to Self: Freud, Greenblatt, and the New Historicist Uncanny." As these chapter titles suggest, Burt's argument resists summary. Interweaving film history with intellectually dense allusions to theorists and scholars, he propels the reader through an overflowing mixture of cultural investigation and critical inquiry. Throughout the text, he remains predominately interested in the "extras" associated with central figures or artifacts. When the subject is cinema, these extras include material added to or transformed in succeeding versions of films as they progress from entities created for public viewing into the evolving media produced for home audiences. In his chapter on Natalie Zemon Davis, he draws from diverse, often contradictory, letters, articles, and interviews that Davis created or contributed to after the filming and publishing of *The Return of Martin Guerre*. He simultaneously presents material from both familiar and comparatively obscure films, providing extensive accounts of the plot and production techniques and discussing the theoretical implications of this vast array of source material. At the same time, as noted, he offers an argumentative model

that demonstrates the kind of paratextual effusion that represents his dominant concern in this investigation. Burt, it seems, wants to include *everything* that might be relevant to his topic and argument, no matter how illusory that goal obviously remains.

One result of Burt's strategy is evident in this review. Given the impracticality of condensing this material in order to critique its argument judiciously and concisely, the reader can craft an overview that notes the seemingly limitless proliferation of this topic or s/he can focus in on artificially determined nodes of argument that invariably misrepresent the actual presentation. Like Derrida's writings, which often defy conventional argumentative structures, *Medieval and Early Modern Film and Media* circumvents standard critical styles by demonstrating the futility of identifying a fixed object of inquiry. The result is both illuminating and dizzying. For those who share Burt's fascination with paratext, the book is likely to be invigorating. Scholars with less theoretical predilections will do better elsewhere.

References

Burt, Richard. 2008. *Medieval and Early Modern Film and Media*. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan.