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A Companion to Steven Spielberg

Edited by Nigel Morris

Wiley Blackwell

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Wiley Blackwell Companions to Film Directors

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This blockbuster of a compilation of 25 essays on the work of Steven Spielberg is the latest addition to the *Wiley Blackwell Companions to Film Directors* series. As a subject of this series, he joins not only fellow Americans like Martin Scorsese and Robert Altman but also representatives of world cinema such as Jean-Luc Godard and Werner Herzog. The book recognises around 50 years of activity in the world of film and television which has resulted in Spielberg being probably the best recognised, most influential and wealthiest director working in cinema today.

Nigel Morris, the editor of this collection, is himself not only a contributor but also the author of the 23-page introduction and a definitive work on the cinema of Steven Spielberg (Morris, 2007) much quoted by many of his 27 fellow writers. Dr Morris, a Principal Lecturer specialising in film, television and media at the University of Lincoln in the UK, is joined by other recognised Spielberg scholars, such as Warren Buckland, Lester D. Friedman and Frederick Wasser, as well as a range of experts in other aspects of filmmaking from around the world. They stand at various stages in their academic careers, details of which, along with their publications, are included in detailed notes.

The book is divided into seven parts. Part 1, Industry and Agency, gives an overview of Spielberg's life as a director, producer and businessman and identifies some of the activities that identify the Spielberg "brand".

Part 2 looks at narration and style, examining early television and film work and using a wider range of examples, to show how particular films are constructed, narrated and ended. Part 3 is concerned with collaboration and intertextuality. Essays in this section deal with Spielberg's long-time partnership with John Williams, with Stanley Kubrick on the production of *A.I. Artificial Intelligence* and with author J.G. Ballard on the adaptation to the big screen of the novel *Empire of the Sun*. Part 4, Themes and Variations, deals with some of the issues that the director returns to regularly, for example, matters of family relationships, motherhood, fatherhood and dysfunctional elements of American suburbia. Steven Prince draws attention to the varieties and consequences of violence and the moral issues they raise in some of Spielberg's "serious" films. Part 5 on history and identity naturally follows on, looking at the way that Spielberg attempts to relate the violence of the past with the frustrations of the present and the possibilities of a better future. Part 6 on the Digital Age comprises two essays, one on Spielberg's use of special effects and the second on an area where his work is less well known, video games. The last section, Reception, discusses the critical response to Spielberg's films, how this might relate to their promotion, merchandising and popularity and his own role in raising the profile of movies and their creators within the context of popular culture.

About half of the authors have included shots from films or TV programmes within the text to enliven and illustrate their discussion, so it is unfortunate that some images seem not to have reproduced very well.

A useful chronological list of films and television episodes directed by Spielberg up to 2016 precedes the essays, which are followed by three indexes. The first of these lists page references to Spielberg's productions. It is interesting because it gives an idea about which of them have received most critical/scholarly attention within the book (*Close Encounters* . . . , *Jaws*, *E.T.* . . . , *Schindler's List*), while others (*Always*, the *Indiana Jones* series) are hardly mentioned. In the early days of Spielberg's career, some of these films would have been disregarded by some critics purely because of their popularity. The second index lists all films and TV programmes mentioned and incorporates those in index one.

The third index lists and differentiates real people and fictional characters. It includes names of authors listed in chapter reference lists. It also incorporates subjects, such as audiences, auteurism, family, fathers, Hollywood, tracking and so on. It is quite comprehensive, although there is no single entry for Steven Spielberg



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himself. So if one is interested in Spielberg's attitude to war, one might check all the entries for war, war film, World War II, *Schindler's List*, *Saving Private Ryan* and so on. Even though sexuality is not a subject that features to any great extent in Spielberg's films, it apparently does in *Munich*, but there is no reference to the discussion of it in Chapter 20. It seems to be subsumed under an entry for violence.

This collection covers the range of Spielberg's work and the contribution he has made to the nature of the film industry today. There is little on his private life and how this may have affected his work, though other publications are available on this. The book is obviously targeted at academics and students of film and media, although those with a more general interest in cultural or American studies might find it useful. Individual chapters stand alone and, while not an "easy read", for the most part contributors manage to avoid too much film theory jargon. Though nicely produced, aesthetically pleasing and weighing in at over a kilo, this is an expensive book, so one would expect it be purchased by libraries rather than individual students; presumably the publishers know their market.

Maurice Wakeham

Freelance reviewer, Chelmsford, UK

Reference

Morris, N. (2007), *The Cinema of Steven Spielberg: Empire of Light*, Wallflower, London.

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English Broadside Ballad Archive

University of California at Santa Barbara, Department of English
2003

URL: <https://ebba.english.ucsb.edu/>

Last visited July 2017 Gratis

Keywords English literature, History, Music, United Kingdom

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Clowne. What hast heere? Ballads?

Mopsa. Pray now buy some: I loue a ballet in print, a life, for then we are sure they are true.

Autolicus. Here's one, to a very dolefull tune, how a Vsurers wife was brought to bed of twenty money baggs at a burthen, and how she long'd to eate Adders heads, and Toads carbonado'd.

Mopsa. Is it true, thinke you?

Autolicus. Very true, and but a moneth old.

William Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale* (1609)
Broadside ballads, single-sided printed pages with woodcut illustrations, a poem and the

name of the tune that a singer could fit to the lyrics, conveyed the seventeenth-century-equivalent of today's viral memes. Ballads were written, sung and printed to publish news, to retell historical events and stories, to report crimes, to celebrate courtship and love and to wonder at natural and supernatural phenomena. The *English Broadside Ballad Archive (EBBA)* is a project to digitize all known seventeenth-century broadside ballads. In progress since 2003, *EBBA* is an exemplary digital humanities project that models digital sustainability and ambition in recreating and preserving musical knowledge for future generations.

As of July 2017, the archive included scans of 7,859 ballads, 74.85% of currently identified extant ballads, digitized from collections including the Pepys Collection at Magdalene College, the Roxburghe Ballads held at the British Library and collections from the University of Glasgow, the Huntington Library, the National Library of Scotland and Harvard University's Houghton Library. For those interested in a comprehensive search of ballads including earlier and later centuries, the collection is also searchable via the Bodleian Library's *Broadside Ballads Online* (<http://ballads.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/>), which encompasses both *EBBA* data and broadsides scanned from the Vaughan Williams Memorial Library collection. This is possible thanks to *EBBA*'s attention to ensuring files and metadata conform to the standards of the TEI and other digital best practices.

Because ballads were intended to be sung to well-known tunes, this project has created recordings for ballads where tunes are known. Details of the recording project are documented in an essay by James Revell Carr on the site. MP3 recordings may be played or downloaded, and Flash and Media Player options are available for in-browser use. Singers drawn from the UCSB student body and community bring a range of background and experience – per Carr, “some from conservatory backgrounds, some from folk music scenes, and yet others who work with groups like the Society for Creative Anachronism – and each has brought their own personality to the ballads they sing”.

The digitized images themselves often appear in two formats, the Ballad Sheet Facsimile and the Album Facsimile. It was common for collectors to cut apart ballads and paste them into albums. When the only source of a ballad sheet is from an album, *EBBA* researchers have used Adobe Photoshop to recreate original margins and layout following a protocol described on the site; the Album Facsimile image documents the original source as it was placed by the collector.