Studying The Bourne Ultimatum. Neil Archer. Leighton Buzzard: Auteur Publishing, 2012. ISBN: 978-1-906733-59-9. p/bk 120pp. £9.99.

This is one in a series of educational books which aim to offer an introduction to film studies through an analytical study of individual films. Neil Archer provides an in-depth study of *The Bourne Ultimatum* (2007) in particular, and the action/thriller film genre in general. As Archer makes clear, the Bourne trilogy of films has had a significant impact on the genre, and for this reason a study of the trilogy - their popularity, stylistics, and ideology - can serve to illustrate and explain not only conventions and development, but also the ways in which films represent and construct critiques of social and cultural narratives. Archer highlights how the Bourne trilogy of films has had a significant influence on the aesthetics, stylistics, and ideology of the revitalized James Bond franchise - a franchise that has tried to tap into the veracities of a post-Cold-War, globalized culture. Archer frequently returns to the James Bond films, by way of comparison, throughout his analysis and for good reason. The Bond films have, over the years, established a unique niche in the action/thriller genre and in cinema-going experiences. They are at one they are at one and the same time considered iconic Ur-texts in the action-thriller genre, and non-serious blockbuster entertainment. Into this niche and in this vein Archer introduces *The Bourne Ultimatum*, placing the film within ongoing debates about the seeming dichotomy of blockbuster entertainment, and "serious" film. He then shows how this dynamic relates to the ways in which audiences and critics alike approach and perceive certain films, and suggests that this too can be a starting point for analyzing *The Bourne Ultimatum* in particular. It is therefore understandable that references to critical reviews are made at the beginning, although a wealth of material available on audience/fan studies could have made this section stronger. I say this because this is clearly the work not only of an academic, but of a fan too. This preliminary, however, serves a wider purpose by foregrounding how disparate media and public perceptions of films in general, and of *The Bourne Ultimatum* in particular, are important elements of any analysis. In fact the real value of this study lies in its structure both as a template and guide not only in how to read films, but how analysis of films can be organized. Each chapter ends with a "Summary and Questions" section. Similarly, the chapters themselves illustrate the

processes and subject areas one would expect to find in any film theory course: aesthetics, stylistics, politics, milieu (urban), myth and ideology. There are also enough minutiae and detailed information about the films themselves to satisfy ardent fans, and Archer is particularly strong on the technical aspects of film, such as camera shots, visual narration through editing, and sound/music scores. Similarly, his decision to highlight the influence of director Paul Greengrass, and in particular the documentary-style aesthetics that Greengrass brings to *The Bourne Ultimatum*, provides an important point. It shows not just an understanding of how visual style can promote patterns of critical thinking, but an appreciation of how films do not exist in isolation. To this end Archer's discussion on the social and cultural context of production provides a brief and relatively recent history of American politics, and not surprisingly, the impact of 9/11, 7/7, Iraq, and Afghanistan on these types of narrative. But I would argue that the end of the Cold War (which Archer does mention) has had a far greater impact on the genre as a whole. The effects of a non-ideologically polarized world has had far-reaching effects on society in general and on modern identities in particular, creating a culture of amnesia and giving rise to transnational narratives of identity - a condition that is perfectly encapsulated in the themes of all three of the Bourne films.

Of extra interest are the original approaches that Archer takes in his study of the actual films in question. His discussion on the use of parkour (defined as an activity where the participant moves quickly through an area by surmounting walls and/or other obstacles), offers a useful alternative to the usual cinematic convention of the car chase scene, while also revealing the near-super-hero abilities of the main protagonist. Much of this study - its language and references - reflects a literary background and knowledge that may anticipate the learning experiences of his likely readers. But it may also reflect the dynamics and impact of more recent trends and practices in education, whereby film and literary studies have gradually found themselves on common ground, namely through textual readings and use of adaptations. As a consequence, there is much in the way of originality for a film study. For instance, Archer has no problem reimagining the Bourne trilogy in terms of Stendhal. Similarly, the term mimesis is preferred to the concept of realism, despite Archer making a case for these films constructing and representing critical concepts of contemporary society and culture. But Archer is always happier when

dealing with the visuals. And whilst there is no detailed analysis of film adaptation *per se*, Archer does briefly acknowledge the literary pedigree of these films as part of a wider appreciation of context. In fact Archer manages to cover a lot of ground, both in terms of film studies and textual analysis in this dedicated study of one particular film and genre. It is a useful introduction to film studies with some original ideas.

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