

the province and whether those views were consonant with the practice of slavery. Slave owners had a vision that “usually entailed working toward some kind of balance between disciplining, caring for, and making concessions ... to the slaves,” yet that vision was not reality. “Governing slaves and plantations ... actually served to secure the forced labor system and contain the resistance that system naturally produced” (115–16). However, the slave code in practice was brutal. The system was established to secure economic wellbeing. All blacks were considered slaves unless they could prove otherwise. Again, the code aimed to limit cruelty to slaves, but “cruelty” was defined in the slave owner’s terms. For example, there was no penalty for an owner who accidentally killed a slave, who was being punished (119–20).

Palmer sums his findings concerning the elite political authority in South Carolina in the years leading up to the revolution in a nine-pages-long epilogue. One of the most significant findings is the political and social conservatism of South Carolina at the time of the revolution. Thus, “it is difficult to see the revolution—at least in this colony—as the transformative stage in the creation of liberal democracy or a moment when ‘Americans suddenly saw themselves as a new society ideally equipped for a republican future’” (284). The target is none other than Gordon Wood. It is just one more reminder of the significance of “small” or “parochial” studies such as Palmer’s. They remind us to be cautious of sweeping generalizations concerning complex phenomena such as the American Revolution.

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**Terence McSweeney, *The “War on Terror” and American Film: 9/11 Frames Per Second*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. 2014. 242 pp. ISBN 978-0-74869309-2.**

Several books have been written about the war on terror already, from anthologies like *Reframing 9/11 Film* (of which McSweeney himself is part) to monographs like Peter Markert’s both exhaustive and superficial *Post 9/11 Cinema: Through a Lens Darkly* (2011). McSweeney’s monograph manages to be survey-like without losing analytical depth. It is grounded in a rather sweeping assertion; that “American film in the first decade of

the new millennium became a war of representation and nothing less than ‘the locus for America’s negotiation of September 11 and its aftermath’” (9). While one could come up with numerous examples that counter this assertion, McSweeney narrowed the definition of a post-9/11 film to mean films that “resonate with the decade” (22). While this is not a very specific definition, the breadth of genres that McSweeney discusses and analyzes serves to validate his claim and to flesh out his definition. One of the central aims of the book build from the notion of films as “fractured entities” full of “omissions and silences.” McSweeney want to open up the fractures in the various films “by suggesting how these texts might be connected to the era” (23). Underlying this premise is that film (and popular culture in general) is capable of “influencing our understanding of real-life events” (25). And a central question in prying open the selected films is to what extent they feed into what McSweeney calls “a cinema of disrememberment and mythologisation” (27).

So not only does McSweeney discuss actual 9/11 films like *World Trade Center* and *United 93*, but he also provides a clear overview of various genres affected by 9/11: combat films, action films, superhero films, alien-invasion films, zombie films, and historical films. Each chapter begins broadly, mentioning a range of genre films and how they support the arguments that McSweeney then builds up in in-depth analyses of a few films.

Chapter 1 focuses on vulnerability in post-9/11 films through in-depth analyses of *Zero Dark Thirty*, *United 93*, and *Syriana*. Chapter 2 deals with the new combat films and has two subchapters; one discussing *Act of Valour* and *The Hurt Locker* and one about *Battle for Haditha* and *Redacted*. McSweeney makes the convincing argument that *The Hurt Locker*, despite a general consensus of it being a both realistic and psychologically nuanced film, is, in effect, a close cousin to the jingoistic and simplistic *Act of Valor*: Beneath the “detailed and intimate narrative” McSweeney sees an apolitical and ahistorical film that is at heart “a rather reactionary treatise that emphasizes the humanitarian role of the American military” (67). Not surprisingly, *Battle for Haditha* and *Redacted* are presented as much more complex counter narratives to the trend of mythologization.

In Chapter 3 the focus is on the action genre and the theme of redemption through violence. The films discussed are *Rambo*, *The Expendables*, *Taken* as well as the new James Bond films and the Jason Bourne franchise. McSweeney convincingly shows how the action genre has incorporated the discourse of the war on terror into its narratives, by including

post-9/11 debates on masculinity, the legitimacy of revenge as well as the role of the US in international affairs. McSweeney then moves to the challenging American mythology in the superhero genre, which is the topic for Chapter 4. Through analyses of primarily *The Dark Knight* trilogy and the recent Marvel Universe films. McSweeney argues that these films “perform a distinct cultural and sociological function by embodying myths in conspicuously realized forms” (114). He thereby goes against a common critique of superhero films, in particular, as escapist fantasy fare and argues instead that they not merely reproduce our desires, but as often also deconstruct them.

The next two chapters focus on alien-invasion films and zombie films. The former group is represented by *War of the Worlds* and *Cloverfield*, and the premise for McSweeney’s analysis is that these films, especially in their figurative and literal realizations of an alien Other “provide yet another manifestation of the particular fears and fantasies that characterized the decade” (137). As for the zombie films, McSweeney sees the return of the genre as “one of the most remarkable changes in American horror cinema” (162), and he reads Romero’s *Land of the Dead* and *Diary of the Dead* as well as *I am Legend* as films whose proximity to 9/1 and the war on terror render the genre’s recurrent fear of civilization’s collapse more powerful.

The final chapter figures allegorical readings of the war on terror historical film, in this case *The Eagle*, *King Arthur*, *300*, and *The Alamo*. While these films vary widely, McSweeney’s treats them as “discursive events” (177), that is, as stories “defined by their modern perspectives on the past” (177). Through this allegorical prism, McSweeney convincingly shows how the United States remains the focus of the films.

While the discussions and the analyses of the films are well-supported, McSweeney at times lapses into overarching assertions that he fails to back up convincingly, such as his claim that the “vicious and merciless aliens” in Spielberg’s *War of the Worlds* are “quite intentionally framed to evoke Islamic fundamentalists” (142). Thankfully, most of the arguments and conclusions are convincing and at times surprising, resulting in a fresh take on several films and their relation to 9/11.

I was left wondering about the absence of certain films (no mention of *Green Zone*, in the combat film chapter and only a brief mention of the *Spider-Man* films in the super hero chapter). It never becomes clear why some films are worthy of in-depth analysis and others not—and some are not even mentioned. Likewise, the films receiving brief mention do so in

bullet point paragraphs that seem oddly disconnected from the text surrounding them. But this is a minor flaw in what is otherwise an engaging and critically lucid monograph.

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