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***The Three Amigos: The Transnational Filmmaking of Guillermo del Toro, Alejandro González Iñárritu and Alfonso Cuarón*. Deborah Shaw. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013 (270 pages). ISBN: 978-0-7190-9759-1.**

A Review by Elliot Hardman, Liverpool Hope University

The Three Amigos charts the careers of three of the most prominent contemporary Mexican filmmakers: Guillermo del Toro, Alejandro González Iñárritu, and Alfonso Cuarón, and their emergence as international filmmakers. Part of the *Spanish and Latin American Filmmakers* series edited by Núria Triana Toribio and Andy Willis, the book provides "the first comprehensive academic analysis of some of the most significant films" from these three directors (15). Deborah Shaw describes these three filmmakers as having "global auteurist ambitions that Mexico, with its limited funding possibilities, has not been able to accommodate" (1). This scenario is the central focus of Shaw's study, which traces the auteurist ambitions of these three filmmakers and shows how their work reveals filmmakers' navigation of "the global channels of film production, distribution, and exhibition" (2). Each of these Mexican filmmakers has been forced by the limited financial scope of their national film industry, and by their own ambitions, to seek projects abroad, most notably in the US. While *The Three Amigos* serves as a detailed assessment of these filmmakers, it also provides insight into the global film industry as it stands today. Through an analysis of films such as *Pan's Labyrinth* (*El laberinto del fauno*, Guillermo del Toro, 2006), *Y Tu Mamá También* (Alfonso Cuarón, 2001), and *Babel* (Alejandro González Iñárritu, 2006), Shaw examines these directors' transnational film productions to reveal their use of the international styles, generic forms and global consciousness which, with Hollywood collaboration, allowed them to foster their own global auteur status.

The three filmmakers are quite different to one another, with each pursuing diverse genres and styles of filmmaking and gaining varying degrees of critical acclaim and recognition. Nevertheless, Shaw makes a strong case for their critical consideration within one text, discussing genres from horror to fantasy and science fiction, the interactions between mainstream Hollywood cinema and independent and art cinema, and both adapted and original screenplays. Shaw provides the reader with thoughtful and fresh perspectives on these subjects and addresses these complexities in a clear and concise manner for the benefit of the reader. The greatest strength of this text is its incisive theoretical approach, outlined in the introductory chapter. Shaw argues that "the diverse national, production, and generic contexts in which the directors have worked require new ways of thinking about cinema" (7). To address this, Shaw bases her study in new conceptualisations of auteurism and transnational film theory that enable her to appreciate the nuance of film authorship and the complexities of transnational film production. For instance, Shaw readily engages in discussions of these directors along with their writers, cinematographers and other collaborators to deconstruct their authorial status. Shaw's application of a transnational perspective is at the centre of this text, and its discussion of these diasporic filmmakers addresses careers which have spanned the globe, including Mexican, Hollywood and North American independent productions, as well as other international coproductions.

The Three Amigos gives broad consideration to a number of aspects of film criticism, including issues of genre hybridity, narrative form, film adaptation, fan studies, and even

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some paratextual analysis. Shaw's assessment of the current literature in all of these fields is extensive and thorough. The text meaningfully engages with a multitude of theoretical approaches to film criticism and fully accounts for the complexity inherent in any study of transnational film and film authorship, and is critical of the privileging of the director and of defining these filmmakers as "transnational directors" (11).

The book is divided into three sections, each dedicated to one filmmaker and consisting of three chapters examining pivotal moments in their careers. Beginning with "Guillermo del Toro: The Alchemist", the first section discusses del Toro's beginnings in Mexico and the development of his generic style as he starts to work in Hollywood and Europe. More specifically, the first chapter introduces the director through his first film, *Cronos* (1993), and examines "the way it questions the fixity of borders while also making a political statement on US–Mexican relations" (20). Shaw establishes del Toro's authorial characteristics by arguing that "*Cronos* is the key film that unlocks the codes of the director's body of work in terms of his approach to filmmaking" (38) and argues that his "moral and thematic universe" and visual style originated in this film (41). In the second chapter, Shaw discusses del Toro's move into Hollywood with *Hellboy II: The Golden Army* (2008) and builds upon the previous chapter to consider how the director hones his style when working on larger productions. Here, Shaw engages usefully with adaptation theory and also considers fan studies perspectives to illustrate how del Toro is able to maintain his authorial status when adapting Mike Mignola's pre-existing *Hellboy* franchise. The final chapter then addresses how *Pan's Labyrinth* "has allowed del Toro to realise his creative potential, unencumbered by the budgetary limitations of *Cronos* or the rules governing Hollywood-funded genre products" (67). Shaw here best demonstrates the value of transnational film theory when discussing a film that unites Mexican filmmakers, Spanish locations and talent, and Hollywood financing and international distribution. This opening section establishes Shaw's theoretical approach and provides thoughtful and invigorating insight into del Toro's career.

The second section, "Alejandro González Iñárritu: Independent Filmmaker", discusses the first three films from Iñárritu with a particular emphasis on international film styles and narrative form. In the first chapter, Shaw discusses how *Amores Perros* (2003) gained international acclaim through the use of techniques adapted from international cinema. Despite the wealth of literature on *Amores Perros*, Shaw still provides a fresh assessment of the film through a consideration of Eleftheria Thanouli's discussion of "post-classical" narrative style, contrasted with David Bordwell's criticism of the term. Shaw argues that the film's international film language presents a transnational Mexico, ensuring that "this 'national' film enters into transnational circulation" (96). The following chapter argues that *21 Grams* (2003) challenges first- and third-world paradigms by applying the narrative style inherited from *Amores Perros* to Iñárritu and his team's independent American film. In the final chapter of this section, Shaw makes a rather critical assessment of *Babel*, highlighting its problematic engagement with discourses of globalisation and its Hollywood production elements, arguing that the star casting undermines its "contrived" (152) and "superficial" (153) narrative.

In the third and final section, "Alfonso Cuarón: A Study of Auteurism in Flux", Shaw offers her assessment of Cuarón, of whom she is particularly critical. She challenges Cuarón's limitations in his earlier films and queries the new stylistic direction he adopts in *Y Tu Mamá También* and subsequent films. The first chapter of this section discusses his first film produced in Mexico and his subsequent career in Hollywood. Serving as an introduction

to the following two chapters, this chapter does not analyse these early films in great detail but rather positions them as the cause of the director's efforts to avoid categorisation as a director-for-hire. The subsequent chapter builds upon this foundation to explore how Cuarón attempts to reaffirm his status as a global auteur through his adaptation of Hollywood genres and use of the touristic gaze in *Y Tu Mamá También*. However, Shaw's stance remains critical, and she claims that Cuarón's realist techniques are "filtered through an awareness of commercial imperatives" (195). The final chapter considers *Children of Men* (2006) as "an ideal model case study for a transnational film" as well as the culmination of the director's efforts to cultivate his authorial status (202). Shaw argues that the film demonstrates the "combination of big budget effects with a guerrilla filmmaking approach" (208), utilising transnational modes of narration together with the conventions of popular genres such as science fiction to produce a social realist film with "a hero who can save the day" (209). This final chapter is also distinct for its engagement with the film's accompanying documentary, *The Possibility of Hope* (2007). In discussing the various critiques of globalisation present in the documentary, as well as in Cuarón's filmography, this final chapter also resonates with the rest of the book, making for a thematic conclusion at once to Iñárritu's engagement with globalisation discourses and to del Toro's transcultural fantasies.

Thus, *The Three Amigos* does not catalogue the entire careers of these three filmmakers, but rather considers the essence of their approaches to filmmaking, and concludes that they are intricately intertwined with the nature of the global film industry and the abilities of these filmmakers to thrive within it. However, the text does not take account of more recent work by the three filmmakers. For example, recent developments such as cinematographer Emmanuel Lubezki's choice to work on two successful films with Iñárritu over past collaborator Cuarón are not addressed. Despite this, the strength of Shaw's rigorous research, the cogency of her writing, and the book's strong theoretical underpinning make for a text that contributes to an understanding of the intersection between auteurist and transnational film discourses. Ultimately, the book is critical of the separation between independent cinema and mainstream cinema, and of that between global cinema and US cinema; it highlights auteurist identities as a "flexible label" constructed by texts, paratexts, critical discourses, and the filmmakers themselves (225).

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