

Review of *Guillermo del Toro: Film as Alchemic Art*

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Abstract

This is the first book length scholarly consideration of del Toro's work and it will certainly not be the last as del Toro continues to prove himself as one of the most interesting and rewarding filmmakers working today. McDonald and Clark's book lays a solid foundation for whatever work may follow in this impressive and comprehensive reading of del Toro's cinema.

Keywords: Guillermo del Toro, queer cinema, science fiction film, fantasy



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Review of McDonald Keith and Clark, Roger, Guillermo del Toro: Film as Alchemic Art. New York: Bloomsbury Publishing Inc., 2014. 233 pp. ISBN 9781441124494.

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Guillermo del Toro exemplifies a new type of auteur that has adapted as an artist to the social networking era and contemporary transnational cinema. Keith McDonald and Roger Clark's approach to del Toro accepts the Mexican born director as such, investigating both the roles he plays within Hollywood and the international cinema community and also providing explorations of each of his eight films to date. As a scholar of Del Toro myself, I found my understanding of this filmmaker enriched by readings of his works that I have never considered and furthermore, my comprehension of contemporary auteurism expanded.

McDonald and Clark have divided this analysis into two sections. The first part covers the themes and topics repeatedly returned to in del Toro's cinema and the contexts in which he works, including a detailed and well argued assertion of his literary (Dickens, Carroll, etc), artistic (Goya, Man Ray, etc.), and cinematic influences (*Spirit of the Beehive* [1973], Hammer Horror, etc.), his active role in the fan community, his operations in Hollywood, transnational and art cinema, and also a consideration of the director's work operating within Queer cinema. The authors' thorough delineations of the equal, weighty influence of Hitchcock and Buñuel on del Toro establishes the director being equal at home in genre and art cinema, arguing that valuing one over the other minimizes one's capability to see del Toro's personal touches in films such as *Blade II* (2002), *Mimic* (1997), *Pacific Rim* (2013) and the *Hellboy* films (2004 and 2008). This discussion lasts throughout the book, initiating convincing claims in the chapters on del Toro and fandom and transnational cinema in understanding presently working

auteurs in a new light, capable, as artists never have been before, of interacting with their audiences in unprecedentedly direct methods.

The reading of del Toro's relationship to Queer cinema is ultimately distracting because there is either too much or too little of this contention. The authors do not devote enough space to this approach to the director to persuade us of its validity. There are certainly promising signs for a more fleshed out and satisfying argument in this direction (for example, the transformation of horror as represented in both *Cronos* (1993) and *Blade II* after the HIV and Aids epidemics) but perhaps they would be better made in a separate text that does not stretch the other approaches already provided in this book.

The second section provides a close analysis of individual films paired together by similarity, oft running in a mostly chronological pattern from *Cronos* to *Pacific Rim*. In these chapters, McDonald and Clark explore del Toro's transformations and hybrid combinations of genre, including his book series, *The Strain* trilogy, co-written with Chuck Hogan, and unfinished passion projects such as his work on the recent *Hobbit* films and his adaptation of H.P. Lovecraft's "At the Mountains of Madness." The authors provide ample evidence for the influences cited and their readings of individual scenes in each film, furthering their claims made in the book's first section.

As far as I am aware this is the first book length scholarly consideration of del Toro's work and it will certainly not be the last as del Toro continues to prove himself as one of the most interesting and rewarding filmmakers working today. McDonald and Clark's book lays a solid foundation for whatever work may follow in this impressive and comprehensive reading of del Toro's cinema.