



Differences in the Dark

Michael T. Gilmore

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George Bernard Shaw once quipped that America and England are two cultures separated by a common language. In this innovative attempt to place the movies and theater in the larger context of American and English cultural differences, Michael Gilmore demonstrates that the most interesting way to understand the distinctions between the two cultures is by looking closely at each country's favorite art form.

Differences in the Dark is a fresh, wide-ranging look at the meaning of America's fascination with movies and movie stars, and the way the soul of Britain is reflected in its tenacious love affair with the stage.

Gilmore shows how the characteristic features of American experience are inscribed in how movies, the quintessentially American idiom, are made and viewed. In the private, solitary nature of film-viewing (in contrast to the more communal, interactive experience of seeing a play), and in American actors' tendency to play themselves, not their characters, from role to role, American movies express a strong sense of individualism and a tendency to escape the limits of time for the freedom of space. An art form built of sophisticated technology and cutting and splicing of time and space, Gilmore argues, resonates deeply in the country of reinvented lives and wide-open spaces.

At the same time, the English tradition of class and collective memory is perfectly served by an art form that requires disciplined memorization and the submergence of the individual within a role that, in many cases, existed before the actor was born. Unlike the mechanical products of Hollywood or Disneyland, drama by its very nature cannot be mass-produced.

Bringing together such diverse topics as theme parks, realism, and social class, as well as the role of Jewish immigrants in the making of Hollywood (and their virtual exclusion from Great Britain) and the connection between the movies and the African-American community, *Differences in the Dark* is one of the most original and engaging cross-cultural studies to appear in many years.



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