

Portals: Exploring Films within Films

A review by James Lyons, Guest Editor, University of Bristol, UK

Introduction

This special edition of the *Scope* film reviews section has, appropriately enough, two sources of inspiration. The first was a film review written for the journal by Will Brooker (included in this collection), which found *Helix*, the "film" that Julia Roberts' character stars in within *Notting Hill* more fascinating than *Notting Hill* itself. The second was the release of Joel and Ethan Coen's *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*, which set out to make the socially conscious film that the Hollywood director John L. Sullivan (Joel McCrea) is planning at the start of Preston Sturges' 1941 satire *Sullivan's Travels*. Taken together, these events indicated that it might be an apposite moment for *Scope* to consider the phenomenon of films within films. The journal invited contributors to examine the ways in which films within films offered portals into promised cinematic worlds. The result is an eclectic range of reviews which reveal some of the possibilities offered by considering the myriad roles of films within films. The reviews uncover some of the ways in which such portals can provide, however fleetingly, alternative perspectives on issues such as star image, genre, spectatorship, celebrity, authorship, film history, and the film industry. While it could be argued that all films, in one way or another, are "about" other films, *Portals* explores a very explicit form of cinematic dialogism, and one worth considering for its resulting variety of intriguing and thought-provoking celluloid vistas.