Universal Women: Filmmaking and Institutional Change in Early Hollywood (review)

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In the final chapter, Muller takes on the question of nationalism. He mainly deals with Zionism, overlooking other forms of Jewish nationalism, especially that of the Jewish Bund that until the Holocaust was much more dominant in large centers of Jewish life in eastern Europe. The discussion of the Zionist socialist Ber Borochov and the social theorist Ernest Gellner's conceptions of ethno-nationalism under capitalism is stimulating, but clearly, there is much more to be said here about the multifaceted interplay between nationalism and capitalism in the Jewish context.

Despite its drawbacks, *Capitalism and the Jews* is an important study that affords readers a lucid and extremely accessible analysis of what is no doubt a central topic in Jewish and western history. It is a welcome addition that joins recent efforts to make us more aware of the significance of the economy for our understanding of the modern Jewish experience.

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Mark Garrett Cooper. *Universal Women: Filmmaking and Institutional Change in Early Hollywood*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010. ix +230 pp. ISBN 978-0-252-03522-7, $93.59 (cloth); 978-0-252-07700-5, $25.00 (paper).

In a crucial 2004 essay in *Cinema Journal*, "Film History and the Two Presents of Feminist Film Theory," Jane Gaines pointed to a double-edged historical puzzle facing feminist film scholars with respect to early cinema history. That is, how to explain the rapid rise and fall of women's influence in the international film industry during the silent era as well as the failure of "second wave" feminist film scholars to examine this phenomenon (as part of the emergence of a powerful subfield within the discipline). Feminist scholarship on early cinema has increased dramatically in the twenty-first century with ongoing "discoveries" of women's central role in this era. However, as Gaines notes, this neither explains the original erasure by the film industry or subsequent one by groundbreaking scholarship focused primarily on how the screen itself relays structures of gendered representation (113). To confront this two-sided riddle, Gaines suggests not so much a counter-narrative to film history—a causal chain that illuminates

the mystery (a given agent or institutional force) but rather a counter *theory* of history that challenges linear explanation (178).

Mark Garrett Cooper's *Universal Women: Filmmaking and Institutional Change in Hollywood* can be seen as an exemplary effort both to address the first side of the puzzle as well as to write a history informed by the theoretical challenge posed by Gaines. The result is a stellar analysis of women filmmakers' rise and fall within the context of the Universal Film Manufacturing Company, an organization where women directors, such as Lois Weber, Grace Cunard, Ida May Park and Elsie Jane Wilson, were particularly prominent. Weaving together industry and social history, feminist theory and history, textual analysis, and organization theory, Cooper meticulously explores the complex intersection of factors that led Universal to move from being the leading employer of women directors in the mid-teens to their subsequent marginalization and elimination from directorial ranks by the end of 1919. As an introductory précis, one might say that Cooper's case study maps out and isolates the development of genre in the feature film as the main culprit behind the female filmmaker's demise in the industry. But such a summary leaves out the key component of feminist theory in Cooper's analysis as it is the performative and connected roles of genre and gender that seal women's fate in the silent era. That is to say, it is the shifting nature of both these terms in relation to a series of complicated business and social necessities that best illuminate this history. Women's roles as directors changed at Universal as the very notion of director and genre changed—from *efficient* storyteller in highly branded (name recognition) but loosely generic forms (comedies, westerns, dramas) to *specialized* storyteller of distinct genres ("domestic dramas") directed to a given audience, that is, women. Paralleling this new formation of film genre as highly specific, narrative forms by the end of the teens were also a changed understanding of the director as now generically masculine. Intersecting with this particular understanding of gender roles at Universal were also broader cultural definitions of gender as well as social shifts in women's labor possibilities to increasingly domestically defined spaces (and removed from the business context). The key to Cooper's analysis is that no one factor was determinate or indeed that women's plight in the film industry was inevitable. Rather as he notes, it is best to see Universal "both as an historical actor and as a site of struggle" (173); an institution that both shaped and was shaped by a variety of forces.

The significance of Cooper's study is perhaps most constructively viewed in relation to two other valuable histories on this topic, Anthony Slide's *The Silent Feminists* (1996) and Karen Mahar's *Women Filmmakers in Silent Hollywood* (2008) and the puzzle offered

by Gaines with which we began. Slide's vital research on early women directors focuses primarily on the individual biography. While he does offer various explanations of women's demise in the filmmaking ranks during this era, the reasons are mainly personal and generational. Ideology enters in, however, when Slide turns his attention to the second part of Gaines's puzzle. Here, Slide attributes the historical gap to contemporary feminist politics, that is, these early filmmakers were not feminists, hence the oversight. Institutional questions, whether on the film industry or film history (i.e., scholarship) side, are secondary in his account so that counter histories are not only rare but also logically so (since both would require exceptional individuals). In contrast, Karen Mahar's more recent work takes on a more institutional and cultural focus, whereby women's role in the industry shifts with the social discourse on gender. Thus women's role increased in the film industry when there was a need for "uplift" and social legitimacy (and parallel women's reform movements) and decreased as censors and film business saw the "New Woman" as the threat to social and financial stability. Mahar's account provides an excellent insight into the social landscape of the era, but the broad brushstrokes of "culture" as a methodological framework, as Cooper notes in his book, lend a certain inevitability to women's erasure from history.

The power of history is its explanatory power, but that explanation, like any good story, need not be singular or linear. Cooper's book takes us through a complex network of forces that shape women's filmmaking history in the silent era and provides one alternative for writing history that answers Gaines's call.

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James Onley. *The Arabian Frontier of the British Raj: Merchants, Rulers, and the British in the Nineteenth Century Gulf*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. viii and 352 pp. ISBN 978-0-19-922810-2, $165 (cloth).

In this well-written and thoroughly researched book, James Onley, Director of Gulf Studies and Lecturer in Middle Eastern History at the University of Exeter, has answered a question often posed (but rarely answered satisfactorily) by students and observers of pre-twentieth- century Gulf history. The question concerns the seemingly