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Jens Ulf-Møller, *Hollywood's Film Wars with France: Film Trade Diplomacy and the Emergence of the French Film Quota Policy*. Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2001. xix + 202 pp. Figures, tables, illustrations, notes, bibliography, and index. \$65.00 U.S. (cl.) ISBN 1-58046-086-0.

Review by Susan Weiner, Yale University.

We think of it as the global appetite for Hollywood movies. According to historical as well as corporate wisdom, big-budget productions that feature glamorous stars and serve up comfortable variations on narrative formulae make for an esthetic with universal appeal. Among national cinemas that have developed in competition with Hollywood, the history of the French film industry stands among the more dramatic cases. [1] On the heels of the Lumière brothers' first public projected screening of moving pictures in Paris in 1895, the American studios' invention of the "talkies" in the late 1920s forever altered the economics and esthetics of the cinematic field. The obsolescence of silent film has even come to figure as one of the handy metaphors for the larger relations between French and American culture, as if these relations were only a matter of old world versus new. Think Jacques Tati's *Mon Oncle* without the irony. Jens Ulf-Møller looks beyond film history's familiar nexus of esthetics and technology to factors equally determinative to Hollywood's domination of French screens. As demonstrated in his carefully documented *Hollywood's Film Wars With France: Film Trade Diplomacy and the Emergence of the French Film Quota Policy*, America's larger than fair share of the French film market was never simply a question of French appetite. The imbalance has rather been the result of the strategic and not always ethical workings of American foreign trade policy and of a French political and economic response best described as incoherent.

Ulf-Møller's history is that of French and American diplomats and businessmen and of their respective institutional strategies in the film industry's formative years to promote and protect each of their national cinemas on French terrain. He devotes much of the book to uncovering the archival trail of American protectionist policies that led to the French campaign to institute a screen quota on Hollywood exports in the late 1920s. These practices included, most notably, monopoly—illegal on domestic soil by virtue of the Sherman Antitrust Act (1890), yet legally exportable according to the Webb-Pomerene Act (1918). The policy loophole functioned for all exports, but proved especially beneficial to the film industry after World War I. Through Hollywood's distribution and exhibition strategies of block booking and blind selling in France, competition from French national cinema was effectively eliminated. French movie theaters had to rent American films in blocks, and exhibitors were even required to book American films that hadn't yet been made. Blind selling was outlawed in France in 1934, and block booking in the 1950s, but not before the imbalance in screen time between French and American films was facilitated by the short-sightedness of the French state.

While American institutions strategized economic expansion of the film sector in the interwar years, European authorities both local and national transferred a centuries-old mistrust of theater to the moving image. This was particularly unfortunate for France, whose national product had dominated the (admittedly meager) world market prior to World War I. According to Ulf-Møller, by looking back instead of forward, French bureaucrats contributed to arresting the new medium's development. Onerous state-imposed amusement taxes, along with local and national censorship, meant that

exhibitors were disinclined to promote French cinema and indeed favored Hollywood products for their theaters. In a trade agreement that proved to be disastrous for France's artisanal film industry, restrictions on Hollywood imports were softened in exchange for tariff reductions on French alcohol, whose profitability in the American market seemed unbeatable—until the Prohibition years. Strategic thinking about national cinema only took hold in France in the mid-1920s, largely within European initiatives to resist American block-booking and blind selling through coproductions and reciprocal distribution agreements. Interestingly, France and Germany would have been the anchor for what distributor Louis Aubert conjured up as a "United States of Europe" (p. 79). For the State Department, the very idea of a European film trust carried with it the seeds of "discrimination against American products" (p. 79): grounds to step in and join forces with Hollywood in promoting and protecting American cinema in France.

In chapters on cinema law, export trade legislation and administration, and Franco-American film diplomacy, Ulf-Møller follows the archival trail of the conflict from World War I through the aftermath of the Blum-Byrnes agreement on screen quotas for Hollywood exports to France. His sources include the archives of production companies, the American Departments of Commerce and State, and the French, Danish, and American press. Ulf-Møller is particularly interested in international negotiations of quota plans and the activities of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA, 1922-1945). The personal archive of MPPDA president Will H. Hays contributes strongly to Ulf-Møller's case for the focus on France in what was also the experience of other European countries. MPPDA headquarters were located in Paris, which meant that American commercial film policy was especially well-organized there. A small detail of the everyday workings of the Paris offices provides for a real sense of the tone of the American film industry's economic and political presence. The MPPDA was staffed by high-ranking army officers, who continued to address each other by rank. The situation itself is worthy of a screenplay; one can practically imagine the dialogue. It is astonishing to see how readily structures came into place after World War I to make the export of Hollywood movies an intervention that retained a military cast.

With a title like *Hollywood's Film Wars With France*, a reader would hope for a larger conceptual framework within which to place the military tone of these economic confrontations. The elements for just such a framework run throughout Ulf-Møller's book. His research has repeatedly yielded the use of the rhetoric of war to describe Franco-American tensions over film quotas. To cite just a few examples, in 1917 a Danish article described Hollywood's expansion in Europe as a military conquest marked by invasions, battles, and victories (p. 24), and according to the *New York Times* in 1926, "[I]n the face of the overwhelming prosperity of the American film industry, any attempt at fighting back would seem to be like a pygmy up against a giant" (p. 78). Ulf-Møller himself observes that "the American model was [instead] one of economic warfare... The policy was a continuation of World War I with economic weapons" (p. 68). In the opening lines of the book's introduction, Ulf-Møller quotes remarks made in 1997 by Jack Valenti, current director of the Motion Picture Association of America. The point of Ulf-Møller's book is precisely to disprove the industry stance and commonplace Valenti expresses: that Hollywood only gives the people, the world over, what they want. In Valenti's dramatic words, "We dominate world screens—not because of armies, bayonets, or nuclear bombs, but because what we are exhibiting on foreign screens [is what] the people of those countries want to see" (p. xii). But Valenti's recourse to the language of military maneuver decades after the generals and corporals who staffed the MPPDA offices merits attention as well. His is simply the most recent example of a discursive strategy that has been at work in the Franco-American conflict over film quotas since the 1920s.

Yet Ulf-Møller does not take full advantage of the apparent rhetorical dimension of Hollywood's film wars with France, and the conceptual framework promised in the title is lacking. This is evident on the level of individual chapters, which do not reach conclusion and often give the impression of transcription from the archives, as well as in the book's conclusion, which does little more than summarize. Even in the absence of analysis, the book remains fascinating in the thoroughness of Ulf-

Møller's account of this neglected and essential chapter in Franco-American relations. *Hollywood's Film Wars with France*, like Richard Kuisel's *Seducing the French*, will interest scholars of contemporary Franco-American economic relations. It is also an important complement to the works of film historians such as Georges Sadoul's *Histoire générale du cinéma*, Jean-Pierre Jeancolas's *Quinze ans d'années trente*, Richard Abel's *The Ciné Goes to Town*, and Dudley Andrew's *Mists of Regret*.^[2] An impressive work of scholarship, although conceptually underdeveloped, *Hollywood's Film Wars with France* will surely prove essential to both of these fields.

NOTES

[1] Dudley Andrew, *Mists of Regret: Culture and Sensibility in Classic French Film* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 7.

[2] Richard Abel, *The Ciné Goes to Town: French Cinema, 1896-1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); Dudley Andrew, *Mists of Regret: Culture and Sensibility in Classic French Film* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995); Jean-Pierre Jeancolas, *Quinze ans d'années trente: le cinéma des français, 1929-1944* (Paris: Stock, 1983); Richard F. Kuisel, *Seducing the French: The Dilemma of Americanization* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993); Georges Sadoul, *Histoire générale du cinéma* (Paris: Denoel, 1946).

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