

## Book Reviews

Daniela Berghahn. *Hollywood Behind the Wall: The History of East German Cinema*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005. Pp. 294. Cloth \$74.95.

*Hollywood Behind the Wall* is a rich narrative of the history of East German Cinema. Daniela Berghahn offers both a structural description of how a state-run movie industry operated in a socialist state as well as artistic criticisms of the movies produced throughout the life of the German Democratic Republic (GDR). The author shows a film tradition that incorporated the legacies of Germany's dubious past. To be sure, the productions of the *Deutsche Film Aktiengesellschaft* (DEFA) were much like the history of the GDR: heavily influenced by interests that fell outside the realm of its immediate concerns, and therefore, its movies became less cultural reflection and more propagandist tool.

Film's instrumental role in the course of East German history is substantiated by the immediate function it played during the Soviet occupation. To that end, the Soviets were fortunate to have received the lion's share of Germany's film capacity, with nearly seventy five percent of the industry in their hands. Although far from the fascist dream factory, the need for the creation of a socialist mentality in the communist zone of occupation perpetuated an atmosphere of suspicion around Western imports and, in turn, the hegemony of Soviet propaganda prevailed.

The thematic organization of the book follows the linear narrative of East German films. The first two chapters construct the backdrop of the political and cultural landscape, the next several show the maturity of the DEFA into a semi-autonomous entity complete with its own artistic dogma. Chapter five demonstrates a societal need for the influence of the feminine perspective. Indeed, the state-run enterprise proved to be a canvas for the release of pressures that were prevalent in the life of ordinary citizens throughout the GDR. In the latter half of the Cold War, however, the state came under increasing pressure from filmmakers to produce work that portrayed the history and identity of Germany without the presence of communist doctrine to dictate the terms by which creativity could be channeled.

The little brother mentality that dominated the course of the GDR's political life saw the eventual liberalization of the film industry after the Soviet Union initiated many reforms under the leadership Mikhail Gorbachev after 1985. As Berghahn points out, "Everywhere filmmakers demanded that films which had been banned, often decades ago, be taken off the shelves and shown at last." State censorship failed to create the utopian vision as prescribed through Socialist Realism.

Berghahn attempts a comprehensive overview of the DEFA's cinematic works, as they were produced in the communist state. The use of comparative figures by Berghahn suggests, however, that the industry was relatively weak next to the West and other eastern satellites. Nevertheless, that fact does not detract from the richness of the DEFA's productions; these films were representative of a unique culture. That culture, on the other hand, essentially outgrew the structure provided in the DEFA, and the GDR, as a whole, crumbled soon.

—Nick Szamet

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Frank L. Holt. *Into the Land of Bones: Alexander the Great in Afghanistan*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006. Pp. 260. Paper \$14.95.

Frank L. Holt, an ancient history scholar renowned for his expertise on Alexander the Great, uses the Afghan exploits of the world's greatest general to paint a sobering picture of what today's troops can expect as they traverse the same hostile landscape. Written just after the U.S. had invaded Afghanistan as a result of the 9-11 attacks, this work aims to place the present in a broader historic perspective, arguing that our recent invasion is not actually a new war but simply a continuation of the same war Alexander started in 329 BCE. He begins by quoting Alexander's call to arms against Bactria (the ancient name for Afghanistan), which imbues a strange sense of déjà vu in the reader; perhaps President Bush's speechwriters used Alexander's rhetoric for inspiration. Our army is similar to Alexander's in terms of superior sophistication and logistics, yet neither army has found those to be victorious traits. Part of the difficulty in conquering Afghanistan is the land itself; an