

Mary Harrod, *Heightened Genre and Women's
Filmmaking in Hollywood: The Rise of the Cine-fille*

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- 1 In the five years that have passed since the infamous Harvey Weinstein case, which started the #MeToo movement, it has become clear that this scandal not only sparked social changes, but also caused a shift in academic discourse. Although initiated in 2006, the movement was brought into the limelight after the New York Times exposed Weinstein's sexual misconduct and harassment allegations and brought forth questions of consent and bodily autonomy, and agency. The latter also serves as a common denominator in both the MeToo movement and the monograph, as the issue of (directorial) agency and authorship is a key question throughout Harrod's work. By focusing on the role of female directors, the monograph is in sync with the contemporary trends and discourses shaped by the fourth wave of feminism, and also with post-MeToo Hollywood. The volume thus promises to tap into the link between female agency, storytelling, and Hollywood: that is, into the female directors' contribution to the mainstream film industry. Harrod manages to provide a well-rounded reading of the works of the most prominent female directors of the 21st century and highlights the importance of genre theory itself from a female-driven perspective.
- 2 Harrod approaches the topics of gender, genres, and films not only as a scholar, but also as someone with years of experience in film production, which yields an invaluable and unique perspective. This volume, therefore, not only fits well into the current

academic discourse on feminist film studies and the impact of female filmmakers, but also fills an aching gap in academia, with the potential of becoming a highly influential work due to the novelty of the term “heightened genericity.” By means of this term, Harrod aims at complementing the notion of meta-genericity, but the use of the word heightened “is more redolent of emotionality” (38), resulting in films that are consciously self-reflexive. Harrod argues that heightened genericity is more than just pastiche, the intertextual play on genres and styles (38).

- 3 While the role of and the play on genres have been well-researched over the last couple of decades, pastiche also serves as the overarching theme of *Heightened Genre*. Operating with Dyers’s notion of pastiche being “imitation that you are meant to know is imitation” (qtd. in Harrod 4), Harrod manages to point out how it differs from “straight genre filmmaking” (4) via examples such as *Clueless* (dir. Amy Heckerling, 1995), *Twilight* (dir. Catherine Hardwicke, 2008)¹, or *The Bling Ring* (dir. Sofia Coppola, 2013), just to name a few. Pastiche also provides the thematic link between the monograph’s chapters and a logical guideline for the readers. The novelty that Harrod brings to the table is the exploration of the relationship between genres, pastiche, and female directors. The ambitious undertaking of this monograph is to approach contemporary films made by women from a new perspective “beyond the notions of subversion or deconstruction that punctuate existing feminist film studies of the mainstream” (5), without confining them in the usual framework of backlash against patriarchal conventions. The primary source for the monograph is the career of women who made blockbusters in post-1990 Hollywood, including Kathryn Bigelow (*Zero Dark Thirty; Detroit*), Sofia Coppola (*Marie Antoinette; The Bling Ring*), Catherine Hardwicke (*Twilight; Lords of Dogtown*), Amy Heckerling (*Clueless; I Could Never Be Your Woman; Vamps*) and Greta Gerwig (*Little Women*), but the list could go on.
- 4 At first glance, the above-listed directors and their most well-known films might seem to be of a too wide range, however, Harrod makes a convincing case that every single one was consciously chosen for the study. Altogether, the monograph seems to be carefully edited and logically structured, however, some points could have been more successfully conveyed. For instance, the notions of “heightened genres” and “heightened genericity” appear multiple times in the introductory chapter and the first chapter as well, as if the author assumes that this notion is self-explanatory to all readers. The context, however, does not make it as obvious as assumed, which becomes strikingly clear in the second chapter, where a subchapter attempts to give a proper definition for the notion previously used numerous times. This section would have been useful from the very beginning of the volume, as it could have clarified the aims of the book much sooner, for both experienced and early-career researchers.
- 5 Despite this, the term “heightened genres” is a valuable contribution to the fields of both film and women’s studies, offering a new approach to exploring women’s contribution to cinema and, even more specifically, to the conscious use of various genres. The second chapter, where Harrod finally explains the term, discusses (the history of) female authorship. The directors and films brought up as examples reinforce her arguments that women are just as capable of making blockbuster genre films as men, even if they are rarely given the chance to direct one.
- 6 Harrod uses a variety of theories to support her claims. Ranging from queer to traditional film or even affect theory, the author makes valid and compelling observations about an impressive array of films and directors, mapping out a tendency

present not only in Hollywood that deprives female directors of being hired to make potential blockbusting movies. Her novel analyses of the films and the works of the directors are enthralling and well positioned within the argumentative framework of not only the volume, but also on a larger scale, fitting neatly into current research trends.

- 7 All in all, the theoretical relevance and undeniable novelty of *Heightened Genres* does not fail to make up for a few stylistic shortcomings. On the one hand, the book itself is useful to film studies scholars and graduate students alike, even if some of the long-running sentences make it difficult to find the point the author is aiming to make and is more than qualified to convey. On the other hand, her addition to the field of cinema studies is irrefutable, the arguments and the research are still worth the reader's time, especially considering that the author expands on the idea that the assumed dichotomy between marginal and mainstream cinema is false, ultimately repositioning the discussed directors in a new framework (257). The closing remarks neatly tie all of her claims and argumentation together, reaching the convincing and well-proven point that the "accelerated globalisation of collective imaginaries makes mass fictions all the more culturally powerful" (258), justifying the need to avoid the marginalization of female directors, especially when it comes to blockbusters. Mary Harrod's *Heightened Genres and Women's Filmmaking in Hollywood* is a clever, challenging, yet satisfying read for an audience wishing to explore the representation of women on screen and the work of female directors of Hollywood in the contemporary, post-MeToo era.
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NOTES

1. The cover image popularized by *Twilight* (a hand holding an apple) appears on the cover of Harrod's monograph as a well-directed link between the book and the primary sources, also illustrating the cultural impact of the blockbusters discussed by Harrod.