

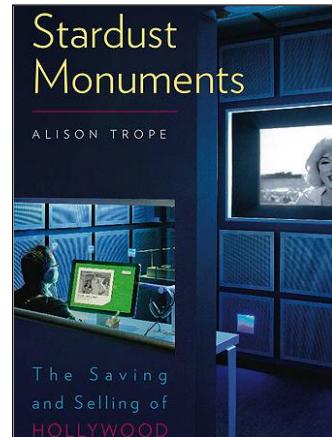
Alison Trope, ***Stardust Monuments: The Saving and Selling of Hollywood***, Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College Press, 2011, 248 pp., \$35 (paperback).

Reviewed by

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With the evolution of technology and social media, Alison Trope's book, *Stardust Monuments: The Saving and Selling of Hollywood*, asks essential questions about the status of Hollywood in the United States. In particular, her book takes readers for a walk through the various attempts to memorialize the Hollywood film industry and enlightens them to the changing viewpoint behind the different approaches.

Trope can be considered a Hollywood "insider," as she has worked on an editorial board of a media journal, was the program director at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, and cocreated a media exhibit connected with the Labyrinth Project, research on interactive media. She has experienced the industry from various perspectives, as well as the creation of a display, paralleling what she discusses in her book—the various attempts to exhibit and celebrate Hollywood.



In creating this book project on the history of Hollywood from the viewpoint of memorialization, key terms, including "remembering" and "memory," are defined in their relation to actual spaces, mostly in physical locations but also on the Internet; no philosophical discussion of the terms is incorporated, nor is it needed. The book provides an informational summary of events of approximately the past 100 years. Trope chose a chronological layout to guide readers, which provides both strengths and weaknesses. Most readers, such as potential students of film studies, will not be able to relate on a personal level to the early development of film archiving as discussed in the early chapters. Trope then discusses current, popular modes of memorialization, such as dedicated websites on the Internet and DVD collections (such as *Criterion*); she even mentions iPhone apps. Her examples can easily be applied to personal memories, even when she discusses the *Pearl Harbor* two-disc set while the reader may own *Saving Private Ryan*. The later chapters will most likely attract more student interest as reading material in classrooms.

However, the invaluable strengths of the chronological structure is an implicit argument that Trope creates throughout *Stardust Monuments*. She tells the story of film curation and celebration that at first was very limited in terms of its actions, as social media and technological conversions did not exist or were in their infancy. Thus, major events that took place could be summarized, discussed, and analyzed, such as the development of MoMa's film library (pp. 14–26). However, it is impossible to study the entire body of work that relates to current Hollywood memorialization. Rather, a few examples should suffice to present a larger trend or new mechanism for preserving and celebrating film. Therefore, this book illustrates the same "knowing Hollywood and not knowing Hollywood" that Trope argues throughout her study. Due to the diverse number of technologies and consumer interaction that started to reach

mainstream consumers in the 1990s, Hollywood has again become a place that one can be "close" to and that permits "behind-the-scenes" access with special DVD features and websites dedicated to films. At the same time, however, the information provided via these outlets only presents a fragment of the current machine that is the industry. *Stardust Monuments*, then, mirrors Trope's argument that Hollywood remains a(n evolving) myth today and that the reason(s) for the celebration of film history evolves simultaneously.

The examples provided in the later chapters fall short of being called "case studies," as depth is lacking in the analysis of the illustrations she chooses. Janet Wasko's (2001) *Understanding Disney* examines the studio's marketing of the film "Hercules" (pp. 72–80). Wasko outlines the various strategies used and explains how they represent the modern-day conglomerate and the term "synergy." Graphics are included that provide an easily accessible overview of the various merchandise sold. While Trope provides samples, she does not explore them fully, leaving the reader to ponder their complete impact and meaning for the industry and the consumer. For instance, Chapter 5 of *Stardust Monuments* opens with a brief description of iPhone apps that would allow users to locate specific stars on the Hollywood Walk of Fame and to find information about them (p. 171). What is missing is an analysis of how these applications already impact and may continue to impact the approach to memorialization and curation of Hollywood film history in the future. Only one person's comments are provided—those of Paul Nerfer representing the independent organization, Hollywood Walk of Fame—and they align more with suggestion and opinion than they do with investigation, interpretation, and potentially validated arguments. The Internet is discussed with a similar surface approach. Therefore, the book lacks the definitive answers that are provided in earlier chapters. Possibly, answers as to the meaning of Hollywood and approaches to its curation in current times cannot be articulated at this time, but this could and should be stated for the reader. *Stardust Monuments* is an excellent addition to the existing body of work on the early film industry, but possibly not of as much relevance in its discussion of recent and current events. Since 2010, the London Film School and the London Consortium have offered an MA in film curating, which highlights the need for such educated and skilled workers in the industry. The book provides an outline of the complexity of the role and tasks involved.

Like the existing body of work on the silent film era, Trope's book focuses on one topic that provides a specific window into the first decades of filmmaking. Thomas Schatz and Steven Bach's (1988) *The Genius of the System: Hollywood Filmmaking in the Studio Era* brings the stories of studios, key producers, and executives to life in great detail while omitting related information that would not have focused on the text's specific aim. Literature that provides a general overview, such as Brian Robb's (2007) *Silent Cinema*—a pocket book aiming to provide basic knowledge about the who/what/where/when/why of the time period—accomplishes exactly what it sets out to do. A second approach to a general overview is through relating specific case studies, such as *The Silent Cinema Reader* (2003), edited by Lee Grieveson and Peter Kraemer. Biographies, including A. Scott Berg's (1989) *Goldwyn—A Biography*, represent yet another popular approach. Each of these approaches provides a specific viewpoint on the early years of filmmaking and the developing film industry; combined they provide a multifaceted picture of the times. Trope has added an additional perspective by providing more factual information about the desire to remember the development of the film medium versus a more common focus on moving film forward via new technologies and development of narrative techniques.

As no other book exists on the subject matter of film curation, *Stardust Monuments* is significant in that it is conscious of the ways in which Hollywood was thought of throughout the past century—how people selected what was worthy of remembering, collecting, and celebrating. Her book effectively illustrates how the answers to these focuses shifted over time (via its chronological structure). Simultaneously, it provides more insight into the early film industry and the collaboration (or lack thereof) between the early stars of the industry. A new perspective on well-known movie stars is provided by informing the reader of their involvement in the preservation of Hollywood history. Mary Pickford, known to many as “America’s first sweetheart” and one of the first power couples with husband and fellow movie star Douglas Fairbanks, was actively engaged in the creation of a film library in Hartford, Connecticut, as a member of its advisory board (p. 20). Pickford also hosted a gala at her estate to garner Hollywood support, and William Hays, who many readers associate with the Hays Code, spoke that evening (p. 21). Trope’s book reveals a new side to these stars that rounds out and elaborates on their public persona. The image by which these movie stars are known is part of the myth of Hollywood. She is able to dispel some of the myths—or add a new layer or two (depending on one’s viewpoint)—associated with the early decades of the film industry precisely because that period has passed.

Including photos in the book adds value to its content, as we see the stars in action. However, integrating only posed shots and pictures of film posters also limits the excitement level of the book, which positions it more as a way of representing history the way a traditional noninteractive museum would do. The first film mentioned in the text, *The Movies March On* (1939), serves as a great opening, but loses most of its power, as the reader cannot watch it (p. 11). As the film is widely available, including on YouTube, interested readers can access it and bring this history to life, which may prompt a deeper engagement by readers with the text.

Trope chose a traditionalist approach to the presentation of Hollywood curation, with each chapter representing a certain aspect of film history, ordered chronologically. Missing, though, is interactivity of modern memorialization spaces. In 2007, Peter Kobel and The Library of Congress’ *Silent Movies—The Birth of Film and Triumph of Movie Culture* was published. As its title suggests, film has claimed a victory: the book exhibits film history by incorporating the written word with an abundance of visuals. It is a representation of current curation in a traditional book format and suggests that film history possibly continues to be curated most successfully for niche audiences; in this case, those who still read a “silent” book with strictly structured information on pages rather than through interactive, nonlinear engagement.

Stardust Monuments could have achieved some degree of collaboration between consumer and text by providing graphics and charts that would invite readers to become interactive by studying them to discover facts and figures themselves. Trope provides history, such as the official groundbreaking of the Hollywood Museum on October 21, 1963, in Los Angeles (p. 46), and therefore ensures that this portion of Hollywood history is not forgotten, even if the majority of attempts at creating exhibition spaces are ultimately never realized. She has now given them their space in history and has memorialized them by focusing on the business side of curation. Just as movies receive a green light if they have a high potential of turning a profit, museums need memorialization spaces to be catered to audiences to ensure success. The

ultimate implied statement the book makes about the industry is that capitalism rules the industry in all its facets, including (ironically) not-for-profit ventures, as they also require financing.

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