

H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

David Puttnam. *Movies and Money*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998. xii + 337 pp. \$27.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-679-44664-4.

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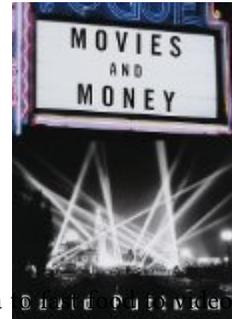
In addition to being one of Britain's foremost movie producers, for a fifteen month period lasting from June 1986 to September to 1987, David Puttnam served as chairman and chief executive officer of Columbia Pictures, becoming the first non-American to head a Hollywood movie studio. Prior to working for Columbia, Puttnam had produced a string of critically praised modest financial successes, including *Midnight Express* (1978), *Chariots of Fire* (1981), and *The Killing Fields* (1984). Accordingly, in an effort to increase Columbia's foreign revenues, Coca Cola, Columbia's parent company, hired Puttnam, a European with experience in the international marketplace who they believed would bolster their lackluster profits in foreign markets. Instead, what they got was a person who wanted "to bring a more sophisticated boutique mentality to what was in essence a department store operation." In turn, what Puttnam got was firsthand experience in mediating the conflict between a filmmaker's desire to make meaningful personal films and a studio's drive to generate income through marketing strategies and audience targeting, which in part inspired him to write *Movies and Money*, which traces the uniquely adversarial production history of an art form that is also business.

Movies and Money provides readers with an insightful overview in which Puttnam chronologically traces the financial trajectory of American cinema in light of its incestuous relationship with European cinema. Beginning with how the early European film pioneers' inventions, ideas, and techniques were usurped by Thomas Edison and leading right up to the present era in which movies have increasingly become "instant brand names ... behind which are dragged many, many other sectors of the

economy, everything from fashion games," Puttnam shows how over the years the war between art and commerce has leaned more and more in favor of commerce. Puttnam convincingly illustrates how the surreal amounts of money behind the making and marketing of Hollywood movies has had the same effect as American military spending during the height of the Reagan years; just as Eastern Bloc countries could no longer financially compete in the Cold War, European cinemas such as Britain's, Germany's, France's, and Italy's, once vibrant and important in their own right, have been spent into near extinction.

Although *Movies and Money* is a well argued and meticulously researched book, the citation of sources is something of a problem. Rather than including in-text citations accompanied by a concluding works cited, Puttnam only lists his sources at the end. This makes it somewhat difficult for readers to match his citations with their sources; it can still be done, but it is a much more cumbersome process than it would have been had Puttnam used a more accessible format. However, despite this minor flaw, *Movies and Money* remains an excellent book. Puttnam's evaluation of how the uneasy relationship between filmmaking and its accompanying financial realities has led to American movies dominating the world's screen spaces is as interesting and perceptive as it is disturbing.

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