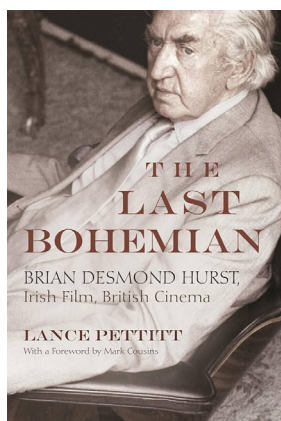


Lance Pettitt's The Last Bohemian: a snapshot of Hurst's status as a filmmaker



Pettitt, Lance. *The Last Bohemian: Brian Desmond Hurst, Irish and British Cinema*. New York: Syracuse University Press, 2023. P. 312. ISBN-13: †978-0815637295.

Despite its confident title, *The Last Bohemian: Brian Desmond Hurst, Irish and British Cinema* is a large and still evolving research on accumulative knowledge of more than a decade of “extensive use of archival collection and library research” (14), academic work and conferences about Hurst’s (1895-1986) life, work and critical reputation, edited by Lance Pettitt. The book inspires and explores the reasons why Hurst and his films were forgotten, included “mainly in the footnotes and film-directory entries in British and Irish cinema history”, called as “cinema astray” (by Tom Gunning) and have lately been reclaimed. Among other relevant aspects, the book draws heavily on Hurst’s reputation “as lacking sustained critical attention as a filmmaker” (1). This makes the reader think, react to, and engage with the subject. Its wide scope is its greatest strength.

The aim of *The Last Bohemian* is, then, to examine Hurst’s full filmography to give ample evidence to the quality of his art, by considering not only his biographical profile, but also his hyphenated Northern-Irish identity, his “formative years of artistic development” in Canada and the United States (13) and his “interstitial status as Ulster exile in London” (16). To describe and analyse the themes proposed, Pettitt approaches a plethora of different concepts of identity, subjectivity, diaspora studies, nationality, spirituality, sexuality, social mobility, migration, home and elsewhere within philosophical and interdisciplinary perspectives.

An Introductory chapter is crucial to any book’s ultimate success. *The Last Bohemian’s* Introduction captures the readers’ attention and compels them to continue reading by clearly

outlining what is to come. In the prelude of his book, Lance Pettitt presents an overview of the organisation of each chapter. First, the writer defines Hurst's status as an exile produced by cultural and historical conditions and states that this subject is developed further in Chapter 1. Still in the Introduction, he presents a list of films that gives him a "sense of measurement and significance" (2), according to subject and genre. Besides it, he also takes into account the three broad phases of Hurst's critical evaluation. The first phase comprises the context of Hurst's individual films in the 1930s and 1940s. The second corresponds to the late 1950s up to the mid-1980s when he dies. It was the period he gained seniority. The third phase of critical evaluation of Hurst's work includes academic and scholarly portraitures, reference works and popular writing from the late 1980s.

Pettitt highlights four important words in the Introduction: "Belfast, British, Bohemian ... and Irish" (2). These words tie together the themes of his research which are developed in the five chapters. Each word resonates within the whole context of the discussion he proposes to hold. They assist the understanding of Hurst as an individual person, his sea journeys and maritime experiments in the British army in the Mediterranean island of Lemnos and Gallipoli (1915), the history of the conflict of the geopolitical division of the island of Ireland, the corpus of films within the cinema history, his transatlantic career as a filmmaker in Canada, New York, Los Angeles and journeys to other countries, such as France. Given the "successive personal experience of exile" and interaction with different places and people, it seems quite suggestive to call it a "transatlantic subjectivity" for the "fluid, transient and mutable existence" (7) he adopted.

As *The Last Bohemian* is divided into five chapters, which provide an impressive and relevant survey for scholars, filmmakers or anyone interested in film studies. The themes mentioned above are explored since his origin as a Belfast-born individual, followed by his transnational subjectivity phase, moving from Ulster to London, then Canada, Los Angeles, New York and Paris and his last phase in London, embracing British cinema. While Chapter 1 is entitled "Formation", Chapter 2, 3 and 4 have three different themes: "Filmmaker", "Fame", and "Finale". Pettitt believes they form the "bulk" of the book, for they cover Hurst's experiences in three decades, from the 1930s to the 1960s, within British cinema. Chapter 5, "Forgotten", examines how himself and his work did not receive the deserved recognition, as they were disregarded from the British and Irish cinema and were only reclaimed in 2004. The resurgence of Hurst's work has lately taken place in face of

significant circumstances, such as press reviews of Hurst's films, "academic and popular writing" about his work, his archive material, "the selective rerelease of films and DVDs" (19), among others. All these topics are essential background for anyone who intends to develop or is developing research on Irish and British films.

Pettitt names the first chapter of the book, "Formation", by highlighting how Hurst's Irishness was inflected by different circumstances in life along the decades of the twentieth century. First, his identity was formed at the intersection of particular social, aesthetic and cultural elements for having inhabited "successive diasporic realms". Then, a combination of successive transatlantic material and experiences and lifelong exile from his hometown "under the flux and pressures of modernity". He further shares the fact that Hurst's Irishness-within-Britishness was formed within a set of transformative migrant creation. Pettitt concludes by recognizing Hurst's identification with a "cosmopolitan, bohemian outlook" peculiar to a generation that used to revolt from bourgeois social norms and conventions of straight culture. Thus, significant part of the poor Edwardian Belfast working class boy can be defined by "an interaction of "here" and "elsewhere" (22).

The aim of Chapter 1 is to highlight the transformations Hurst experiences across his life span which Pettitt associates with his exilic migrations. His Belfast upbringing, early manhood as an Ulster Protestant, name-changing, shape-shifting, "idiosyncratic devotional practice" from Ulster Presbyterianism to Roman Catholicism, and interest in spiritualism make Hurst "a man with highly individual, eclectic and unorthodox ideas about faith and spirituality" (21). Still, his experiences in military service either in contact with other people or with the violence he witnessed (torture, mutilation and rape), together with his libidinous life, having relationship with both sexes and other sort of sexual encounters, help to understand the characters he portrays in his films.

After analysing and interpreting Hurst's attitudes to sexuality and morality, portraying homo- and bisexuality in Anglo-American cosmopolitan cities, albeit illegal and criminalised, and Hurst's social class in Belgravia, London, Pettitt moves to his time in Canada subsidised with a grant of 100 Pounds by the British government. His engagement with arts and aesthetics in Canada was extended to Paris. Together with many artists who flocked to the city of light in search of innovations and revolutions in terms of painting, sculpture, architecture, design, and culture fashion, he improved his sketching and painting techniques. During his time in Paris, he enjoyed not only professional experiences in the art field but also the variety of social

connections in the Parisian avant-garde. In Paris, Hurst teemed with several “figures associate with impressionism, cubism, and the futurists” (41), receiving instruction from them and other talented artists from different areas.

Mapping Hurst’s transatlantic journeys back and forth, Pettitt ends Chapter 1 describing his time in Los Angeles in the 1930s, when he encounters John Ford and other important film directors – an opportunity he had to develop “his understanding of film design, camera setups and lightening by observing Ford and many other directors ... of the Hollywood system” (44).

As the final section of Chapter 1 suggests, Toronto, Paris and Los Angeles were three relevant geographical locations for Hurst’s social and cultural transformations. Pettitt is successful in bridging every space Hurst to which moved over the first decades of the twentieth century. Throughout the chapter, he skilfully provides not only a crucial reflection on Hurst’s personal life, professional career as a filmmaker, but also covers a few political, religious and historical aspects of Irish, British, French and North American cultures. This chapter is particularly inspiring for anyone engaged in Irish culture as well as in Irish and British films.

Chapter 2 discusses Hurst’s ten films made from 1934 to 1939 within the British film industry, at a time when “unemployment and widespread austerity” and “financial crash”, from 1936 to 1937, hit industry sectors. It noticeably demonstrates that the economic depression that started in the end of 1929s up to 1934s in the financial world did not affect Hurst’s career, but rather led him working intensively at Elstree studio in London, achieving prominent social and professional status during this period. Painting, illustration and graphic art blended with his training and experience in direction, staging and camera working in Hollywood’s studio system gave him enough support to work partially independently and with studio contract in Britain cinema.

The series of films examined in Chapter 2 evinces a terrific mix of fact, memory and images, capturing the history of a man, his Irish-British identity, extraordinary training in visual art and creative and formalist film directing. Undeniably, the way the writer describes the filmmaker’s transatlantic experiences, the films he produced and its contents related to political events, moral values, sexual infidelity, murders, social and cultural concerns and different kinds of sexual defiance raise the reader’s curiosity and interest. They are also tempted to watch the films and learn how a person should watch and interpret a film. It is quite impossible to follow Pettitt’s analyses of Hurst’s short period in “avant-garde” credential

and later as an independent spirit, the subject matter he embraces, and not sense his exilic status and “displaced familiarity with England”.

In terms of subject matters, the chapter analyses the different contexts of his films within the British industry. *Irish Hearts* (1934), *Riders to the Sea* (1935) and *Ourselves Alone* (1936) correspond to his early productions. *The Tenth Man* (1936), *Sensation* (1936), and *On the Night of the Fire* (1939) belong to the crime drama topics. The romantic themes he embraces, such as *Glamorous Night* (1937) and *Prison without Bars* (1938) were film adaptations of literary works. His Irish connections in England in the world of “literature, the arts and creative works” and his multitasking roles about revolutions in different contexts, form the basis to produce two famous films: *Ourselves Alone* (1936), and Middle East’s revolutions, *Laurence of Arabia* (1936-1938).

Chapter 2 makes readers acquainted not only with Hurst’s trajectory in British cinema from 1934 to 1939, but also with his social network in Paris and London (Liam O’Flaherty, Francis Stuart, Nina Hamnet, Patrick Kirwan Denis Johnston, among other important figures in his connections), his residence in Belgravia, and his “non-monogamous” relationship with Norman Dean in London. Not less relevant are the references to Hurst’s critical engagement with the art of making films, such as debates on techniques and styles of working developed into British film studios. His profile within the concept of cinema as art form as well as industry come to justify his great influence upon a new generation of directors.

What follows is the analysis of the films Hurst made. In his battle to lift Hurst’s profile, Pettitt’s top priority is to inform readers about the content and quality of the films in order to show his remarkable achievements. He draws attention to the personal strength of the subject matters of the films along with the specific aspects of editing, cinematography, acting, and sound. They provide information on relevant events and ideologies of the period for a better understanding of its historical background. He devotes the last part of Chapter 2 to the analysis of films, such as *Irish Hearts* (adapted from *The Night Nurse*, 1935), *Riders to the Sea* (J.M. Synge’s same title play), *Ourselves Alone* (1936) and *Laurence of Arabia* (1938). To display the creative force of the director behind them, he presents Hurst as a person responsible for shaping the vision and executions of films and shares the Irish British director’s choices and technical standpoints in terms of film’s storytelling, pacing, overall atmosphere, music and sound and light effects, characters, location, among others. In short, Pettitt provides a well-rounded critique of the films by capturing striking cinematic elements

that contributed to their overall impact. Cinematography as the visual side of a film is the key feature of Hurst's productions.

Still embarking upon an ambitious attempt to restore Hurst's directing talent, Pettitt presents different critical receptions of *Ourselves Alone* in the press, such as in *The Irish Times*, *The Irish Press*, *The Evening Standard*, *The Limerick Licker*, *the Spectator*, *Life and Letters Today* and others that highlighted the positive aspects the film generated and Hurst's public profile into British industry. Additionally, he praises the direction, production and performances of its cast.

Pettitt finishes Chapter 2 analysing three of Hurst's film versions that came from tested literary materials, such as the novel, the stage play and the musical: *Glamorous Night*, 1937, *Prison without Bars* (1938) and his last production *On the Night of Fire* (1939). The chapter focuses on the interwar context and influences on Hurst's forays into the writing and direction of film which is situated within "alternative film culture", which alludes his life in Paris and the connections he made there.

In Chapter 3, "Fame, Wartime, and Film Work in the 1940s", Pettitt's research moves forward and embraces Hurst's trajectory in London within British cinema in the 1940s. The author outlines the purpose of the chapter which is aimed at recognizing some of Hurst's "most memorable" films at the wartime period and the success they achieved. Throughout this recognition, he identifies films that explore the impact of war on people's life and the crisis impinged by the post-war order. Here, the author points out Hurst's creative skills and domain of the art of cinematography connected to wartime experiences as responsible for his great success in the 1940s. This leads him to explain the whole scenario of the country affected by the War and how the underlying daily pressures on exiles and internally displaced persons, knowledge of combat and conflict, and melodrama were incorporated into Hurst's varying production. Attentive to the notion of "film as a social medium", he forged the source material of his films to attend the claims of the time in terms of "societal anxieties", class, gender and the new cultural identity after the war. Furthermore, he was aware of British audiences' "feeling of extreme emotions under pressure" (133) together with his personal interest in exploring the historic Irish-British relations in a challenging time.

Moreover, this chapter provides insights on the nature of Hurst's identity in a wider context of the British society. By covering his "sexually promiscuous, open, and socially alternative to hetero norms" (106), life in London at routine air raids, blackout restrictions and

other hard circumstances, the author goes beyond his film work and fame, reaching his personal identity. Meeting friends at clubs, dimly-lit parties in town, having guests in his countryside house on weekends were part of his “upmarket bohemian” life aside documentary, propaganda and commercial filmmaking activities and the Mass Observation projects to capture everyday experiences, thoughts and opinions in of people living in Britain. Here, the chapter is especially instructive in delineating the films sponsored by the Government in London to “convince the British viewing public that the Royal Air Force (RAF) was resourced, prepared, and ready to defend Britain against the Nazi Luftewaffe” (108). *The Lion has Wings* (1939), *A Letter from Ulster* (1942) and *Theirs is the Glory* (1946) are examples of short documentary-style propaganda war films directed by Hurst which highlight the significant British and the Irish military participation in the War.

The comments the author gathers about these films are relevant to understand their contents and the intended effect of the production on filmgoers, that is, the idea of altering their behaviour. Then, two short-form documentary *Miss Grant Goes to the Door* (1940) and *A Call for Arms* (1940) are presented. To the insights of the production comes the films’ purpose: “to alienate many sorts of working-class or other feelings” (114).

In terms of feature film, the author considers *Dangerous Moonlight* as Hurst’s most memorable film of the time for many reasons, which include scenario, beautiful music, plot, new narrative structure (the film starts at the end of the story) and “strong exploration of exilic angst about belonging, personal love, and national duty” (124). He devotes a few pages of the book to analyse the theme music of the film and its exilic significations which he associates with loss, separation, displaced people and socially eclipsed identities – aspects that resonate with Hurst’s life.

What follows are two films that distinguish themselves in the combination of box office and critical praise: *Alibi* (1941) and *Two Hundred Pounds Window*. While the former explores murder and crime in cabaret culture of Paris in the late 1930s, the latter, the moral consequences of gambling within the middle-class family. The author reviews genuine information about *Alibi* and its most memorable moments. Expressly, the film’s overall message, the key members of the cast, camera methods, the composition of the film, encoded on-screen queerness in the performance, lighting, among others. These elements the author analyses help readers to improve the understanding of the depth of the film and develop an appreciation of its unique

film techniques. What Hurst attempted and by all accounts achieved in all aspects of the film portrayals, fluidity, and cinematography was a sense of authenticity.

Pettitt chooses *Theirs is the Glory* as “... Hurst’s favourite film and the one with which he was most satisfied as a director” (134). *Theirs is the Glory* is a true cinematic reconstruction of the attack of the German forces to the British and Allied at the Battle of Arnhem in September 1944. The film was a tribute to the soldiers deceased in the war. By examining *Theirs*, he shares Hurst’s knowledge and experiences from different areas alongside his training with Ford in film aesthetics, lighting, camera work, art design etc. Each of them happens to have a direct effect on the film storyline, portrayal of the characters, cinematic lighting, to mention just a few. These elements work together in a different way to visually and emotionally reinforce or underscore the characters’ fear, suffering, grief or heroism in order to seem credible, accurate and authentic to the actual events. In doing so, the author focuses much more on its quality of poetic realism rather than in its plot. He rightly places that the overall success of the film would not be reached without the director’s artistry.

Likewise, the writer meditates upon the outcome of the authenticity of visual effects, that is, how they have captivated the emotion of the viewers despite their knowledge of the end result. He provides reflections on the fact that the techniques Hurst incorporated in *Theirs* helped to frame his superb prestige as post-war director within British cinema. Evidently, his expressive writing to describe a few memorable sequences of film makes readers feel touched and compelled to watch it to see how both facts and fiction have worked together the emotional memory. *Theirs is yours* is to be commended for introducing readers to the history of the Second World War and British cinema and it is an excellent choice for those interested in war films as art and those who seek an emotionally charged and heartfelt piece.

The chapter closes highlighting a few compelling points in Hurst’s career after the war: his entry in the *British Film Yearbook, 1949-1950*; British films seen in ‘quality productivity and filmic achievement’ five years after the war; Hurst’s contact with Ireland and his idea of building a film studio there; Hurst as the director of *Mercury Film* (Ireland); his sense of exclusion from his country after the Irish government’s “unwelcoming rebuke” to his plans of a cinema in Ireland; Hurst’s “social mobility and cultural capital” (143); Hurst as part of the portfolio of a famous photographer in London, Angus McBean; British “noir” Films: Hurst’s historic drama *Hungry Hill* (Ireland as a setting: 1846-1847 centenary of Irish Famine, class

mobility and sexuality); *Mark of Cain* and *Trottie True, 1946* (first Hurst's technicolour film is a criticism on the institution of marriage) – back to literary-sourced, historical melodramas.

By the end of the 1940s, Hurst was able to reveal to cinemagoers how his craftsmanship, aesthetic talents, and experiences were shaped to attend the context of the Second War and post-war scenarios. His 'lingering memory of the war', Ireland's relations with Britain in a varied of fields but also the Anglo-British way of life, Hurst's increasingly cultural politics in the British scenario.

Further in chapter 4, there are different sections; each one comprises new phases of Hurst's career in the 1950s now. At this point, Hurst is deeply involved with both Ireland and Britain's relations. In this regard, the author remarks that Hurst's Irishness and English patriotism come together and are recognized within the film adaptations he made, such as *Scrooge* (Charles Dickens' *Christmas Carol*, 1848), *Tom Brown School's Day* (Thomas Hardy's *Tom Brown School's Day*, 1857 novel), *The Playboy of Western World* (J.M. Synge's play). A plethora of themes is explored to mark Hurst's concerns with "the Second World War", "colonialism", "mixed race" and "cultural belonging", "memory of the war" and "monarchy". Still, he underlines Hurst and Killenin's unsuccessful attempt to set a film studio in Ireland again.

Nevertheless, what the author presents in this chapter is a brief outline of the geopolitical context of Britain and the world during the post-war phase (1950-1960). Independence of many British colonies and dominions, the United Kingdom out of the EEC (European Economic Community), "the newly crowned Elizabeth II" and Britain's political relationship with Ireland, the increase of emigration in Ireland, particularly, from the Republic, working-class Irish people occupying different positions in different sectors in Britain, among others are source materials for Hurst and his Irish-born generation react artistically.

Pettitt recalls the arrival of television in the 1950s and how the new social medium comes to affect both independent production companies and cinema audience. As Hurst's strategy was to produce films to attend the interest of overseas market in the colonies, the world he expresses and builds is related to the world of the audiences. *Simba* (1955), *Dangerous Exile* (1957), *The Malta Story* (1953) and *The Black Tent* (1956) were the films he directed. However, the author recognizes the 'discursive tensions and limits' of his films due to the dramatic narratives featuring exilic Irish or estranged "nationals" in "foreign lands".

Still concerning the period called “the Elizabethan age”, “Englishness and the assertion of cultural values” entered into question. It was the opportunity to celebrate great names of English literature while trying to contest and reconfigure the nature of Victorian texts. Dickens’s *Oliver Twist* (1946) and *Great Expectations* (1948) and Alberto Cavalcanti’s *The Life and Adventure of Nichols Nickleby* (1947) were examples of literary pieces adapted by different film producers, such as Olivier and David Lean.

Following Pettitt’s analysis, what we see early in the decade is Hurst working for two different independent companies, Talisman Films and Renown Films. His contract with Rank studio had expired and was soon renewed to direct wartime projects in Africa. *Tom Brown School Days* and *Scrooge* (1951) are films he directed in the period whose critical reception shows dissonances and ambivalences due to the changes he introduced to the source texts. By analysing Hurst’s cinematic version of *Tom Brown School Days* and *Scrooge* (1951) according to different critics and reviewers, Pettitt offers a few distinct creative visual elements and overtones which work against Dickens’s original text and its previous film version. The author points out questions the director shapes in the screen narratives which are related to the excluded and the socially marginalized individuals, in conjunction with vulnerable children and “the isolated older generation”. He underscores different comments the critics made on the versions, not only related to distortions, flaws and merits but also to “the intensity of emotional attachments between boys” (174), “underlying homosexual tension within a homosocial setup”, moral dilemma of the time fused with his personal humanism (p. 175). For those interested in film adaptation of literary works, the analyses Pettitt presents help them to see the new medium as a different piece of art.

Going further in Chapter 4, the author invites readers to understand the success of *Scrooge* by discussing its special effects, “spiritual impetus”, attempts to reconcile the Kenyan political issues with those of Ireland, the position of Britain past and present in the world, among other elements which also dominate the films of the middle years of the decade. After signing another contract with Rank, Hurst directs *Malta Story* (1953), *Simba* (1955), *The Black Tent* (1956) and *Dangerous Exile* (1957) with African settings. Every project he embraces represents “opportunities to rekindle interests in Ireland as well as in Britain” (p.199), independent of location and time the story originally takes place. The same can be said about *Behind the Mask* and *His and Hers*. His second and last screen version of Synge’s *The Playboy of Western World* is another product of his exilic imagination. He wrote the screenplay together

with Killanin. As usual, reviewers and critics (*The Irish Time*, for example) consider the source text as the starting point to criticize the production based on the transformations the director makes. Pettitt presents the faults and merits critics recognize in the film. The design/costume hair, music track, “the acting of both leads”, too long scenes of sports, bad as a film and as a screen version of a drama text are the “critical opprobrium” of Sanford Sternlicht. Despite the demerit the critics give to *The Playboy*, a few positive aspects can be pointed out in terms of casting, performances of the main actors and cinematography.

Pettitt comes to the end of the chapter examining Hurst’s career along the decades of his life when he recognizes his “significant status and critical respect” within the film industry, “periods of relative contractual security”, disappointments for cancellation of projects (Lawrence of Arabia project, film versions of O’Casey’s play, *Shadow of a Gunman* and Liam O’Flaherty’s *Famine*, among others) and “his position of being Irish in England”.

Chapter 5, “Forgotten: The Wake of a Fame”, is an intriguing title given to what we have seen thus far. The two opposite words, “forgotten” and “fame” invite readers to ponder over the reasons and circumstances why this has happened to Hurst’s life and career. The massive number and success of great number of the films he produced could be enough reasons to be remembered and celebrated. If they were “not always in themselves artistically innovative” (219) but a product of his in-between mentality is another question to be discussed.

As any curious reader, I am prepared to understand Hurst’s marginal and invisible position in cinema history and the process of “reclamation” and “rediscovery” of his reputation that Pettitt proposes in the final chapter. A selection of critical comments about his exilic and queer condition in conjunction with the films he produced and directed seem to justify his obscure career. Incorrect birth dates, dismissive judgment about his production, interests more directed to bohemian life than to “the art and business of making films”, problematic status in England, “his anecdotal recall of his life in and out the world of cinema” (227) audio recorded, self-serving bias in tension with a true Hurst did not help to project a positive image.

After examining the facts that have clouded Hurst’s biographical profile and filmography, Pettitt moves to the events that provided conditions for putting him back in people’s mind, for his rediscovery. To fulfil the expectations of the readers who have followed his biography and film legacy so far, the author gathers a list of events and works that have helped his popular rebirth. Most of the events are related to Ireland. In Britain, BFI (British

Film Institute) archives have made its own contribution. Opinions about his significance in the cultural scenario are among them, despite a few controversial ones.

Following Pettitt's research, the millennium 2000 corresponds to the year when Brian Desmond Hurst's revival started to proliferate. "Titanic Quarter" (the urban project in Belfast), the commemorations of Good Friday Agreement, 2004 Cork Film Festival, the publication of the first edition of Robbins's *The Empress of Ireland*, academic works on his films, his inclusion on the Trinity College "Irish Film and TV Research" website, "popular commemorative practices" in Ireland (p. 234), renaming of Belfast city airport in 2005, the creation of Hurst Estate to raise his profile with publications, websites, events, etc. are a few events which have helped the talented director and producer to be recognized and celebrated within British cinema. Regarding Hurst Estate, Pettitt recognizes relevant historical data about his "unorthodox sexuality and religious practice" but sees a few aspects of Hurst's profile which are regrettably overlooked, such as the definitions of "the men and masculinity of a generation" explored in his films, his critical positioning within war conflict films, among others new biographical contributions he added in *The Last Bohemian*.

In the end of Chapter 5, Pettitt suggests a few questions for future research. He considers they need to be explored in further works to robustly capture a more in-depth information about Hurst, given the resources available and positive currents to investigate fluid identities. I, particularly, believe articles would benefit by assessing the likely value of possible further research.

After offering a solid and organised analysis of Hurst's filmography, emphasising his talent and taste as a visual artist (especially in the framing composition of human profile) and suggestive evidence of his queer sexuality, Pettitt examines the events that favoured his revival, reaching the conclusion that Hurst has finally been found in the twenty first century. As far as the title he gives to the book, he considers Hurst as the last bohemian of the era of cinematic modernity who was forgotten by the Irish cinema, despite being "a major British director who begins his career with Irish features", as the film historian Anthony Slide claims (239).

In the Conclusion, Pettitt sets out with a brief summary of the ideas developed in the chapters, reassessing a few aspects of his research. First, he reexamines "the nature of his bohemianism and reputation as a film director" (240), by comparing Hurst's achievements with his other Irish and British peers of the time. As in the conclusion of any book, he does not introduce any content but restates the book's thesis, reviews the chapters in a different

tone, stating Hurst's position in both British film industry and Irish film history, presenting the results of his research. He reconsiders the main purpose of the book, that is, to analyse the whole range of films Hurst produced for different studios in Britain, the circumstances within which they were made, his recognition and success in the film industry. By doing so, he came to see how stable Hurst's career was. He reappraises other aspects, such as the primary source of his films and its critical reviews, his critical writing on filmmaking, Hurst's artistic formation in Toronto, his "Ulster Exilic" identity and status, his "film versions of Ireland and his self-styled Irish identity", and Hurst's critical reputation as a filmmaker within Irish and British cinema history.

Before reaching his conclusion, he raises a few points on Hurst's national identity as an Ulster Protestant and the transformations this status underwent according to his different spatial mobility and time. Overall, Pettitt presents a cohesive argument to justify his view of Hurst's films, reappraising his qualities as a talented film director within the British film industry from the 1930s to the 1960s. He is skilled in demonstrating the relevance of Hurst's films in British film dynamics. As far as the illustrations, they help to foster a deep understanding of Hurst's life and films on a variety of levels. On the thematic level, the reader may be able to comprehend the themes of the films analysed through the lens of the shot sequences selected to illustrate them. In this regard, the use of a few screenshot images with scene sequence analysis was very relevant to effectively clarify the author's approach. Still and all, we can say that the author was very skilful in the use of scene sequence analysis together with a good number of screenshot illustration images. They successfully communicate the intended message to the readers. In other words, the visual elements embedded in the images were crucial to provide a fully understanding of the textual content. As the data, they are referenced in a comprehensive 19-page bibliography and films referenced, 34-page notes, 12-page appendix and 21-page index.

In many respects, *The Last Bohemian* deserves to be read widely beyond the boundaries of film studies, for it has much to contribute to other disciplines, such as cultural studies, anthropological and biographical studies, identity studies, migration studies, social sciences, particularly, academic writing. It is still worth highlighting how easy it is to read and digest the book, and how the paragraphs of the chapters are well-organised and provide background information to support the thesis statement. Readers have the opportunity to access substantial knowledge about Hurst's life, filmography and directorial reputation from Pettitt's analyses in

The Last Bohemian. He actively contributes with powerful and concise reflections on Hurst's career more than a half century from his death. I would recommend *The Last Bohemian* for teaching because it is advantageous to have so many perspectives and historical overviews collected in one book. In my opinion, it is a pioneering study on Hurst, since early works did not make readers recognize a sense of genius in Hurst as Pettitt did in the detailed analyses he provided.

As my final remarks, I must say, based on what I have read in *The Last Bohemian*, that the marginalisation of Hurst's work by film studies and Ireland cinema history must be regarded as nothing short of a scandal.

Noélia Borges