

challenging colonial ways of organizing information” (66). And as the title suggests, McCracken and Hogan-Stacey have the future in mind with this text, so in this way we can consider this work as prefigurative: it not only attempts to guide and orient archival impulses and practices in and into the future, but it also suggests that if we are able to imagine respectful, ethical, relational archival practices in that future landscape, then there is no reason why we cannot or should not be doing them *now* in the present. This book invites the reader to do this work or, simply, “the work” — readers should accept the invitation.

Dallas Hunt

University of British Columbia

Julia Erhart

The Children's Hour

McGill-Queen's University Press, 2024. 168 pp.

The lives of Martha and Karen, two women who run a small private girls' school in the United States are destroyed when one of their disgruntled pupils spreads a rumour that the women are lovers. Such is the basic premise of *The Children's Hour*, the 1961 film directed by William Wyler based on a play by Lillian Hellman. In the 2024 book *The Children's Hour*, author Julia Erhart provides a compelling argument for the significance of the film and the story, both at the time of its release and into the present day.

Erhart's study is the tenth and latest addition to the Queer Film Classics series from McGill-Queen's University Press, edited by Thomas Waugh and Matthew Hays. These books offer relatively short studies of key films: written in an accessible manner, they provide historical context with some theoretical analysis. The feminist film scholar Erhart's treatment of the film fits very well into this series. She examines *The Children's Hour* via a three-part structure through which she first discusses the history of the film's production, then its reception by mainstream, trade, and lesbian reviewers, and finally turns to the movie text itself in terms of script, framing, and soundtrack. This approach allows her to develop an in-depth and thorough analysis of a film which is, as she rightly claims, “a protean and contradictory object, capable of meaning different things to different audiences and scholars” (80).

At the root of the film's contradictory meanings is the unresolved question of what it is actually about. Is the film a chilling depiction of how a story fabricated for gain by a mendacious child can whip up a moral panic with devastating consequences? Or is it a female-centred and nuanced account of lesbianism and the horrors of anti-gay persecution? Erhart suggests that what gives the film its classic status is the tension between these perspectives. Woven into every element of its production, reception, and content are different versions and interpretations of what story is being told.

The 1961 film was a remake of a 1936 film, *These Three*, also directed by Wyler:

both films were based on the 1934 play *The Children's Hour* by Hellman, who worked with Wyler on both screenplays. Hellman's play itself was based on a story published in 1931 by the crime writer William Routhead, who had resurrected a tragic legal case from 1811 brought by two women schoolteachers in Scotland who lost their livelihoods when one of their pupils accused them of being lovers. Each version of this legal ur-text takes a different perspective on the story, and for Erhart these distinctions are telling. The 1936 and 1961 film versions bookend the years that the Motion Picture Production Code in the United States was in force, and Erhart examines the archival evidence for the negotiations that were undertaken to get Production Code Administration (PCA) approval for release. In 1936, this meant changing the damaging rumour to one of heterosexual infidelity while in 1961 it meant reassuring the PCA that the lesbianism at the heart of the film was a "false charge" (42). For Hellman in particular, having refused to disclose the names of Communist Party members to the House Un-American Activities Committee in the 1950s, with its inevitable damaging impact on her career, the central story being told was one of "rumour mongering and scapegoating" (80), not lesbianism. Yet the dramatic power of the film lies in the revelation that Martha does, in fact, love and desire Karen who, in Erhart's close reading of framing, script, and soundtrack provided in the third section of the book, reciprocates at least some of those feelings. So is the false charge in fact a true one?

Erhart's book delivers a remarkable amount of contextual detail and critical analysis, which is particularly impressive given the length constraints. One significant contribution is Erhart's focus on the soundtrack by the composer Alex North. Here she argues that the use of music works to "turn the conventional aligning of queerness and monstrosity on its head, to demonstrate that it's not lesbians who are monsters, but the society in which they live" (109). The use of silence, too, is powerful, so that "audiences are compelled (as are the women) to interpret what's going on without the benefit of dialogue or musical cues" (114) and "to share with the protagonists the experience of what it's like to be kept at a distance" (114).

This focus on sound is certainly valuable, but it is the middle section on the contemporary reception of the film by three different audiences that sets this book apart. Here, Erhart draws on published reviews to show how each audience responded. Film industry reviewers were most interested in the negotiations with the PCA and lauded Wyler and the Mirisch production company for their bravery in taking on the Production Code and challenging its censorship of sophisticated themes. Mainstream reviewers reassured readers that there was nothing salacious in the film, and several positioned themselves as truly sophisticated by dismissing as outdated the idea that the accusation of lesbianism could create a moral panic. Lesbians themselves, however, reviewing the film in the homophile periodicals *The Ladder* and *ONE* and even writing to Wyler disagreed and demonstrated their ability to understand "different community stakes and impacts" (72).

The power of lies to, in some sense, create a dangerous reality reaches back to the original 1811 case. In her strong conclusion Erhart shows how this threat remains distressingly relevant in the era of social media where irreparable reputational damage

can happen in an instant and where book bans and laws are justified on the spurious claim that they will protect children from the supposedly corrupting influence of queer people. Erhart's brilliance lies in her ability to lay out in all their complex detail the ways in which different forms of censorship operate.

Liz Millward
University of Manitoba

Jesse Chanin

Building Power, Breaking Power: The United Teachers of New Orleans, 1965–2008

University of North Carolina Press, 2024. 336 pp.

Three months after Hurricane Katrina decimated New Orleans in 2005, the Orleans Parish School Board fired more than 7,500 employees, nearly 4,000 of them teachers. Since close to three-quarters of the dismissed teachers were Black, their termination echoed the mass displacement of Black educators in the southern United States following *Brown v. Board of Education*. While the scale and precipitating factors differed, both cases underscored the inextricable ties between public education, labour, and American racial politics.

By kneecapping the teachers' once-powerful union—the United Teachers of New Orleans (UTNO)—the post-Katrina terminations abetted the dramatic overhaul of the city's public school system. The democratically elected school board lost much of its power, privately run charter schools replaced publicly administered ones, and jobs shifted from veteran Black educators to less experienced white ones. By the 2019–2020 academic year, New Orleans became the only major American city in which all publicly funded schools were charters. In *Building Power, Breaking Power*, Jesse Chanin seeks to determine why teachers and their union were so central to this transformation.

Her explanation revolves around the considerable power that educators—Black women educators in particular—amassed through labour organizing in the decades prior to Hurricane Katrina. Black teachers formed the American Federation of Teachers Local 527 in 1937, and the union notched an early civil rights victory by securing the equalization of Black and white teachers' salaries in 1943. In 1965, when the majority-Black New Orleans public schools remained largely segregated, Local 527 initiated a collective bargaining campaign. A year later it launched the first teachers' strike in the South to demand a collective bargaining election and the increased hiring of Black personnel at all levels. Unsuccessful, Local 527 struck again in 1969, then merged with a majority-white union in 1972 as the district transferred teachers en masse to desegregate faculties. Black educators became the leaders and driving force within the integrated union, renamed UTNO, and in April 1974 the