

‘I am not particularly despondent yet’: The Political Tone of Jill Craigie’s Equal Pay

Film *To Be A Woman*

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Abstract

To be a Woman is a short campaigning film made in 1951 by documentary filmmaker Jill Craigie. This article offers an account of the film which aims to recover the affective life of both the film text and the archival correspondence between Craigie and the General Secretary of the National Union of Women Teachers, which refers to its production history. The article analyses the ‘feeling tones’ of the letters that describe both Craigie’s attempts to get the film made and her difficulties in distributing it. It is argued that paying attention to these affective aspects of the archive and the film together enables a recalibration of (in a variant of Raymond William’s formulation) the structure of feminist feeling in both the film and to an extent, the wider public realm, in the immediate post-war period. Paying attention to the film’s affective dynamics in this way is also revealing, it is suggested, of its class and race positionality, enabling a more nuanced critical account of its politics.

Keywords

British Documentary; feminist histories; Jill Craigie; tone; post-war gender politics; structure of feeling; women and film.

To Be a Woman is a short campaigning film directed by Jill Craigie in 1950-51. It argues for equal pay for British women workers against a background of equivocation on the issue by politicians despite, as the film reminds them, their having ‘signed up’ to the declaration of human rights in which such (wage) equality was enshrined. It is a witty and provocative film that lays out the argument for equal pay through a mixture of montage, talking heads and a

dialogic form of narration aimed squarely at compelling its audience to see the justice of its claim. Its argument questions the conventional terms in which women's work is defined and valued. Craigie's images and narration acknowledge the economic and social value of women's work, emphasising what Michael Hardt (1999) describes as the undervalued but necessary 'affective labour' from nursing to cabaret dancing, in which women are over-represented. The film stresses both rational objections to the gendered division of labour and the role of emotions in opposing the status quo. Early in the film, the narrator emphasises the irony of the traditional divisions commenting that 'women work while men weep'. The film goes on to point to the privilege that pays men as the breadwinner in the family while exempting them from this emotional labour. Craigie pinpoints the unjustness of the naturalisation of domestic roles for women, indicating the ways that the state relies in times of crisis on women's labour in heavy industry and other 'male' occupations as well as pointing to the sheer silliness of many gendered occupational norms. The final line emphasises the affective dimension of political and feminist life, rhetorically asking 'isn't it time that we in Britain, made it a proud thing to be a woman?'

Craigie's film, despite its title, is less interested in the production of the category of woman than in the exploitation of her labour. It does not ask the questions that its title might suggest to those schooled in feminist and gender theory. It does not question the category of woman, but takes it to be self-evident that a woman is 'born,' not made, into a body that is self-evidently sexed, and which, if it has a sexuality, is seemingly inevitably oriented toward its opposite-sexed counterpart in a body that is explicitly coded as white. So, this is a 'normative' film which wears what would now be understood as its liberal white feminism firmly on its sleeve. There is no 'but' to this characterisation of the film. I have no interest in a 'but' that would be understood as defending its exclusions and omissions or which would assume its very specific location in a post-WW2 Britain at the point of (an as yet unfinished

project of) decolonisation which inevitably and ‘naturally’ produced its race, gender and sexual politics.¹ Far from it. I see these aspects of the film as pertinent to any critical engagement with it. There is, however, an ‘and’. *And*, this is a film worth revisiting in the context of both recovering a more nuanced understanding of the history of British feminism in the immediate post-war period *and* in relation to the ongoing project of understanding the nature and extent of (some) women’s historic participation in the British film industry.

Craigie made *To Be a Woman* as a film industry ‘insider/outsider’, under interesting, possibly unique, conditions of production and distribution. It is a film directed by a woman who had at this point been directing films for some years, and who appeared to expect to go on doing so (Tasker, 2021). The need to find resources to fund the production of *To Be a Woman* required Craigie to articulate explicitly a defence of the importance of film as a tool for the reimagining of the social world. It is, therefore, a film well worth revisiting as her reimagining allows the contemporary viewer to better understand emergent and still oppositional feminist discourses of equality and to situate this within a context of cultural activism. In keeping with the theme of this special issue, this article attends to the archival traces of the processes of financing and production within a wider context of re-evaluating women’s contributions to non-fiction film in the mid twentieth century. Specifically, I am interested in recapturing the affective labour that enabled the film to be made and the wider light this sheds on the cultural dynamics and atmosphere of gender equality discourses at this point both in the film industry and in the wider public realm. Unsurprisingly, it transpires that these are somewhat complicated, not to say contradictory; nonetheless, I suggest that paying attention to the ‘tones’ – found both in the film itself and in the archival traces of its production history – allows for a textured evocation of this period of British cultural and film history.

Setting the tone

Sianne Ngai's work on 'Ugly feelings' and specifically her utilisation of 'tone' as an analytic frame is extremely useful and generative in exploring and exposing the ways in which cultural works engage and critique the social world, often revealing, in Raymond Williams' terms, the 'structure of feeling'² of their moment of production. Put simply, analysis of tone, Ngai argues in the context of literary criticism, allows the critic to examine the overall as well as the minutiae of 'a cultural object's affective bearing or "set toward" the world' (2005: 29). In concert with the cultural work of representation, tone, 'seems so ideally suited for the analysis of ideology, which, as the materially embodied representation of an *imaginary relationship* to a holistic complex of real conditions, clearly shares tone's virtual, diffused, but also immanent character' (Ibid: 47). In other words, tone, though 'immaterial', is nonetheless both experiential and generative and it allows us to consider those aspects of cultural production which grant access to the social political field via the critic's attunement to the feeling that characterises both the text and its context. The analysis of tone is flexible in that it is traceable through a text, but it is also generalisable as an orientation toward, and a response to, the world.

Whilst these somewhat abstract explanations of what tone 'does' are useful, they raise a further question: how is tone materialised in a film or in an archive and how do we, as contemporary readers or viewers, access it? If, as I want to suggest here, it is a useful analytic frame, what precise aspects of the film or archive are thereby foregrounded or illuminated? In what follows, I have endeavoured to pay specific attention to aspects of the film and its production history which seem to me to engage the question of feeling: either explicitly, for example 'despondency' as a state of feeling not yet arrived at but evoked in a letter about the distribution of the film, or, implicitly, as 'archness', irritation or exasperation as mode of political engagement in the voiced commentary in the film. These direct allusions are

relatively straightforward to find but to interpret them (even if that interpretation makes no claim to ‘disinterestedness’ or ‘objectivity’) requires sensitivity to both the moment of their construction and the time of the reading. This is important when it comes to the question of an analysis that is sensitised to the racial and class politics of the film because the judgment of the film by the standards of a contemporary critical awareness of the ways that racism coexists with progressive gender politics is highly uncomfortable for a project which is trying to recover a figure unjustly erased from film history. Such discomfort cannot be wished away, and I have tried here to register and to put into a longer context the ways that some British films have attempted to evoke ‘good feelings’ about gender equality without sufficient attentiveness to the contribution and participation of people of colour to those campaigns. This doesn’t negate Craigie’s achievement or the importance of recovering her film from relative obscurity but it does mean thinking through the ways the film fits in a longer history of British feminism and its legacies.

Tones of feeling can also be called to account in less direct ways. For example, the interaction and sometimes the dissonance between elements of the film - music, dialogue and image - offer competing evocations of feeling and, sometimes, it is from this dissonance that an overall tone emerges. The key here is to be attentive to the possibility that the ways in which Craigie organises and references feeling in her film can give us additional insights into the status quo of gender politics in 1951 and the difficulties of articulating dissent from it. Interestingly as Sharon Tay notes, it is the ‘tone’ of *To be A Woman* that her biographer, Carl Rollyson, objected to. He goes so far as to label the tone of the film unhelpful to her cause as it ‘does not have the playful, cunning tone that might have disarmed an audience and an industry that had little patience for the film’s subject matter’ (2005: 132). It is hard not to read this as a gendered assessment of political tone. It would seem that to be palatable and

therefore effective Craigie needed to employ traditional ‘feminine’ tones of wit and charm and not the grace notes of anger that the film actually provides.

Feminist film critics and historians have long been interested in the gendered dimensions of feeling in film and its relation to genre and gender; see for example, in relation to the period under discussion here, discussion of the juxtaposing of emotion and restraint in performance or of realism and melodrama as modalities which offer competing and interconnected ways of accessing the social historical and affective truths of women’s experience (Gledhill, 1996: 217-8; Geraghty, 2000: 89; Gledhill and Knight, 2015). The analysis that follows stresses that attention to tone, even in an explicitly campaigning film, illuminates the politics and culture, or the ‘structure of feeling’, that enabled the text to be made in the first place and helps a contemporary reader of the archive or viewer of the film to reconstruct the constraints and vicissitudes of both the production and the broader cultural and political context.

Politics of Equal Pay

The immediate post-war period was marked, in terms of women’s participation in paid work and in relation to campaigning about it, by contradictory rhetorical and discursive emphases. As Penny Summerfield argues, this reflects a longer political and policy ambivalence over the necessity to encourage women’s work paid outside the home (1996:50) dating back to the war itself. Similarly, Denise Riley stresses the contradictions around women’s paid employment that, however urgently needed, were ideologically unpalatable to a pronatalist state which adopted a welfare model that ‘reinscribed [women] as dependents on the male breadwinner’ (Oram 1996: 65) and resorted to a rhetoric of ‘return to the home’. However, despite the reticence and complexity, the mobilisation of women during the war had generated ‘shifts in gender discourses’ (Ibid.) which were to prove tenacious. Significantly

for the argument in Craigie's film, women's post-war employment was also badly paid. The campaigns for equal pay – which, as Craigie's film points out, pre-date not only the Second World War but also the First – had achieved a high profile with the establishment of a Royal Commission, following the failure of teachers and civil servants to be granted equal pay when this was voted for via an amendment to the education bill in 1944 and subsequently overturned (Oram 1996: 69). This is the very general background then, to Craigie's film which as Allen Potter establishes, was the 'most expensive single project' (1957: 54) sponsored by the equal pay campaign committee, a pressure group, which had been formed in the aftermath of the successful campaign for equal compensation for war injuries in 1943. Formed to 'educate the country about equal pay', it had a wide range of trade union, women's and feminist organisations affiliated to it.

Film and cultural scholars have been arguing for some time that the post-war image of women returning to the home after venturing or being conscripted out of it during the war requires far more nuanced understanding, although this image clearly still has cultural traction.³ In 1948, the year that Craigie proposed her film, the Attlee government had been actively pursuing women workers into the understaffed, traditionally female industries, particularly textiles, and 'regarded the situation on the industrial front as a national emergency' (Crofts 2000: 30). Whilst the government invested considerable funding in a series of campaigns to recruit women, including married women into the labour market, there was concurrently, concern with the low birth rate resulting in a patchwork of ideologically confused policies which included a dismantling of the state-funded nurseries set up during the war. The setting up of the welfare state, both in ideological and policy terms, placed enormous emphasis on the (racialised) importance of the mothers role for 'Britain' but, as Alan Sinfield succinctly puts it, 'Domesticity was an issue because women were likely to resist it' (1989: 205) and indeed a policy leaflet from 1948 described the anxiety that women

will experience the return to the home as a return to ‘prison’ (quoted in Geraghty 2000: 80). Craigie’s film then, asks its central question -- what does it mean to be a woman in 1950? -- at a crucial moment in the reconstruction of gendered labour and ideology, making it all the stranger that this film isn’t more widely considered.

Tracking tone in the production history

On 4th December 1950, Craigie wrote to the General Secretary of the National Union of Women Teachers. The union responded very positively to Craigie’s suggestion of a film to promote equal pay in May 1949 and supported, promoted, elicited subscriptions (effectively crowd funding) from their members and eventually financed the production of *To Be A Woman*. In the 1950 letter, Craigie concedes that she has failed to find a commercial distributor for her film, despite earlier promises that her previous successes would make this straightforward. Craigie writes that she has ‘fixed to show the film at the House of Commons’:

Also, rather disappointing this, I’m afraid, A.B.C. say that the film is too controversial for them to show. British Lion, however, is negotiating with somebody else, and another important circuit is seeing the picture. . . . I am not particularly despondent yet. However, it could do no harm if Mrs Cazalet-Keir had a word with her friends at A.B.C. I am rather wondering whether the staff of the cinemas are also paid on an unequal basis. If we do not have good news this week, I shall have another go ad [sic] Basic Burton of the Film Academy, as I think that will be a good kick-off for the picture.

Now, please don’t be too worried as I have always had initial difficulties with distribution, but it will probably come out all right in the end.⁴

This letter interests me in part because of its contradictory tones - of suspicion about the commercial sector's exploitation of cinema workers, of equivocal confidence based in part in the belief that her informal networks will come to the aid of the film and a breezy denial of the reality that the equal pay film was 'too controversial' to be commercially viable. Or rather, the superficial denial in fact operates here as a covert acknowledgment that there is indeed something to 'worry' and be 'despondent' about.

This contrasts quite sharply with Craigie's earlier correspondence on the film. In her first letter, dated May 23rd 1949, to the NUWT proposing the film, she writes:

Dear Secretary

I would very much like to make a short film about the same length as the "Modern Age" films to put forward your case for equal pay and I am wondering how this could best be done.

I am not suggesting this as a commercial proposition but because I would like to help and I am quite convinced this could do more to advance your cause than almost anything else.

Such a film could be shown at the Academy cinema, Oxford Street, the House of Commons, various independent cinemas throughout the country not to mention private shows, film societies and so on.

The question is how on earth can we raise the money? I would be willing to work on the script without payment, but even so we would need about four to five thousand pounds

Nevertheless, knowing the influence my films have had on past projects I am sure it would be well worth while. For instance the only town plan to have made real

headway is the Plymouth plan and it is freely admitted in Plymouth this is largely due to my film "The way we live". My latest film "Blue Scar" is beating all records at Cardiff and has even done well at Luton and Brighton despite great opposition from the film trade. It will in the autumn be more widely distributed as a result and it was made with the sole object of creating greater understanding for the mining industry.

If only we could produce one on equal pay before the next general election I am sure it would help. Would not all the women's organisations contribute to such a venture?

The average cost of a 'modern age' film is about twelve thousand pounds, so you see I am not going into this with the idea of making a profit

My interest is simply that I believe in equal pay, but also that films are not used sufficiently for such purposes with the result that most people are blind to their potential influence.

Perhaps you will let me know what your committee thinks

Yours sincerely

Jill Craigie ⁵

As a 'cold call' to a potential film backer this letter speaks to Craigie's robust position within the public realm, if not unequivocally in 'the film trade'. The letter is also revealing of Craigie's contemporaneous view of her films as both successful and politically influential, with this being her primary interest in making them, a contrast with her later retrospective view of her career.⁶ Craigie's tone of confident expectation that her appeal will be acted on and that the union will respond positively, suggests a view of her career at this point as buoyant and respected. Even if we want to think of these declarations as performative -- she is producing these affective dispositions through the writing of the letter -- it is also significant that this level of confidence is available as a resource she claims -- and to which

she feels entitled. And it is this ‘happy performative’ (Austin 1962: 14) sense of entitlement (in a positive sense) that I would suggest is echoed in the varied tones of the philosophical and political arguments put forward in the film itself. To be a woman is, it argues, not yet to be allowed to be fulfilled as fully human because unequal economic structures render women as inferior. These arguments, as I shall return to, are spoken explicitly but also produced through the political grammar of the film form through, for example, the montages of shots of women performing precisely the kinds of roles from which they have traditionally been excluded whilst the arguments for and against equal pay are (somewhat unevenly) proffered through male and female voiceover narration by Julian Somers and Wendy Hiller. The narrators’ tones of voice shift throughout the film, enabling the viewer to interpret the relative merits and seriousness of different aspects of the arguments being put forth. Particularly telling are Hiller’s shifts in tone; she begins with a relatively high-pitched and lightly humorous evocation of the trajectory of women’s emancipation but, as the film progresses, adopts a deeper pitch and a darker tone of righteous anger at the stalling of the progressive trajectory toward equality.

Once the film had indeed been commissioned (Craigie’s confidence was not misplaced, despite some opposition⁷), she was asked by the union to provide words for a leaflet to be sent out to members of the various organisations (women’s freedom league and the equal pay campaign as well as the NUWT and other unions) to encourage their members to subscribe. In this document, she fleshes out the main points of the initial letter in more detail:

If you are asked to put money into a film, you are certainly entitled to know what kind of film it will be, where and how it will be shown and what kind of impact it may reasonably be expected to have on those who show it. . . . And if you are one of those

people who rarely go to the cinema but read about this fantastic industry with its astronomical costs, crises and ballyhoo you will very naturally wonder about the prospects of a film on a subject such as equal pay, made for a mere £5,000.

At its best can a film on this subject do anything more than restate what is already an established principle? Can it turn that principle into an established fact? If not is it worth making?

Let me not deceive you. We must face the fact that, in using any of medium of expression, the film in particular, there is no such thing as absolute safety. We are gambling on the skill of the artist. We are gambling on public taste. Our faith may be misplaced. Our calculations can go astray. At the same time few great reforms have come to fruition without using media of expression. In the past, it was the writer who was the forerunner of reform . . . Today . . . the cinema and the radio seduce young people from their books. They lure politicians for their leisure.

Significant here is the way that Craigie includes a person she may have never met into a confident 'we', rhetorically enlisting, or assuming a feminist solidarity. The document closely follows the cadences of a political speech, with its reiterations of formulations which stress the need for collective endeavour, courage and risk. Craigie compares her film to the American 'The march of time' series, rather than referring to the British documentaries,⁸ suggesting that the commercial viability and vibrancy of the US series is to be emulated for its progressive potential to 'lure' and 'seduce' young people and politicians. Describing her success so far in 'impossible subjects' she again offers *The Way We Live* as an example. Claiming that it holds the box office record in Plymouth, she suggests that it was her film which enabled the transformation and rebuilding of the city since it won public and civic support for the plan. *Blue Scar*, she says, has had a 'similar effect in Wales' though she

doesn't specify what, precisely the effect here was. Overall, the tone of the text is galvanising and impassioned and reads as an invitation to participate *in* rather than to *consume* this progressive, socially transformative film culture. This is emphasised in the final paragraph which is explicit in referencing its own affective, emotional charge:

Finally, isn't there something rather exciting about producing our own film? Is it not better, even if only in a small way, to try and create a cinema to our own taste instead of passively to accept what we are given? Many people are disgusted with the cinema at the moment and usually film people are blamed. Are not we, the public, just as much responsible?

Again, this document is interesting in its tone, its 'affective bearing'. Not only does she 'object' the cinema, referring to the disgust in which it is held, but she also positions herself in an interestingly ambiguous position within it: not with 'film people' but with 'we' 'the public'. This oscillation of subject position – highly successful director one minute, one of 'the people' the next – is significant in the context of the longstanding critical suspicion of the British documentary's anthropological gaze, its view from above and its address to social democracy which elicits 'the people' to identify with the imagined 'national community' created through its films, as described by Andrew Higson (1995: 6, 187) amongst others. Significantly, Craigie is marking herself out as distinct from this celebrated national product on the basis of a cultural politics of participation over representation, or more accurately a desire to be part of the process of constructing such representations rather than merely consuming them. In the context of factual filmmaking this is significant in that the representation itself, as a product of taking on the means of cultural production, has subsequently been a hallmark of British filmmaking with a social justice agenda, from

feminist filmmakers in the 1970s to Black and Asian cooperatives in the 1980s and 1990s. Like Craigie, they recognised that there is a politics to the ownership of the images produced of and about ‘the people’.

Craigie’s cultural politics here are also in line with Raymond Williams who at this point in the early 1950s was beginning to formulate his views on the way that cultural practice is enmeshed with a ‘structure of feeling,’ both in the sense of reflecting a given society’s conscious and unconscious preoccupations and also in terms of the role of cultural production in disrupting and disturbing them. Some years later in *The Long Revolution* he describes the concept thus: ‘Since our way of seeing things is literally our way of living, the process of communication is in fact the process of community: the sharing of common meanings and thence common activities and purposes; the offering, reception and comparison of new meanings, leading to the tensions and achievements of growth and change’ (1961: 58). Williams’ analytic lens of the structure of feeling is defined as ‘the culture of a period . . . the arts of a period, taking these to include characteristic approaches and tones in argument’ (68). Notwithstanding the caution he recommends on the selective documentary evidence that is left behind for historians of cultural activity, I’m interested in the next section in examining the tone of the argument Craigie presents in both the correspondence about the film and the film itself, the ‘political grammar’ (Hemmings 2011) of the film’s form, in order to ask how Craigie’s film – which attempted to elicit an affective solidarity between filmmaker and subscriber, suggesting an active role rather than a passive role in film culture for ‘we the public’ – articulates the imagined future of gender equality at this time?

Finding a feminist tone

Significantly this period in *feminist* history has been understood as lacking a coherent ‘feminist’ political voice despite, or perhaps because of, the existence of a range of feminist

campaign groupings. Craigie's film, through its authoritative, organizing female voiceover, purports to speak with a unifying authority on behalf of all 'women'. This univocal voice might appear to offer coherence and a clear political message but the costs of that clarity is the familiar failure to account for differences between women, or sensitivity to how these differences map onto existing hierarchies and norms. Riley describes this wider tendency to 'speak for an artificially unified constituency of "women", whose apparent silence and hesitations they eagerly claimed to fill in' (1983: 139), clarifying how the divisions between bourgeois feminism and working-class feminists were exacerbated. Craigie's film sidesteps some of these issues in a problematic glossing over of the differences between women, only some of whom speak for what 'being a woman' means, through a narrow, bourgeois feminist framing which is effectively obscured by a visual display of commonality. The film's images of women at work and its voice-over commentary suggest that economic exploitation in paid labour renders 'all' women lesser human beings in the context of the failure to properly enact the declaration of human rights and the commitment to equal pay which had been on the political agenda throughout the late 1940s. The film is careful to describe and visualise a wide array of women's occupations and class positions but it foregrounds the voices of middle class and professional women. The women interviewed and named in the film are professional and highly qualified, pictured in professional interiors in front of bookcases, around large committee tables or in pursuit of their profession: the architect Jane Drew on a building site, plans in hand, or Edith Summerskill addressing a political rally, for example. Even the less sympathetically portrayed 'wife and mother' who complacently fails to recognise the need for change is, as evidenced by dress, accent and domestic setting, decidedly middle-class. Working-class women, when they are featured, are neither interviewed nor granted individuality, merely pictured getting on with their jobs. And here - in an aside - it is perhaps telling that it was the schoolteachers and clerical workers who did

achieve equal pay formally in 1955, and not the industrial workers who provide the most visually arresting but silent 'images of women' in the film.

To some extent this privileging of professional women's voices can be understood as a direct result of its financial backing but it is also in keeping with the representational politics of much feminist campaigning that conceives of 'women' as a group but obscures the perspectives of all but those who are closest to the white, middle class 'norm'. The film thus conceives of 'all' women working the double shift in and out of the home and united in their disadvantage but falls short of imagining them as anything other than white and/or non-migrant. In the world of the film 'to be a woman' is finally, to be white. Whilst this might read as an oversimplification of what is a radical call for equality which should be judged according to the mores of its time, rather than in relation to contemporary anti-racist critique, it is more useful to encourage an openness to the complexity of such evaluations. The lack of representation of Black women's social history in Britain has real consequences for contemporary racial dynamics and inequalities.⁹ This 'campaign film' of 1951 is an artefact which is clearly out of step with a 21st century anti-racist sensibility but what is interesting, and what can be seen in the film, is how Craigie, as a feminist filmmaker, is constrained by as well as struggling with a discursive regime and cultural imaginary which can only realise, in its visual representation *and* in its explicit argumentation, women as an unmarked and de facto white formation.

This broadly conforms to the inadequate gendering of legal inequalities that Kimberlie Crenshaw's definition of the term 'intersectionality' explicitly reveals: the ways in which oppression under the law is routinely conceived on a single axis at a time and produces a fatal lacunae for women of colour whereby gender *or* race *might* be recognised as the basis of claims against discriminatory practice but not the ways in which these intersect. In 1951, Craigie is in effect offering her audience a visual economy which clearly struggles with

imagining the oppressions of the labour market operating across multiple dimensions although men, by contrast, are understood to be differentiated (and potentially disadvantaged) by their refugee status, their religion and the colour of their skin. In one section of the film, the female narrator rhetorically supposes that ‘no person of integrity’ would pay someone less ‘because they were a refugee or because of the colour of their skin or religion’, adding ‘but we insult women in this way’. The tone is an important element here, suggesting that any optimism regarding the eradication of discrimination is misplaced. The narrator’s delivery and the music introduce an air of breezy levity. In this formulation by default, ‘All the women are white, all the blacks are men’¹⁰ despite, as a number of scholars have noted, the long history of Black women’s presence in the British economy.¹¹

These comments can be reinforced by considering, at a more ‘textual’ level, the way the film produces its tone. The film works in part through an articulation of arguments scripted so as to appear to be in dialogue – the female narrator is questioned and sometimes contradicted by a male narrator - with various points raised by interested parties about the questions of equality generally, the ‘progress’ of women since the nineteenth century and the stalling of that progress as shown by the refusal to provide equal pay. The female narrator’s increasing exasperation through the continuing articulation of the injustice of the position of women culminates in the re-iteration of the observation that fundamentally women are ‘cheap labour’. There is great rhetorical strength in a repeated, increasingly emphatically performed ‘she is cheap labour’ line, which operates in juxtaposition with what starts out as notably cool rationality and reasoned debate. The building up to the righteous indignation of the declamatory statement works as an emotive charge, designed to induce outrage.

At the level of the spoken word, the argument is delivered with an arch, ironic, at times playful, even camp, enunciation and tone through the female voice over. The male narrator’s apparent authority is repeatedly undercut not only by the female narrator’s

arguments but by the montage depicting women's labour across a range of occupations and professions, cut to a crisp, staccato tempo. This montage of images, which includes shots of male and female workers, does as much of the work of making the argument for equality as the narration since it is here that the evidence of women's multiple competences is presented. This visual, empirical 'documentary' 'evidence' (conventionally coded as realism) is given another dimension by the musical score; the percussive crashes lend a dramatic charge to the scripted outrage, raising the tension and providing a rhythmic dissonance which provides a sometimes ironic emphasis to the industrial montage which serves to unify the rallying cry for equality. But again, in this authoritative montage, none of the women employed in the industries that Craigie presents actually speak; instead, they are figured through a stockinged foot pedalling an industrial machine here, a factory worker on a production line there.

Montage thus functions here to evidence women's manifest ability to perform in a wide variety of roles (literally documenting that work). It can also be read as enabling the visual coherence of the unifying category of Woman, which detracts from the hierarchies that a more careful evaluation of the different presentations of professional and working-class women reveals. Montage structures the audience's emotional and intellectual responses to the image and voiceover. It 'works at both a physical or emotional level in its ability to create rhythm, tempo, and momentum and at a rational level in its ability to display parallel scenes of action, to deal with the multiple, and so construct a much more extensive diegesis.'

(Higson 1995: 201)

This combination of the emotional with the rational through montage is a major factor in making *To Be a Woman* a satisfying political or campaigning film. But the music is also central, providing both a soundscape and another important element of the argument. The argument for claiming 'equality' in creative practice -- to which Craigie's correspondence about her own ability to work across multiple projects at this time in her life is a testimony --

is reinforced through the use of music and the glimpse of a multi-talented (multi-tasking) female composer. Elisabeth Lutyens, is briefly shown on screen along with architects, teachers, clerical workers and politicians as well as trade unionists. Her work on the soundtrack is explicitly, but subtly, positioned as a counter to the perceived deficiencies of women as creatives, voiced here by a curmudgeonly male academic, sitting smugly in an armchair and decrying woman as not ‘creatives but men’s drudges’, unconsciously personifying Virginia Woolf’s internalised mantra of ‘women can’t paint women can’t write’ in her 1927 novel *To the Lighthouse* (1992:80). Lutyen’s work in the film industry included scores for horror films, leading to her title of ‘horror queen’. Her percussive score here works to augment tension and elicit shock and outrage in ways that bear comparison with that more obviously visceral form of filmmaking. If we understand this practice as ‘melodramatic’ – in the sense of manipulating emotional response through the visceral production of an affective state – the musical score can be understood as not only expressing but also producing an emotional attachment to equality; the musical score and its embodied composer are central to the cultural politics of the films emotional scope and tone.

To conclude this section, I want to link this melodramatic orientation of the film to critical discussions about British film in the 1940s. As Christine Gledhill argues in her discussion of the complex relationship between realism and melodrama in feminist evaluations of the period, it is too easy to dichotomise the relative values of the melodrama valorised by feminist critics for escaping the ‘ideological straitjacket of classic realism’ by pitting it against a masculine culture of realism ‘complicit with bourgeois ideology’ (1996:13-4). Her discussion of a symbiotic rather than oppositional relationship between documentary and melodrama opens up the possibility that melodramatic meaning is an important element of documentary. *To Be A Woman* certainly underscores this point, drawing on a wide emotional repertoire of analytically-presented, philosophical moral outrage,

humour, ironic counterpoint and scorn to induce not an ‘affect of concern’ (Elsaesser 1996: 173) that ultimately leaves the status quo untroubled, but rather a call to effect material change.

Conclusion

This returns me to the question posed earlier as to whether looking across Craigie’s correspondence to the rhetorical strategies and visual economy of the film enables us to understand something of the trajectory of feminist feeling in the period. Williams famously coined the term ‘structure of feeling’ to attempt to work through ideas about ‘culture’ and ‘democracy’ which struggle to reconcile the problem of opposing ‘minority culture’ paternalism whilst acknowledging the potential moral authority of the artist’s progressive vision. This is extremely suggestive for understanding Craigie’s expressed views on the possibilities of film and the filmmaker’s role. Williams’ and Ngai’s work sensitises us, when looking back at a period of ideological contestation and struggle, to be aware of the relation between what is openly articulated and what is assumed as background noise. The analysis of the feeling tones in Craigie’s correspondence and in the film alerts the contemporary viewer to the possibilities and difficulties in accessing the background hum of nascent ideas and their articulation and dissemination. The ‘ideas’ of feminism in the early 1950s are both taken for granted - equal pay is formally recognised but concurrently is also framed or articulated as a seeming impossibility – and also run up against the more conservative grain of gender culture in a complex range of reactions to the recent upheavals of ‘total war’ and its contradictory exhortations to ‘women’.

Craigie’s attempt to produce an explicitly political but accessible and ‘popular’, or at least commercially viable, articulation of an avowedly feminist position is genuinely remarkable. *To Be a Woman* articulates what are still major ideological and practical policy

battlegrounds for feminism: the status and accounting of reproductive and caring labour; gendered occupational segregation; sexual difference; the gender pay gap; the overemphasis on the 'male breadwinner' in economic policy; and the status of women within (or outside of) a human rights framework. At the same time the film's reliance on white middle-class women reflects a history of feminism that has not been inclusive. While in part this might be accounted for by the involvement of a professional women's union in the financing of the production, it is important to acknowledge this as part of a wider pattern of exclusion. Bringing out and analysing these tensions seems to me to enhance rather than detract from the film's significance for both feminist film historians and historians of feminism. In addition, the film is further evidence of the erasure of women's contribution to British cinema history. Craigie's relative obscurity now is a considerable challenge to British film historians when compared with her status at the time as a busy working director with networks, influence and a vision for the social role of participatory, politically engaged cinema. Paying attention to the film's affective dynamics in this way is also revealing, it is suggested, of its class and race positionality and enables us to develop a more nuanced critical account of its politics.

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¹ For a discussion of the role of women of colour in films and broadcasting during the 1940s with a focus on Una Marson see Jarrett-Macauley (1996).

² Throughout this article I am aware that using Williams' term 'structure of feeling' to do some important but somewhat vague work here. The capacious imprecision of William's term has been subject to a whole minor academic industry in itself and was, in his own work

subject to repeated attempts at recalibration and redefinition. See Stuart Middleton (2019) for a full account.

³ For example, the recent highly successful stage play *Home I'm Darling* (Wade 2018) revolves around the fantasy of a return to 1950s gender roles. These roles have received careful critical attention in relation to both film and wider cultural forms from, amongst others, Sinfield (1989), Mellencamp (1992, Gledhill and Swanson (1996), Geraghty (2000)) and Bell (2010).

⁴ Craigie, J. Correspondence (1948-51) 'To be a woman – equal pay film' Institute of Education Special Collection: UWT D/9/2, 2 folders.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ For a discussion of Craigie's retrospective dismissal of her own achievements see Thynne (2021) and Tasker (2021).

⁷ For example, the clerical and administrative workers union was less than enthusiastic as a letter from the general secretary to the NUWT, on 23rd September 1949, makes clear: 'It is our experience within the trade union movement that films of this type you are contemplating cannot get into the commercial houses and their field of operation is extremely limited . . . Moreover the general experience is that the production of these films always exceeds to a very considerable extent the estimated cost.' Institute of Education Special Collection: UWT D/9/2, 2 folders.

⁸ See Enticknap (2000: 209-11) for a discussion of *The March of Time* series in relation to the British documentary movement and Rank's *This Modern Age* series to which Craigie also refers.

⁹ See Lewis (1993) for an overview of equal pay debates and assumptions about gendered divisions of labour for Black women workers in this period and since. For more on the

exclusion of Black women from accounts of British life and work see Bryan, Dadue and Scafe (1985).

¹⁰ This is a reference to the title of the 1982 collection *All the Women are White, all the Blacks are Men but Some of us are Brave: Black Women's Studies* edited by Akasha Gloria Hull, Patricia Bell-Scott and Barbara Smith.

¹¹ More work is needed on the omission of black women in more recent British films such as *Made in Dagenham* (2010) and *Suffragette* (2015) and on the lack of mainstream films about black and Asian women involved in struggles such as the 1976-8 Grunwick strike.