

Eckart Voigts-Virchow (ed.): *Janespotting and Beyond: British Heritage Retrovisions Since the Mid-1990s*. Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 2004

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1 With this collection of essays Eckart Voigts-Virchow has brought together an impressive range of perspectives on the British heritage phenomena since its heyday period of the 1980s and early 1990s. *Janespotting and Beyond* should appeal to various segments of scholarship, as well as be of use to the general reader. Divided into four main sections, each section concentrates on an evolving heritage facet or issue of the ongoing heritage debate in British Culture Studies. Two of the four sections focus on the principal British writers, Jane Austen and William Shakespeare (only E. M. Forster has received as much "heritage" attention as Austen and Shakespeare). Section three "From Auntie's Heritage to Anti-heritage" discusses the turn away from heritage aesthetics, which opens up timely issues for the twenty-first century. Section four "Transnational Productions/Transnational Classrooms" evidences Voigts-Virchow's German context as the three essays in this section explore the British heritage film's international appeal, especially from a German perspective.

2 In the lively Introduction, "'Corset Wars': An Introduction to Syncretic Heritage Film Culture since the Mid-1990s," Voigts-Virchow maps out the heritage terrain for beginning readers as well as provides direction for future scholarly discussion. In terms of gender the heritage film debate was reinvigorated in the 1990s by feminist and gender critics who moved the debate out of issues of nationality and nostalgia to those of gender and sexuality. Perhaps not surprising the gender debates that enlivened the discussion in the 1990s are not the collection's principal concern. Instead, nationalism and nostalgia are still key concepts as Voigts-Virchow maintains that British cultural production in the form of the "post 1980s or 1990s heritage films" fills the German vacuum or lack of heritage films because of, ironically, the manifestation of nationalism in Germany in the twentieth-century: "Even if there have been attempts at rejuvenating the Austro-German Heimatfilm one can hardly overestimate the influence of the British heritage formula on the German market. In this sense, Germany and Britain seem to share a 'culture area', British traditions imaginatively replacing the lacunae of German heritage culture destroyed by militarism and fascism" (23).

3 The first section "The Mise-en-scene of Austen Powers" contains articles by two of the most well-known scholars in heritage films studies, Andrew Higson and Pamela Church Gibson. In his article "English Heritage, English Literature, English Cinema: Selling Jane Austen to Movie Audiences in the 1990s," Higson believes that the mid-1990s Austen films

fit into the category of "the tasteful, middlebrow period drama with an English setting and characters, strong literary connections, and an intense appeal to female viewers" (39). Although Higson does not reference the trendy (American) nomenclature of "chic-flick" (British aka "frock flick"), this is in fact what he accuses these productions of pandering to, as Hollywood became "fascinated by the potential of the co-production and the cross-over film" (39). Higson goes on to name "nine features of the Anglo-Hollywood costume drama production trend that I think are salient here" (40). Well-regarded scholar Pamela Church Gibson addresses Patricia Rozema's adaptation of Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* by hailing it as a presentation of "'otherness' of sexuality" (53). According to Church Gibson, "Yes, Claire Monk and others have found-correctly-'queer' moments in the main body of heritage texts; however, this is the first to be infused throughout by a queer sensibility and by the deliberate introduction of different modes of transgressive sexuality" (53). Examples of "transgressive sexuality" include Rozema's presentation of Fanny's attraction to the female body (supposedly representative of Austen's own same-sex attraction), intimation of incestuous relations, suggested multi-person sexual liaison, and the "disturbing" inclusion of "Sir Thomas' firm belief that his female slaves are there to provide him with sexual pleasure" (55). Rozema's film is not your grandmother's Austen and Church Gibson notes that she is not surprised that "Middle England Jane Austen devotees were so hostile" to the film, but is "disappointed" that scholars have not given the film proper and due attention.

4 In Section Two, "Bardbiz: Heritage Shakespeare," another well-known heritage critic, Deborah Cartmell, addresses what Voigts-Virchow has called the 1990s "reconceptualising Shakespeare" for postmodern audiences. The now familiar "Trainspotter" and "Janespotter" label to identify the film-goer Cartmell claims can be seen in 1990s Shakespeare films. Featuring Michael Almereyda's *Hamlet*, Cartmell discusses this teenpic film as relying heavily on the techniques popularized in that other postmodern teenpic film, Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet*. In "Heritage, Humanism, Populism: The Representation of Shakespeare in Contemporary British Television" Roberta E. Pearson claims that no matter which of the three strategies (heritage, humanism, populism) employed to appropriate the image and cultural capital of Shakespeare in contemporary Britain, each "erases history." The heritage approach "constructs a waxwork icon Shakespeare divorced from the vibrancy and brutality of the popular culture of his own time" (96); humanism makes him transcendent and universal, yet insists on "faithful" period adaptation; populism, meanwhile, "blurs distinctions between historical and contemporary audiences and cultural forms" (96). These classifications could be rewritten as pomophobic (heritage), modernist (humanist), and aesthetically postmodern

(populist). More instructive for the reader might have been an assertion as to how to get beyond these types of appropriation-what kind presentation of Shakespeare might be more historically faithful? And could a historically accurate Shakespeare 1) in fact exist, and 2) be as desirable, weighty and seductive as the three analyzed presentations of Shakespeare?

5 These questions bring us to Section Three "From Auntie's Heritage to Anti-heritage." Another well-known British media scholar Sarah Street interprets British television's use of postmodern cinematic techniques in recent television historical dramas. Because television historical dramas such as *The Lost Prince* and *The Other Boleyn Girl* focus on "lost" historical figures, the attempt at a self-reflexive camera lets the viewer in on this "insider" view of history-and those outside of "official" history. Similarly, Carolin Held discusses the way in which two recent television serials, *Our Mutual Friend* and *Vanity Fair*, depart from "established conventions against the presumed canon of monolithic generic formula and are proof for the increasingly complex representation of heritage in contemporary British television" (114). The major question in my mind that arises from this section and which perhaps haunts all supposedly anti-heritage films is how do these films-and critics discussing these films-get beyond those traces of longing that even-or especially-the anti-heritage film presents?

6 The first essay of Section Four "Transnational Productions/Transnational Classrooms" by Angela Krewani discusses the British heritage drama's impact on America and American film. While the heritage phenomenon was at its height in the US in the late 1980s and early 1990s with a certain segment of the box office and Hollywood invested in the cross-over film when it seemed profitable, it would have been useful if Krewani's article would have contextualized the importance or impact of *British* heritage film on US audiences (thus, further gauging Hollywood's involvement in heritage). The final two essays of the collection, Carola Surkamp's "A Plea for Varied Readings: Teaching British Heritage Films to German Students" and Monika Seidl's "Kommissar Rex Meets Mr. Darcy: Pedagogical Approaches to Visualising the Past and Literary Classics," are insightful not only for their pedagogical merit, but also valuable in thinking about representations of people, history and the very process and problem of representation across national and cultural boundaries.

7 As should be evident in this brief review, *Janespotting and Beyond* is valuable for its richness in multiple perspectives and for its help to those scholars engaged in specific areas of the heritage debate. Certainly many of the essays reinvigorate heritage and post-heritage discourses. In this way, Voigts-Virchow's collection is valuable and timely. Ten years after the famous "Janespotter" versus "Trainspotter" tag, the debate begins to show signs of wear:

the Janespotter and the Trainspotter begin to merge into the same entity. Essays in this collection deal with the inevitable amalgamation of heritage and "yob" (e.g., *Plunkett and Macleane*) in an effort to get beyond *Janespotting*.