

Gillian Dow and Clare Hanson, eds. 2012. *Uses of Austen: Jane's Afterlives*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. 254 pp. ISBN: 9780230319462.

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This volume edited by Gillian Dow and Clare Hanson comes as a ground-breaking, enlightening study on Jane Austen's afterlives at a time when her appeal has reached its peak, with rewritings, prequels and sequels of the novels, film adaptations and offshoots, mash-ups in YouTube, blogs and endless translations. Dow and Hanson's volume adds to the emerging field of scholarship on Jane Austen's afterlives, where we find titles such as *Jane Austen's Fame: How Jane Austen Conquered the World* (Harman 2010), *Jane Austen: Cults and Cultures* (Johnson 2012), *Matters of Fact in Jane Austen: History, Location and Celebrity* (Barchas 2012) and *Global Jane Austen: Pleasure, Passion and Possessiveness in the Jane Austen Community* (Raw and Dryden 2013). The volume under review offers a collection of eleven critical essays by renowned scholars who examine the dimension of the Jane Austen phenomenon and analyse Austen in popular contemporary culture. In other words, the book's main strength is how it successfully contributes to a dialogue between scholarly and popular approaches to Jane Austen. The volume opens with a brief introduction that summarises and contextualizes Austen's reception, and skillfully develops the exponential rise in her fame, only equated with Shakespeare's. For the editors, aspects such as the rise of "girlie culture," the myriad 1990s film and television adaptations, third-wave feminism and post-feminism have contributed to Austen's boom. This introductory chapter, then, serves the function of explaining the *raison d'être* of the collection.

Deidre Lynch's thoughtful opening essay entitled "A Genius for Foretelling': Augustan Austen and Future Fiction" starts by examining the periodicities of Austen's fiction, and emphasises the difficulties of placing her in any single age. For instance, in the decades after the First World War, she seemed an exile from the age to which she belonged, and figured as the last of the Augustans. For Lynch, the construction of an Augustan Austen was not associated with nostalgia, but with the desire to produce an image of the author that could match the aesthetic of the early twentieth century. "This act of distancing Austen in time, making her a creature of the eighteenth century rather than the nineteenth, could also, in some hands, serve as a way of recruiting her

example for the up to date” (21). Thus, Austen was depicted as an Augustan and, at the same time, was constructed as an example of modernity. The next two chapters are also devoted to reading Austen albeit that they slightly change their focus towards rewritings of the novels. In chapter two, Maroula Joannou explores Barbara Pym’s *Excellent Women* (1951), Dodie Smith’s *I Capture the Castle* (1949) and Elizabeth Taylor’s *Palladian* (1946) to see how they were influenced by Austen, especially by *Pride and Prejudice*. Published in the aftermath of the Second World War, all these rewritings turned to Austen because they wanted to distance themselves from all the aspects of contemporary Victorian society they so disliked. Rebecca Munford in chapter three sheds light upon Emma Tennant’s four Austen sequels—*Pemberley: A Sequel to Pride and Prejudice* (1993), *An Unequal Marriage: Or Pride and Prejudice Twenty Years Later* (1994), *Elinor and Marianne: A Sequel to Sense and Sensibility* (1996) and *Emma in Love: Jane Austen’s Emma Continued* (1996)—whose main aim is to challenge male-centred representations and to go beyond the happy endings. According to Munford, the sequels transgress “the literary and cultural borders of the Austen estate” and should be placed on the borderland of feminist revisioning and postfeminist longing (61). Chapters two and three are useful because they reveal how Austen’s work can be transformed via rewritings.

Chapters four and five of the collection shift their focus and move beyond prequels and sequels of Austen’s works. Juliette Wells’s contribution is perhaps one of the most valuable assets in the whole volume since it offers an original interpretation of Austen fandom. She claims the need to analyse Austen-inspired works on their own terms, since they will help us understand why and how the Austen boom has occurred. This chapter is very much in keeping with the hypothesis of her work *Everybody’s Jane: Austen in the Popular Imagination* (2012). If film adaptation has become a crucial area of research in Austen studies, contemporary popular texts should be analysed in depth in order to explore how they approach the novelist, and how they contribute to the current interpretation of her *oeuvre*. Furthermore, Austen-inspired writings equally offer literary scholars “an exceptional opportunity to reach across the divide between academic and amateur readers” (88); they provide a common ground for popular readers and literary scholars. Julian North in “Jane Austen’s Life on Page and Screen” (chapter five) addresses the issue of Austen biographies and how they have distorted her image, and have produced and contested a romanticized author. North brings together literary biographies published in the 1990s as well as film biopics, such as Patrizia Rozema’s *Mansfield Park* (1999)—the character of Fanny Price is based on Jane Austen—, Julian Jarrold’s *Becoming Jane* (2007) and Jeremy Lovering’s *Miss Austen Regrets* (2008). Curiously enough, all these texts—whether written or visual—hint at the presence or absence of romance in Austen’s life. Given the fact that her life was full of openings for interpretation, retellings are imaginative. Chapter six of the volume highlights the importance of Austen’s letters. In it, William May explores the interconnections between novels written by women in the twentieth century, Austen’s letters and the

novelist herself. One interesting finding is how Austen's letters create an author who is completely at odds with the Angel in the house and transform—at least partially—some writers' views of Austen, transforming her legacy and inviting readers to rethink Austen's influence.

The remaining chapters within the collection revolve around a travelling and global Austen. The strength of chapter seven by Felicity James, "At Home with Jane: Placing Austen in Contemporary Culture," resides in the exploration of places of pilgrimage, like her home at Chawton and the new Chawton House Library, to see how they have constructed an image of Austen at home in the English landscape "that coexists with the multiple, transnational afterlives of her work" (132). Although Austen's afterlives have occurred in transnational spaces, she continues to be firmly located in a very specific English landscape. The author concludes her chapter showing the possibility of the coexistence of the local and the global. Next, in a well-structured and highly readable chapter, Gillian Dow explores the idea of a global Austen by means of translations and translators. Dow speaks of thinking back to Continental sisters, highlighting the fact that the first female reader of Austen who has left a record of her sustained engagement with the novels was a translator (Isabelle de Montolieu). Interestingly, she is concerned with translations of Austen's *oeuvre* in the nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first centuries. She shows how France is the country that has been engaged with her the most, that it was not until the 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s that all of her six novels were translated into mainstream European languages and that the novels are very difficult to translate into Japanese for linguistic and cultural reasons, amongst others. Her concluding remarks emphasise how translations are continuously remade to adapt Austen to new generations. Although this chapter is a valuable asset to the collection with all the translations mentioned, she neglects in her analysis the translations made in Spain.¹ The paradigm of Austen's global reach is again highlighted in Stephanie Jones's chapter "The Ethics of Geography: Women as Readers and Dancers in Gurinder Chadha's *Bride and Prejudice*." Following Edward Said's postcolonial framework, Jones's chapter provides a thorough analysis of Chadha's *Bride and Prejudice* as an instance of global mobility. *Bride and Prejudice* is read alongside Rajiv Menon's *Kandukondain Kandukondain* (2000) and Azar Nafisi's book *Reading Lolita in Tebran* (2003). This chapter needs more theoretical background since, although it talks about dancing on the Indian screen, it does not explain Bollywood conventions. In chapter ten, Mary Ann O'Farrell aims to examine the conjugation and interrelation between Austen and contemporary politics. The author foregrounds how Austen has even been construed in columns on Middle East warfare and Libya. Curiously enough, O'Farrell notices a less productive use of Austen when the novelist is reimagined "as a punchline" consisting of juxtapositions based on

¹ To read about the translations made in Spain, see Aida Díaz Bild, "Still the Great Forgotten? The Reception of Jane Austen in Spain" (2007).

popular (mis)understandings of the novelist as “unworldly” (192, 202). The volume is brought to a close with Shelley Cobb’s chapter entitled “What Would Jane Do? Postfeminist Media Uses of Austen and the Austen Reader.” Throughout her essay, Cobb shows how contemporary popular culture’s obsession with Austen has more to say about us than about her or her novels; she appears as an antidote to contemporary life. In fact, the female readers in the film *The Jane Austen Book Club* (Robin Swicord 2007) and the TV series *Lost in Austen* (2008) use her to assuage their dissatisfaction. In a well-documented essay with constant references to feminist scholars on Austen such as Deborah Kaplan, Elzette Steenkamp and Devoney Looser, Cobb explores the ideological uses of Austen by postfeminist media to suggest that the use of the author by fans may be associated with a lost feminist identity as well as with discontent with postfeminist culture.

The collection’s strategy of dealing with Austen’s afterlives in their various forms has its weaknesses at points. More coherence and unity in the volume would have been achieved by means of different sections with brief and short introductions. As the volume has been conceived, it is clear that it is targeted at knowledgeable readers of Austen because considerable background is required. Another shortcoming of the volume is the scarce appearance of screen adaptations. At the end of the collection, the reader may certainly feel an appetite for more films and offshoots and contemporary productions like mash-ups in YouTube. After all, the most frequent encounter with popular culture tends to be via cinema. The main downside of the volume, though, has to do with its lack of theoretical underpinning. With the exception of Juliette Wells, who draws on Abigail Derecho’s theorisation of fan culture, Stephanie Jones, who follows Edward Said’s theoretical framework, and Shelley Cobb, who refers to feminist scholars, the volume is too light on theory.

Yet, despite these minor shortcomings, Dow and Hanson’s volume is a welcome, enlightening and up-to-date contribution to the field of Austen and popular culture. Its engaging and well-researched chapters provide a wide range of encounters between Austen and contemporary popular culture, making it a compulsory collection for those interested in this growing field of study. With it, the authors not only demonstrate how Austen exists in the *milieu* of global mobility but also smooth the way for future research and, above all, consolidate the need to analyse contemporary culture in order to arrive at a new and more complex understanding of Austen.

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