

Gillian Dow and Clare Hanson, eds., *Uses of Austen: Jane's Afterlives*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. Pp. 256. £53. ISBN 9780230319462.

'Miss Austen', wrote T. E. Kebbel in 1885, 'could hardly be appreciated by any one not thoroughly English' (136). Today, such a statement appears absurd. The essays collected in *Uses of Austen*, edited by Gillian Dow and Clare Hanson, demonstrate that Austen's appeal is resolutely international: as Stephanie Jones puts it, Austen exists within the 'contemporary milieu of global mobility' (175). Moreover, the commemoration of Austen has long been bound up with what Felicity James describes as a 'tradition of transatlantic pilgrimage' (141). But while Kebbel's parochialism seems particularly antiquated, the vexed question of what it means to 'appreciate' Austen remains open to question. As several of the contributors to this volume note, scholarly and popular approaches to Austen are increasingly configured as dialogic, rather than antagonistic. What Keppel refers to as 'appreciation' may take many forms: from early-twentieth-century attempts to re-position Austen as an object of academic study, to the online publication of fan fiction.

The opening essay by Deidre Lynch examines how, in the decades following the First World War, Austen was reimagined as an eighteenth-century author, distinguished for her satire, her Johnsonian prose and even the 'Homeric' quality of her sentences (26). As Lynch makes clear, the construction of an 'Augustan' Austen was not a case of indulging in 'nostalgic escapism' but a means of producing an Austen to match the austere modern aesthetic of the early twentieth century (29). Lynch's careful argument poses a significant challenge to the kind of linear literary tradition that functions by 'drawing straight lines between points in time' (30). The workings of literary influence are taken up by several contributors here. William May suggests that the informal, occasionally caustic, tone of Austen's letters offered many twentieth-century women writers an alternative way of relating to her, allowing them to sidestep her formidable fictional legacy. Similarly, Rebecca Munford's exploration of Emma Tennant's sequels to Austen's novels addresses the 'anxieties about legitimacy, inheritance, and re/production' provoked by such 'literary reimaginings' (66, 59). The tensions between the scholarly and the popular reappear here, as Munford argues that Tennant's encroachment on the limits of Austen's original novels saw her labelled 'a violative interloper who had trespassed on the Austen estate' (61).

The spatial terms that Munford employs recall Michel de Certeau's formulation of readers as travellers, moving 'across lands belonging to someone else, like nomads poaching their way across fields they did not write' (*The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. by Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 174). The productive possibilities of literary trespassing are explored in Juliette Wells' insightful essay on Austen and the popular reader. Drawing upon Abigail Derecho's theorisation of fan fiction, Wells develops the notion of the 'archontic text': one that invites creative interpretation, blurring the borders between source text and the archive that it inspires. This model seeks to dissolve literary hierarchy without losing sight of 'the power of certain texts to inspire, even demand responses' (82). While Wells provides a valuable critical framework for discussing Austen-related fan fiction, Mary Ann O'Farrell's essay identifies a less productive present-day 'use' of Austen. With reference to a headline declaring 'Bin Laden a huge Jane Austen fan', O'Farrell explores the 'contemporary habit of reimagining Austen as a punchline' (192). Referring to a range of contemporary, predominantly North American, media sources, O'Farrell provides a snapshot of how the 'blunt-force juxtaposition' that informs such headlines derives from a popular (mis)understanding of Austen as 'unknowing and unworldly' (192, 202).

A welcome correction to this notion is offered by Felicity James, who reminds us that a ‘local’ Austen is not necessarily a conservative one. James’s essay on literary pilgrimage focuses on the intertwined histories of the Jane Austen’s House Museum and Chawton House Library. Like Lynch, James complicates the association of Austen with ahistorical nostalgia. While adaptations of her work may fetishize an ‘English heritage’ version of Austen, they can also inspire ‘a deep engagement with [her] historical and literary context’ (145, 146). This is certainly true in the case of Sandy Lerner, whose ‘revitalization of Chawton House Library’ – complete with a working farm – represents a sympathetic and dynamic engagement with the past, rather than a simple exercise in nostalgia (146).

As James notes, Lerner’s enthusiasm for Austen was influenced by feminist literary criticism. In the volume’s final essay, Shelley Cobb highlights the complexity of postfeminist responses to Austen. In their most conservative guise, productions such as the television serial *Lost in Austen* employ traditional romance structures to suggest that ‘heterosexual coupling’ can resolve the dissatisfaction that haunts postfeminism’s complacent relegation of feminism to the past (222). Cobb’s attentive analysis demonstrates the exclusions at work in this formulation: such happy endings are, she suggests, reserved for ‘heterosexual white women’ (224). As Cobb notes, attending to the dialogue between the scholarly and the popular tells us as much about ourselves as it does about Austen and her work. Similar insights recur throughout the essays that feature in this exciting collection. The editors of *Uses of Austen*, Gillian Dow and Clare Hanson, have succeeded in bringing together a remarkably coherent selection of essays that offer a rich account of the many ways in which Austen has been reimagined over the last century.

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