

standing, becomes Queen of England and her troubles begin in earnest.

That this is a plot entirely too gothic and rich in invention to be believed is unquestionable but it is indeed a factual account of the early life and times of Elizabeth the First. In her new, concise biography of the “virgin” monarch, Susan Doran, a professor of Early Modern History at Oxford, brings to us the vulnerability of all 16th century females, especially those of high rank, embroiled in the never-ending political and religious brawls started by Elizabeth’s father, Henry the Eighth, because he wanted out of his marriage vows to his brother’s widow and into bed with Anne Boleyn, a cunning, toothsome young court beauty. That she was alleged to have six fingers on one hand only added to her appeal as a sexual partner.

What makes Doran’s biography the one to read is first its compactness: in a mere 137 pages Elizabeth appears before us as she begins: young, innocent, oppressed, and bright. She received a first class Humanist education, speaking four modern languages and being a whiz at Latin and Greek (though her tutor thought her pronunciation poor). We pity her quiet as a mouse existence under the watchful eye of first her hapless brother, then her fanatical sister. She emerges, shaken and stirred, as a bitter and politically savvy woman, saddled by empire and attacked regularly by Spanish and French ambitious bullies, eager to add her kingdom to their own. She would rule with extreme competence, albeit bald at the end, for 60 years and steer England to world domination.

The second major plus in Doran’s research is the wealth of historical documentation which allows us access to the private life of Elizabeth as the naughty, outcast-makes-good, funseeker, with a killer corporate job. An early example of her trials as a female is a premature birth announcement for her in which the word “prince” [has been born], is hastily

rewritten as “princess.” This gender misstep would cost her mother her head. Or a family portrait when she was 11 where she and Mary, the spurious daughters, are widely separated from the then happy but doomed family unit of Henry, Jane Seymour, and the long-awaited but short-lived Prince Edward. A pathetic attempt to ingratiate herself with an endless series of stepmothers with their own reproductive agendas is shown in the book of meditations, translated from the French, wrapped in a hand-embroidered cover, which Liz makes from scratch for Queen Katherine Parr.

But Cinderella has her revenge. After her coronation she makes up for sartorial exile in the form of dresses featuring acres of pearls and pounds of precious jewels. No monarch in subsequent British history has surpassed her shopping spree. In her social aspect she shows us that girls just want to have fun: charming, witty and generous with those she loved, she had a not so appealing habit, acquired from Dad no doubt, of beheading her favourites if they proved disloyal in any way, real or imagined. And despite the political intrigue, marriage proposals, plots against her life, invasion by the Spanish Armada, and civil wars over succession, she found time for dancing, theatre, composing music, singing, writing poetry, and royal progresses.

However, Doran does not pander sufficiently to my prurient interest in the Queen’s sex life. Did she or didn’t she? And with whom? Essex and Dudley had a shot to be sure but Doran remains coy on the subject of the dirty royal laundry.

Too bad.

Enquiring minds, it seems, DO want to know, even 400 years later.

EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY FICTION ON SCREEN

Robert Mayer, Ed.
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002

REVIEWED BY NATALIE NEILL

Eighteenth-Century Fiction on Screen, edited by Robert Mayer, is the first book in the mushrooming field of adaptation studies to deal specifically with film adaptations of eighteenth-century literature. The volume consists of eleven critical essays that analyze a variety of movies—mostly “period” films—and the classic British and continental novels upon which they’re based. The essays offer an introduction to cinematic depictions of the eighteenth century, largely derived from the literature of the period. Because of its cross-disciplinary character, this volume will appeal to a variety of readers, particularly those with an interest in literature of the “long” eighteenth century and those interested in the process of novel-to-film adaptation.

Although it is nowhere mentioned in the Cambridge collection, compared with the countless commercial films based on canonical nineteenth-century novels, there have been relatively few adaptations of “classics” from the preceding century. In his 1949 article “Dickens, Griffith, and the Film Today,” early film theorist Sergei Eisenstein argued that the very grammar of narrative cinema developed according to the conventions of the nineteenth-century realist novel. The many adaptations of novels by Austen, the Brontës, and Dickens, as well as the popularity of “heritage” films set in the Victorian Age, demonstrate cinema’s attraction to the nineteenth century. In view of this, *Eighteenth-Century Fiction on Screen* is a refreshing contribution to the field of film and literature because it maps out, in an exploratory way, many rich, yet until now un-

dereexamined, relationships between contemporary film and literature of the eighteenth century. After all, if film has a multiple debt of imitation to the realist novel, it must likewise be indebted to eighteenth-century writers such as Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding, among others, whose work gave rise to the modern novel as a form.

Because of the groundbreaking nature of the subject matter, this volume might have benefited from an introductory chapter which attempted to address how adaptations of eighteenth-century novels differ from other kinds of adaptations, or which theorized film's unique relationship to literature of that period. In his introduction, however, Robert Mayer opts instead to provide readers with an overview of some of the dominant theories in the field of adaptation. Although not exclusively pertinent to adaptations of eighteenth-century literature, Mayer's overview offers a useful exordium to the collection. His rejection of so-called "fidelity criticism" in favour of an emphasis on film adaptations as "readings" or interpretations of their literary sources serves to prepare the readers for the many theoretical and methodological approaches employed in the ensuing essays.

The contributors—who for the most part have backgrounds in literature rather than film studies—examine film and television adaptations of books ranging from Defoe's *Moll Flanders* (1722), Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), Richardson's *Clarissa* (1747-8), and Fielding's *Tom Jones* (1749), to Diderot's *Jacques le fataliste* (1771), de Laclos's *Les Liasons dangereuses* (1782), Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship Years* (1794-6), and Scott's historical novel *Rob Roy* (1817). In general, the authors avoid introducing or summarizing the novels, as it is assumed that readers are familiar with the eighteenth-century literature under discussion. Several of the essays discuss multiple adaptations of the same text. In "Three Cinematic

Robinsonades," for example, Mayer compares three adaptations of Defoe's prototypical British novel about an island shipwreck in terms of their rejection of the colonial values presented in the book. In another such comparative essay, Catherine N. Parke analyzes three films based on *Moll Flanders* and the way each reinterprets Defoe's heroine as "female, feminine, [or] feminist." Other essays that illustrate the variety of critical perspectives represented in the collection include Peter Cosgrove's analyses of screen versions of *Barry Lyndon* and *Tom Jones* in light of questions of historical authenticity and Cynthia Wall's examination of the visualization of space in the BBC adaptation of *Clarissa*.

There are several excellent essays among those in the latter half that deal with adaptations of French, German, and Scottish literature: particularly interesting are Kevin Jackson's discussion of the controversy that surrounded Jacques Rivette's 1966 adaptation of Diderot's *La religieuse* and Margaret McCarthy's essay on Wim Wender's road movie *Wrong Move* (1975), a film which creatively adapts Goethe's Bildungsroman *Wilhelm Meister*.

Eighteenth-Century Fiction on Screen is a useful resource for students and scholars of literature, history, and film alike. It is a "must read" for anyone interested in cinematic interpretations of eighteenth-century literature.

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