

Bautz, Annika. *The Reception of Jane Austen and Walter Scott: A Comparative Longitudinal Study*. London: Continuum, 2007. x, 198 pp. \$130.

In this volume of the Continuum Reception Studies, Annika Bautz studies the “literary reputations” of Walter Scott and Jane Austen “over two centuries “ with a view toward explaining why Scott, the first internationally best-selling author, is now “hardly read at all” while Austen has achieved “extraordinary popularity” (2). The task is enormous, in the number of both the texts to be looked at and the kinds of questions to be raised.

Accordingly, Bautz’s theoretical and methodological choices are significant. First, she gives only perfunctory attention to theories of reception. In two short paragraphs, she asserts that she accepts Wolfgang Iser’s notion of interaction, Hans Robert Jauss’s attention to context, and Stanley Fish’s account of interpretive community, adapting them to study groups of readers (rather than individuals) and a larger context than that of Jauss (including gender and social difference). Conspicuously absent are working definitions of such vexed terms as *culture* and *social*. In view of the espoused purpose of *explaining* the disparate reputations, this omission is significant. This is an empirical, not a theoretical study.

When she describes the target documents, however, Bautz gives careful accounts of shrewd procedural decisions. She divides her book into three parts: contemporary, Victorian, and the later twentieth century. While these divisions correspond roughly with the romantic, Victorian and modern periods, their disparities in duration, especially the last, are problematic. Within each part, Bautz devotes chapters to aspects of reception characteristic of that period, e.g., private letters and reviews in the early nineteenth century, issues of copyright in the later nineteenth century, and contemporary film and television adaptations of both novelists.

Within these frames, Bautz confronts the huge disparity in size between Scott’s corpus and Austen’s. In discussing contemporary reviews, for example, she concentrates on a “roughly equal number of novels by the two authors” (15) by allowing Austen’s dates and production to set the study’s limits, attending only to novels published between 1811 (*Sense and Sensibility*) and 1818 (*Persuasion* and *Heart of Midlothian*). Thus her sample includes all six of Austen’s major novels but only about 20% of Scott’s fiction. Also, Austen gets a head start: *Sense and Sensibility* appeared in 1811 but *Waverley* did not see print until 1814. Still, Bautz’s choice seems reasonable. Scott’s sample-- *Waverley*, *Guy Mannering*, *The Antiquary*, *Rob Roy* and *The Heart of Midlothian* –includes, in my view, most of his best work and none of his worst. In her readings of reviews in British periodicals and comments in private letters, Bautz explores what she calls “typical” concerns: for Austen, realism, lessons to be learned, and pleasure to be derived from reading; and for Scott, genre (romance, novel, history) , the social class of the characters, imagination (as the ability to conjure quotidian activities of distant times) , and the question whether popularity is in itself a good thing. All in all, this section is clear (especially as enhanced with charts and graphs) and as comprehensive as possible within the necessary limits. The research is impeccable.

In her examination of the Victorian period, Bautz turns to questions of “availability” and “accessibility.” To this end, she devotes a chapter to the “edition,” defined as a purposeful “relaunch” (77) of an author’s work. This measurement of availability, she explains, reveals

how often publishers believed that a new or expanded market for a given author existed. Library catalogues serve as a measure of accessibility (again, rendered graphically). Both measures demonstrate that Scott's marketability eclipsed Austen's during most of the nineteenth century. Bautz's account of Victorian reviews is particularly strong. Scott dominates this chapter, and Bautz finds particularly apt comments to show that the Victorians saw Scott, "not only as a genius, but also as the model of Victorian, Christian masculinity" (95). Austen, by contrast, was regarded as cruel in her satire and lacking in the monumental imagination of the Author of *Waverley*.

When she turns to the twentieth century, Bautz first briefly tracks "launches" through the entire century and then devotes a chapter to "Media Reception and Cultural Studies." Here, of course, the reputations of the two authors are reversed. For most of the century, Austen was known (if at all) as a novelist—and then not widely. Scott was regarded as a heavy handed—but important—author of historical adventure stories. After 1995, however, Scott's reputation fell as a consequence of the BBC adaptation of *Ivanhoe* and the film *Rob Roy* while Austen's rose on the tide of the wildly successful films and TV series adapted from her fictions. In her last chapter, "Critical Reception, 1960-2003," the sample comprises introductions to critical editions published by such presses as Penguin and Oxford. This choice is perplexing in view of the expressed goal of elucidating the cultural dimensions of reputation. Introductions tend to be written by established scholars while smaller presses and obscure journals are far more likely to reveal the changing culture—reflecting queer readings, for example, or important neo-Marxist studies of Scott.

Despite some limitations, Bautz's careful and comprehensive research will be particularly helpful to specialists in Austen and Scott. Further, Bautz's methods, procedures, and her rationales for them will doubtless interest reception-studies scholars and critics.

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