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***Swashbucklers: The Costume Adventure Series*. James Chapman. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015 (261 pages). ISBN: 978-0-7190-8881-0.**

A Review by Lucinda Pope, University of Reading

James Chapman's work *Swashbucklers: The Costume Adventure Series* provides an abbreviated, cross-continental history of British, American and European televised adaptations of iconic swashbuckler narratives taken from literature, legend and popular culture. There is an accessible fluidity of writing in Chapman's book that draws the reader through this concentrated examination of the historical and cultural conventions of the televised exploits of the costumed, swashbuckling adventurer through analyses of the gender politics, cultural narratives and genre conventions associated with the televised swashbuckler genre.

Chapman ensures that he justifies his inclusion of television series which might not at first seem to belong to the swashbuckler genre with the caveat that the swashbuckler can be thought of not only as a swordsman; instead, the televised narrative allows for a far broader interpretation of the category. Notably, his analysis of the *Sharpe* adaptations (1993–1997) underlines the manoeuvrability or identifying personality signifiers of the numerous central characters which qualify them for inclusion in his work. His book explores those narrative figures whose charismatic defence of social justice could be used as a televisual vehicle for political, social and ethical debate. In this, Chapman's analysis continues Ben Brady's 1994 examination of the "lasting imprint" (20) of socio-political narrative themes on audiences: for example, in the second chapter, Chapman's work explores the evolving state of thematic narrative communication through such series as *The Buccaneers* (1956–1957) with its stereotypical constructions of gender. Chapman furthers his analysis through detailed examinations of various televisual adaptations of *Robin Hood* (British, American and European productions spanning 1955 to the most recent revisionist series ending in 2009). Each series, he notes, echoed the sociopolitical debate of the decades in which it was produced. For example, the unsettled political leaderships of Edward Heath and his Labour successor Harold Wilson, the turbulence of miners' strikes and financial crashes of the 1970s found televisual reflections in the socialist struggles of *The Legend of Robin Hood* (George Gallaccio, 1975), with the protagonist, Robin, cast as a "radicalised" (119) socialist, and the antagonistic Gisborne portrayed as a "sort of medieval venture capitalist" (119). Acknowledging the theoretical arguments presented by Mireia Aragay and Lisa Hopkins on the cross-cultural capability of resetting narratives in different geographical locations, Chapman's case studies further this analysis by highlighting the pan-continental potential within the plotlines and characterisations of these transposed narratives. Relocation, adaptation and reinvention of the swashbuckler in the 1950s serialisations of the *Robin Hood* legend demonstrated the viability of examining the political tension of McCarthyism through the medium of television; series produced in the 1970s and 1980s, such as ITV's *Arthur of the Britons* (1972), found the freedom, through fiction, to publicly challenge the divisive nature of Thatcherism in the United Kingdom; finally, Chapman contends that swashbuckling narratives of the late 1990s and early 2000s combined entertainment with sociopolitical debate through revisionist, disauthoritarian outcast figures such as Richard E Grant's Sir Percy Blakeney of 1999's *The Scarlet Pimpernel* series, and the latest incarnation of *Robin Hood*, fronted by the fashionably-scruffy Jonas Armstrong (2006–2009).

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From the outset, Chapman clarifies his intention to "map the history of this enduring but critically marginalised television genre" (1). The structure and analytical format of the book follow the chronological development of televised swashbuckler narratives from the earliest screened examples to their dwindling, more rarefied modern legacy. Numerous political, social, technological and adaptational premises, such as issues of democracy, liberalism, and the contrast between beneficial, structured hierarchies and the tyranny of dictatorships, are laid out for the reader to enable a sociocultural contextualisation of the genre and its history. As Jason Mittell has suggested, conscious or subconscious acknowledgement of genre codas enables audiences to understand the symbiotic relationship between entertainment and the sociocultural climate in which the shows are produced and viewed:

> genres can be seen as key ways that our media experiences are classified and organized into categories that have specific links to particular concepts like cultural value, assumed audience, and social function. (xii)

With Mittell's structural definition of the conventions that constitute textual and visual "genre", readers recognise Chapman's own analytical review of key televised series, beginning in the 1950s and concluding in the 2000s: critiquing each production within the context of the social and cultural development of small-screen entertainment, Chapman traces the progressive nature of swashbuckler narratives within the framework of audience and critical reception.

This comprehensive volume selects and analytically expands case-study materials for taxonomic and cultural cross-examination, thereby covering a surprisingly broad range of international productions within a relatively short work. Chapman divides his research into six overviews: "Exporting Englishness"; "Fantasy Factories"; "Revisionist Revivals"; "Rebels With A Cause"; "Heritage Heroes"; and finally "Millennial Heroes", highlighting, deconstructing and tracing the genre and convention-trope lineage of the series addressed. The work contrasts those series which, drawn from literary adaptations, remain loyal to their literary sources, with those that reinterpret the plot to fit the cultural mediascape in which they were produced. Though adaptation theory is never explored in order fully to comprehend the status of each literary transposition, Chapman's pan-episodic analyses find theoretical bases in the critical considerations of Gérard Genette and Julie Sanders on the transpositional processes of adaptation studies, reflected in these swashbuckler serialisations.

The author draws on topics which bring together research from film and television studies with the field of consumer knowledge, and reaches a textual balance that is both informative, as though the reader is being lead through a comprehensive lecture on the topic, and relaxed, to ensure readers from academic and non-academic backgrounds find the analytical content of Chapman's work accessible. Questions concerning the literary authorship of the source texts (including the sociocultural concerns already examined within the text) and the televisual authorship of each series raise the issues of the duality of cultural auteurship. The author notes the narrative, casting and mise-en-scène decisions producers and screenwriters made in order to appease the multifaceted tastes of Anglophone and European television consumers. Chapman's sociohistorical and cultural acknowledgement of the evolutionary development, intertextual referencing, and taxonomic analyses of these consumer-driven serialisations is demonstrated through encyclopaedic background research, covering financial explanations for the televisual serialisation of material previously associated with cinematic features, as well as chronological plotting of the production and

broadcast scheduling of each serialised adaptation. Echoing Steve Neale's work on contemporary Hollywood and cinematic genres, Chapman expands upon the sociocultural reflections of genres on screen, exploring the symbiotic relationship between audiences and the entertainment produced for their consumption. Acknowledging the cultural and political development of audience tastes, Chapman analyses the topic of serial reruns, and the alteration of episode chronology. Through this, he demonstrates that narratives produced for one audience, mindful of past sociocultural concerns, can challenge another audience in the context of their own sociopolitical climate. He therefore expands upon the issue of product placement and the alteration in international audience response by examining certain productions and the methodology of rescreening the swashbuckler narratives as reruns.

Each chapter follows a similar pattern: overview, research goals and the topics to be covered: the presentation of a series of case studies in miniature allows the reader time and space to absorb each swashbuckler narrative as a form of analytical microcosm. Each chapter, though discrete, relates to the others: the six chapters may be read as fully-formed essays on the sociocultural, political and intermedial influences upon and conventions within the televisual production of the timeline specified. However, the key to Chapman's accessible writing style is the consistency of chapter format, with the thematic relationship of each examination creating a basis for comparison with the following case studies. This enables the reader to track the thematic concerns of each series: successive chapters provide retrospective considerations of previous swashbuckler productions together with platforms for exploration of contemporaneous political and social circumstances and narrative conventions, linking foundational and subsequent adaptations of the swashbuckling figures through narrative symmetries. As years pass and social concerns evolve, so the protagonists and villains of the costumed adventures evolved to provide a physically detached yet socially accessible platform for the evaluation of contemporary concerns. Thus, Chapman's case studies demonstrate how fictional narratives present the opportunity to discuss, debate and experiment with social and cultural issues: through the protagonist's actions, fears, passions and doubts, the viewing audience could project their own sociopolitical concerns onto the action on-screen, situating the serialisations both culturally and politically. For example, the narrative of the 1958 *William Tell* series, with its evocations of anti-Fascist resistance, held such sociopolitical parallels with postwar America and Europe that audiences empathically interpreted its allegory of recent struggles arising from "Nazism and World War II" (87).

Chapman's examinations of the televised swashbuckler cross oceans and cultural boundaries, bringing together narrative and critical analyses of *The Count of Monte Cristo* (1998) and the sea-faring piratical derring-do of *The Buccaneers,* both of which have disauthoritarian parallels with the masked avenger *Zorro* (1990–1992). However, throughout the book, the Robin Hood legend acts as the analytical core and as a marker of narrative context for other examinations. There are, therefore, accents of what Brett Westbrook defines as the key point of interdisciplinary adaptation studies: namely the narrative and structural comparison of more than one novel, film or television show as a discrete work or series of transpositions. Chapman's analytical tracing of the development of the swashbuckler adventure series in televisual entertainment from the 1950s to the late 2000s makes a valuable contribution to the study of the evolution of episodic serialisation of extended narratives. Thematically related to his 2002 anthology, *Saints and Avengers: British Adventure Series of the 1960s*, this most recent volume from Chapman expands on the taxonomic conventions of televisual genrescapes, and begins the process of filling the literature gap to which the author himself has pointed.

With an Introduction setting out the character and narrative development of the swashbuckler adventure, Chapman begins his critical work with an overview of the British 1950s *The Adventures of Robin Hood*, a television series which he argues forms a televisual and theoretical foundation of all subsequent swashbuckler series. In Chapter One, "Exporting Englishness", Chapman highlights, without recounting the history of McCarthyism in detail, the duality of American and British production of swashbuckler narratives for Anglophone audiences. Bringing together the social as well as the political concerns of the era, Chapman highlights not only the interdisciplinary nature of the cross-cultural authorship of such series as *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (1955–1960) with the collaboration of North American screenwriters and British producers, but also incorporates a condensed history of the programming schedules and the cultural implications of broadcasting on particular networks. Examining the production procedures and values of the swashbuckler series in the context of the founding of the ITV networks, the author studies the contrast between the cultural prestige of the BBC and the relatively new ITV, formed during the 1950s, which screened the first Robin Hood series Chapman examines.

The second chapter tracks the era of the "Fantasy Factories": the move toward the commercialism of dual-authorship and conglomerative productions. At this stage, the emerging concern of producers was not simply the transposition of narrative from page to television (and sometimes the concentration of cinematic spectacle to suit the production and broadcast platforms of television serials): it also bore in mind the considerable financial benefits of cross-cultural productions. Chapman therefore outlines the filmmaking values of British and North American dual production partnerships with analyses of such series as *Sword of Freedom* (1957) and *Ivanhoe* (1957). Chapter Three, "Revisionist Revivals", focussing on the productions of the 1970s and early 1980s, discusses the political framework and context of the screen-based entertainment of this era. Using the vehicles of liberalist television series, such as *Dick Turpin* (1979–1981) and *Smuggler* (1981), Chapman underscores the methodology of fiction screenwriting serving both as family entertainment and as a political critique of the socioeconomic perceptions of Thatcherism in the UK: the evolving political sympathies of the swashbuckler, with particular reference to the exaggerated socialist themes in the *Robin of Sherwood* series (1984–1986), presented the social unrest of the divided British public through primetime family entertainment.

The fourth and fifth chapters, "Rebels Without a Cause" and "Heritage Heroes", covering the late 1980s through to the early 1990s, explore the postmodernist characterisations of culturally familiar icons depicted in the shows of the era. With the election of the New Labour government on the cusp of the millennium in 1997, and the retrospective inspection of the socioeconomic flaws of previous Party politics in such series as *The New Adventures of Robin Hood* (1997–1998), television shows turned their attentions to the question of the irreverent and apolitical rogues of the swashbuckler narratives. The subject matter of Chapter Six, "Millennial Mavericks", brings the examination to the contemporary era of swashbuckler entertainment on television through analyses of the sculpting of screen heroes such as the traditional Don Alejandro in *Zorro*, who is a "champion of the people" (216) fighting for socialist democracy, or the paradoxically gender-imbalanced exploitation of female protagonists in *Queen of Swords* (2000). It is pertinent that though this condensed anthology of decade-centred presentations was published last year, mid-decade, there is little material concerning the late 2000s beyond a commentary on the BBC's revisionist *Robin Hood*. Linking outlaws with the disenchanted youth culture of the era, stereotypically dubbed as the "hoodie culture", Chapman is objective in his examination of Jonas Armstrong's depiction of this "youthful Earl of Huntingdon" (243), describing

instead the "equivocal" (243) critical response to this most recent interpretation of the Robin Hood legend.

Reflecting on the key issues of television studies, Jonathan Bignell highlights the historical trend of analysing serialised entertainment through the lens of "national contexts" (4), the construction of entertainment specifically for extant audiences and "commercial television" (22), and the analysis of genre with a view to understanding "the persistence of some kinds of storytelling" (4). The thematic and socio-critical content of Chapman's work, expanding upon cultural examinations of the "political and ideological significance" (8) of entertainment series by David Morley, introductory case-studies on the origins of television studies by Toby Miller, and diversifying themes brought up in cinematic genre studies by Neale or Raphaëlle Moine, continues to expand the scope of the existing literature on television research to analyse the themes of broadcasting patterns, programme authorship, political undercurrents and international audience reception. Using the vibrancy and spectacle of the swashbuckler genre, Chapman identifies the need for episodic narratives such as those examined throughout the book, both for their "emotional and ideological" (260) functions as well as a means of the cultural preservation of iconic characters for future generations.

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