This chapter examines the most well known of all the popular genres associated with Scotland, the costume drama (sometimes referred to as the period drama, heritage or historical film). Initially, the debate surrounding costume drama is introduced — in particular the contested term ‘heritage cinema’ — and the role that costume dramas made and set in Scotland increasingly play in this debate. Because of the popularity of this particular genre, however, the chapter look at example featuring a female protagonist, The Governess (1998). In The Governess, the wilderness of Scotland is represented as a fantasyland, but its mythical resonance as a place somehow ‘before history’ actually facilitates the construction of a diasporic history, or ‘heritage’, that stands apart from concerns of British or Scottish identity. Thus, the setting of Scotland is integral to the film's deployment of its feminist reworking of history (a process typical of the contemporary costume drama), in this case to explore a diasporic Jewish identity that does not belong to the same historical traditions as those normally encountered in the wilds of cinematic Scotland.

Sofia Coppola, one of the most visible indie directors in recent years, is clearly embedded in the ‘commerce of auteurism’ (Corrigan 1991),
as she actively participates in constructing her public image. Building on existing scholarship on the filmmaker as illustrative of the new critical paradigm in studies of women's film authorship, the first section of this chapter looks at the promotional and critical discourses surrounding her films to trace the various processes of authentication and de-authentication of Coppola as an auteur (family connections, the privileged position in the American film industry, her filmmaking style marked by a focus on flat affects and the mise-en-scène’s surface details, as well as her interest in postfeminist/neoliberal femininity which has divided critics, especially with her 2013 feature film, The Bling Ring). In the exploration of Coppola’s authorial status, the chapter sheds light on the issue of genre, arguing that her engagement with familiar conventions is far more complex than current analysis of her work has acknowledged. This is particularly evident in the case of Marie Antoinette (2006), a film which has been read variably as a costume drama and/or as a historical biopic. In establishing a dialogical relationship between biopic and costume drama scholarship, the chapter centres on self-conscious devices deployed in Coppola’s film, which are mobilised not against but through a logic of a feminised consumerist culture. The aim is not to reject the supposed ‘feminising’ aspects of the costume drama or to masculinise them in framing the film as a ‘self-conscious’ biopic, but rather to investigate the gender anxieties that underlay the labelling of genres by film criticism.

Postcolonial TV: El tiempo entre costuras [The Time In Between] (Antena 3, 2013–14); El Príncipe (Telecinco, 2014)

Paul Julian Smith

in Dramatized Societies: Quality Television in Spain and Mexico

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Item type: chapter

Chapter 4, the last on Spain, deals with post-colonial TV, a subject as yet little studied. Having explored the halting media relationship between the Spanish metropolis and its one time Moroccan protectorate, the chapter gives a close account of two exceptional series. The first is a lush historical romance set in the 1930s, which takes the woman’s work of sewing as a metaphor for international relations. The second is a gritty police drama exploring the drug and terror gangs in the contemporary Spanish enclave of Ceuta. Both series are shot and set in North Africa, a region that embodies a bloody heritage for Spain and which recent cinema has failed to investigate.
Raúl Ruiz, while considered one of the world's most significant filmmakers by several film critics, is yet to be the subject of any thorough engagement with his work. This book sets out on this task by mapping, as fully as possible, Ruiz's cinematic trajectory across more than five decades of prolific work, up to his death in 2011; ranging from his earliest work in Chile to high-budget “European” costume dramas culminating in Mysteries of Lisbon (2010). It does so by treating Ruiz's work—with its surrealist, magic realist, popular cultural, and neo-Baroque sources—as a type of “impossible” cinematic cartography, mapping real, imaginary, and virtual spaces, and crossing between different cultural contexts, aesthetic strategies, and technical media. It argues that across the different phases of Ruiz's work identified, there are key continuities such as the invention of singular cinematic images and the interrogation of their possible and impossible combinations.

Bio-pics
Ellen Cheshire

This book offers a series of case studies that throw light on the type of films that are collectively known as bio-pics. It asks whether the bio-pic is a genre in its own right, or whether such films are merely footnotes to other more traditional genres such as western or costume dramas. It shows how bio-pics, unlike other genre forms, seem to share no familiar iconography, codes, or conventions. They can be set anywhere and at any time. It argues that what links them is, quite simply, the fact that the films depict the life of an “important” person. Through a carefully selected range of thematically linked (English-language) bio-pics released since 1990, this book explores key issues surrounding their resurgence, narrative structure and production. It also looks at the issue of subject representation or misrepresentation in bio-pics and the critical response these type of films have engendered. The films under discussion are grouped around a number of professions (writers, singers, politicians, sportsmen, criminals, artists). This allows for comparisons to be drawn about the way in which similar subject matter is approached.
The Scarlet Empress
James Phillips

in Sternberg and Dietrich: The Phenomenology of Spectacle

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The Scarlet Empress (1934) redeployed costume drama as farce and as a critique of despotism. The chapter analyzes how Marlene Dietrich does not so much play the role of Catherine the Great as replace the historical figure with her own Hollywood star persona. The power structures of despotism and the lawlessness of the sovereign are thereby parodied: promiscuity becomes the bond Dietrich’s Catherine has with her subjects and the studio-enhanced beauty of her appearance is substituted for the separateness of the royal person. With its spectacular yet rickety film sets, The Scarlet Empress is not an apologist’s chocolate-box rendition of European monarchical government but instead conveys its émigré makers’ sense of its pomposity. Rather than exposing what lies behind the spectacle of power, the film considers what becomes of power when it is nothing but spectacle and appearance.

The Rodgers and Hart Revolution
Dominic Symonds

in We’ll Have Manhattan: The Early Work of Rodgers & Hart

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Item type: chapter

The first full book show by Rodgers and Hart was Dearest Enemy (1925), a story set in the American Revolution with a libretto by Herbert Fields. As a costume drama it eschewed conventional Broadway qualities of the period such as a jazz-influenced score and a chorus of scantily clad girls. Nevertheless, it attracted positive notices and brought Rodgers and Hart to the attention of producers. The show featured Helen Ford in the lead role, and this chapter considers the possibility that she and Rodgers were involved romantically. The discussion also focuses on the way Rodgers and Hart crafted their material, establishing methods of Broadway score-writing that would be formative to their later style. In particular, Rodgers adopts a way of using song structure to establish character, and together they borrow references and traits from past musical theatre idioms, especially the work of Gilbert and Sullivan.
Chapter six departs from the practice of exploring horizons of identity to test the limits of nostalgia and solastalgia as a critical approach to reading fiction and film, by looking at how both the colonial future and past are remembered. The chapter includes several close readings including a concluding rumination on the political uses of cinematic murder. Films considered in this chapter include colonial era government produced propaganda documentaries and the work of Wang Tong and Lin Zhengsheng.