



THE CURIOUS CASE OF AMANDA PRICE: GENRE CYCLES, 'CONSTRAINED INNOVATION' AND *LOST IN AUSTEN* AS TIME TRAVEL FOR A FEMALE AUDIENCE

Ross P. Garner
Cardiff University

STARTING POINTS

- ✘ Extratextual discourses noted similarities between *Lost in Austen* (ITV/Mammoth 2008) and *Life on Mars* (BBC/Kudos 2006-7)
 - + “[i]f [*Lost in Austen*’s premise] sounds odd, remember that *Life on Mars*, a critical and ratings success, played a similar trick and viewers happily suspended their disbelief” (Griffiths 2008: 12)
- ✘ Structure of Argument
 - + Altman (1999) – the ‘Producer’s Game’ applied to the TVIII era
 - + Consideration of “textual strategies” (Johnson 2005: 7) in the programme
 - + In both instances “the masculine generic conventions of science fiction” (Fiske 1987: 113) become downplayed

THE 'PRODUCER'S GAME' IN THE TVIII ERA

- ✘ producers forg[ing] critical readings of successful films in order to eventually confect successful 'imitations' of those films, in the process producing the shared structures that will eventually precipitate into genres. (Altman 1999: 48)
- ✘ [a]lmost every film is meant to serve the function of creating synergy by locating a successful device and carrying it to another where, if it again succeeds, still further success is guaranteed. (Altman 1999: 44)

THE 'PRODUCER'S GAME' IN THE TVIII ERA

- ✘ TVIII – an era driven by commercial concepts such as branding (see Rogers *et al* 2002; Johnson 2007)
- ✘ “the commercial channels in the UK – ITV and Five – are increasingly likely to seek volume rather than niche audiences and thus produce dramas with broad appeal. Whilst this does not preclude innovation, strong forces gravitate towards the “tried and tested with a new twist” rather than radical experiment.” (Nelson 2007: 70)

THROUGH THE MAGIC DOOR...: METHOD OF TIME TRAVEL IN *LOST IN AUSTEN*



THROUGH THE MAGIC DOOR...: METHOD OF TIME TRAVEL IN *LOST IN AUSTEN*

- ✘ Downplaying “ratiocination ...where discoveries are made about the incredible properties” (Carroll 1990: 111)
- ✘ Female-coded Narrative Pleasures:
 - ✘ “[t]he emphasis [is] on the process rather than the product, on pleasure as ongoing and cyclical rather than climatic and final” (Fiske 1987: 183)
- ✘ Rejection of “material device” (Roberts 2000: 5)
 - + “in our societies technology and science have replaced “magic”, as the social manifestations of male power” (Fiske 1987: 202)
- ✘ Device motivated by ‘desire’

...AND INTO THE WORLD OF FICTION: 'DESTINATION DIEGESIS' IN *LOST IN AUSTEN*

- ✘ “a central character is transferred to or marooned in a wholly alien environment, and the story arises from his efforts to deal with the situation” (Bergonzi 1976: 42).
- ✘ Diegesis constructed through “discourse of ‘SF-as-conjecture’” (Tulloch and Alvarado 1983: 106)
 - + “recogniz[ing] the future [or past – RPG] projected in the fiction as “prophecy” – that is, the “working to a logical conclusion” of what can be observed in the world of the present” (Philmus 1976: 63).

...AND INTO THE WORLD OF FICTION: 'DESTINATION DIEGESIS' IN *LOST IN AUSTEN*

- ✗ 'History', factuality and gender
 - + Research an extension of “instrumentally rational and masculinist science” (Wolmark 2005: online)
 - + “Feminists object to ...this package as a normative ideal” (Anderson 2009: online)
 - + Reading habits - “men have far higher rates of preference for genres with a factual or documentary orientation: historical, scientific and political writing” (Bennett *et al* 1999: 152)
- ✗ 'Quality' as well as 'female' audiences
 - + “address a relatively mature, feminine middle-class audience” (Voigts-Virchow 2004: 10)

CONCLUSION: CONSTRAINED INNOVATION?

- ✘ *Lost in Austen* engages with ideas relating to adaptation in two ways
- ✘ Textual – as female-orientated time travel
- ✘ Institutional – ‘Producer’s Game’ in the TVIII era
- ✘ ‘Constrained’ innovation identifiable in the practices of ITV’s drama output?