

Book review

Smith, I. R., & Verevis, C. (Eds.) 2017. *Transnational film remakes*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. 192 pp.

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It is striking to see that, in times when transnationalism studies have gained a considerable following, this edited volume actually seems to be the first one that explicitly focuses on the practice of “cross-cultural remakes”. Ironically, and notwithstanding good intentions, scholarship on this phenomenon has generally been published in volumes, books and journals that focus on particular national contexts. *Transnational film remakes*, on the contrary, highlights the global nature of transnational remake practices and steers clear of an all too explicit focus on Hollywood. Drawing from numerous geographical contexts and adopting an intertextual approach, the editors have clearly opted to broaden the field of remake studies which, unfortunately, oftentimes remained confined to textual research. To accomplish this, an amalgam of both leading and emerging international scholars has contributed to the volume. Striving for an ecumenical approach, this edited volume also succeeds in identifying new interesting directions in the field of (transnational) film remakes.

The editors have intelligently opted for a more thematic approach instead of a conventional methodological or geographical clustering. Accordingly, *Transnational film remakes* is divided into three bigger parts which immediately reveal the different frameworks at work in the analysis of the different cases, while also disclosing the insightful potential of transnational film remakes. The first part, titled “Genres and Traditions”, mainly scrutinizes the various industrial and economic themes that are brought up by the transnational remake practices. In the first essay, Lucy Mazdon claims that the authorial status of David Fincher, the director of the American *The girl with the dragon tattoo* (2011), “resists accusations of cultural imperialism, embracing instead the European character of its Nordic sources” (p. 9). This is partly explained by stating that Fincher consciously gave the film a kind of “Scandinavian vibe”. Ironically, this embedding was grounded in stereotypical perspectives, probably with the purpose of attracting international audiences that are accustomed to particular constructions of the region through film and other media. Therefore, this vicious circle of (re)productions of stereotypes may point to a different kind of cultural imperialism. Another appealing essay in this section is the one written by one of the editors, Robert Iain Smith. Using the famous example of Bram

Stoker's *Dracula*, the author tests his concept of the meme, which stands for "an individual unit of culture that spreads, adapts and mutates" (p. 72), and proves that it is not confined to the Hollywood film. In this way, the volume urges to also consider more deductive approaches, which overcome the recurring focus on inductive inquiries in the form of specific case studies.

The second section is dubbed "Gender and Performance", and focuses on the various politics of gender, sexuality and other issues of representation. Kenneth Chan, for instance, claims that the trend of East Asian remakes of American films is, besides being driven by a specific cultural and economic context, the result of the 'cinematic pragmatism' of specific directors. Investigating Zhang Yimou's *A woman, a gun and a noodle shop* (2009), a remake of the Coen Brothers' *Blood simple* (1984), Chan alleges that the role of the 'woman', as well as her clearly oppressed status, is foregrounded in the remake. He links this to China's contemporary socio-cultural context, but does not lose track of the 'transnationalism lense' by highlighting the filmmakers' readiness to accommodate the needs of transnational audiences. The third and last part of the volume, "Auteurs and Critics", further investigates the notions of authorial remaking and canonization. One of the essays, written by Daniel Martin, partly touches upon the endeavors of Spike Lee to not brand his *Oldboy* (2013) as a remake but rather as a reinterpretation of the 'original' manga series. This illustrates Hollywood's awareness of the remake's negative status, as well as its willingness to anticipate this skepticism and rebrand their recycled content. Moreover, Martin shows a great interest in the often stereotypical stances of film critics towards cultural contexts. This latter idea can be linked to Daniel Herbert's insightful essay on the discursive strategies employed by film critics writing on film remakes. Herbert states that critics, without literally mentioning the term transnationalism, actually already highlighted the cross-cultural nature of film remakes way before the founding of transnationalism studies. The transnationality in films, however, was more associated with stars, auteurs and genres and less with national lineages. Herbert makes a well-founded call to tap into the unused potential of, for example, the rhetorical space of film critics.

In my opinion, Herbert's call resonates on a more fundamental level in the sense that the study of (transnational) film remakes lacks fundamental research that examines the public space. Moreover, the author claims that the adoption or reproduction of the term 'transnational remakes' should be put into question since it is actually almost never used by, for example, film critics. I would like to add that it is at least equally questionable that the concept is not used in, more broadly, public spheres. Hence, it is perhaps a missed opportunity that this volume did not treat or at least bring up these issues. This should not, by all means, be understood as a call to get rid of every academic concept that is

not used outside academia, but rather as reminder that both worlds are interdependent, especially when it comes down to understanding and, more broadly, knowledge. Therefore, it would be interesting to see some audience research that, for example, investigates labels and definitions of, for example, (transnational) remakes, reboots, reinterpretations or reimaginings. Another small point of critique is the fact that the approach of topical clustering in some cases proves to be somewhat random, since themes cannot always be clearly defined and often flow into one another. Nonetheless, *Transnational film remakes* not only succeeds in providing great explanations of complex issues, but, and probably more importantly, raises new thought-provoking questions. Therefore, it will be an interesting read for scholars working in transnational (remake) studies, or more broadly in adaptation studies, but equally for everyone interested in film studies and the recycling of cultural artefacts.