

Derek Jarman: A Biography

By Tony Peake



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England's most controversial filmmaker and director, Derek Jarman was also a gifted writer, artist, gardener, designer, and an outspoken AIDS and queer rights activist. Jarman's story stretches from his childhood in postwar Britain to art school days at the Slade School of Art and the making of many acclaimed films, including *Sebastiane*, *Jubilee*, *Caravaggio*, and *Blue*.

A chronicle of sexual fear and repression, the devastation of disease, and inimitable courage and grace, *Derek Jarman: A Biography* is an honest and brilliant tribute to the uncompromising life and art of Derek Jarman.



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Derek Jarman: A Biography By Tony Peake Bibliography

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

In 1986, at the height of his career, Derek Jarman was rigorously denounced by right-wing censor Mary Whitehead for promoting homosexuality and violence after his earlier films, Sebastiane (1976) and Jubilee (1977), were shown on the BBC's Channel 4. The attacks were emblematic of the fire the filmmaker drew as a radical artist and sexual provocateur from the beginning of his career in the late 1960s to his death from AIDS in 1994. This intelligent, graceful critical biography traces Jarman's colorful life and art in detail. Born to middle-class parents (his father was in the RAF), Jarman spent his youth abroad and in boarding schools, where he became aware, at a young age, of his gay sexuality and his artistic talents. Early efforts at theater design and conceptual art led to working with Ken Russell on The Devils and then a brilliant and very controversial film career of his own. Peake, who was Jarman's literary agent, deftly weaves together his subject's many artistic facets (Jarman was a director, designer, painter, sculptor and writer) with the intricacies of his public and private lives. Though openly gay, Jarman was on the fringes of the gay movement until his diagnosis with AIDS in 1987, when he began vigorously to protest antigay and AIDS policies in the U.K., both on the streets and in his work. Jarman's dedication to both his films and his controversial politics (he attacked Ian McKellen for accepting a knighthood from an antigay government) makes for lively reading, and reveals as much about the impact of the artist's world upon his work as it does about his effect on that world. (Oct.)

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From Library Journal

Writer, painter, designer, avant-garde filmmaker, and sometimes gardener, Derek Jarman was a whirlwind of creative activity before his AIDS-related death in 1994. British director Ken Russell, who employed Jarman as a designer on films like The Devils and Savage Messiah, considered him "the last true bohemian." In this objective look at a man who "could not have been dull if he tried," Jarman's friend and literary agent portrays an often-contradictory figure. For instance, Jarman embraced his sexuality (artist Robert Mapplethorpe was among his many lovers) but tempered the hedonism with an innate shyness and asceticism, and in spite of late-night parties and other excesses, he took pride in maintaining an "orderly ship." Peake recounts Jarman's bleak childhood, early creative endeavors, and constant struggle to finance his controversial films, which some critics dismissed as homoerotic "home movies." After his AIDS diagnosis, Jarman turned activist, speaking out against the disease's stigma while facing a prolonged death with humor and grace. This is likely to remain the definitive look at Jarman's life and career. Though constant references to British individuals and institutions will prove daunting to American readers, this book should be considered for large academic collections and specialized film collections or archives. AStephen F. Rees, Levittown Regional Lib., PA Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Review

"That Jarman lived and died on the cutting edge of contemporary culture is central to the thesis of Tony Peake's monumentally well researched and fittingly respectful biography of this multifaceted personality. Peake . . . is his subject's perfect biographer." —*The Times* (London)

"Outstanding . . . the thoroughgoing life story that this experimental director and gay rights crusader deserves." —*Financial Times*

"This is a superbly written biography, both evocative and gritty, as much a social history of postwar Britain as a life of an artist." —*Irish Independent*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Amy Dixon:

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Marjorie Cook:

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