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John Wiltshire

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Jane Austen has been read as a novelist of manners, whose work discreetly avoids discussing the physical. John Wiltshire shows, on the contrary, how important are faces and bodies in her texts, from complainers and invalids like Mrs Bennet and Mr Woodhouse, to the frail, debilitated Fanny Price, the vulnerable Jane Fairfax and the 'picture of health', Emma. Talk about health and illness in the novels is abundant, and constitutes community, but it also serves to disguise the operation of social and gender politics. Behind the medical paraphernalia and incidents are serious concerns with the nature of power as exerted through and on the body, and with the manifold meanings of illness. 'Nerves', 'spirits' and sensibility figure largely in these books, and Jane Austen is seen to offer a critique of the gendering power of illness and nursing or attendance upon illness. Drawing on modern – medical and feminist – theories of illness and the body, as well as on eighteenth-century medical sources, to illuminate the novels, this book offers new and controversial, but also scholarly, readings of these familiar texts.

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# JANE AUSTEN AND THE BODY

*'The picture of health'*

JOHN WILTSHIRE

*Department of English, La Trobe University*



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*For Ruth and Johnny*

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'One hears sometimes of a child being "the picture of health;" now Emma always gives me the idea of being the complete picture of grown-up health. She is loveliness itself. Mr Knightley, is not she?'

*Emma*, chapter 5

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## *A note on texts*

Citations of Jane Austen's novels are made in the text by following quotations with the standard abbreviations and page numbers, viz. (PP 124). The page numbers refer to the text which has been used throughout, the *Oxford Illustrated Jane Austen*, ed. R. W. Chapman, 5 vols. 1923, revised editions, 1965, 1967, *The Works of Jane Austen*, ed. R. W. Chapman, vol. VI: *Minor Works*, 1954, revised editions, 1963, 1965. For *Sanditon*, *Sanditon, an unfinished novel by Jane Austen, reproduced in facsimile from the manuscript in the possession of King's College, Cambridge*, introduction by B. C. Southam, Oxford and London, 1975, has also been used. Where a number of references to the same novel are made, the abbreviated title is omitted after the first citation.