

THE HIDDEN JANE AUSTEN

In this major study, leading Austen scholar John Wiltshire offers new interpretations of Jane Austen's six novels, *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), *Mansfield Park* (1814), *Emma* (1816), *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion* (1818). Much recent criticism of Austen has concentrated on the social, historical and intellectual context of her work, but Wiltshire turns attention back to Austen's prose techniques. Arguing that each of Austen's works has its own distinct focus and underlying agenda, he shows how Austen's interest in psychology, and especially her treatment of attention and the various forms of memory, helped shape her narratives. Through a series of compelling close readings of key passages in each novel, Wiltshire underscores Austen's unique ability to penetrate the hidden inner motives and impulses of her characters, and reveals some of the secrets of her narrative art.

JOHN WILTSHIRE is Adjunct Professor at La Trobe University, Melbourne. He is author of *Jane Austen and the Body: 'The Picture of Health'* (Cambridge, 1992) and *Recreating Jane Austen* (Cambridge, 2001), and editor of *Mansfield Park* (Cambridge, 2005) in The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Jane Austen.

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For my grandsons, Angus and Oscar

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Preface

Austen studies for the last few decades have often been concerned with Jane Austen's place in history. A book called *The Hidden Jane Austen* might well belong to this genre, since exploring the historical circumstances and written sources to which Austen's work may refer can certainly throw light on previously missed or misunderstood aspects of her novels. No one writing seriously now about Austen can ignore this historicist approach or its very fruitful results, but on the whole this volume belongs to another genre. It seeks – as far as possible – to read Jane Austen as our contemporary, and so to offer new readings of the novels to some extent inspired by twenty-first-century preoccupations, while keeping closely attentive to her texts.

The topic of attention in fact is central to this book in two ways. I'm going to suggest that it is a key issue for Austen readers because in all of her published novels the heroine's attention or inattention is coupled with and sometimes played against our own engagement. Memory, which is dependent on attention in the first place, is just as important a feature. This book seeks to explore how attention and memory are dramatised, but at the same time to illuminate the reading experience of attention, and often to distinguish between reading and re-reading, as well as practising careful attention itself. The heroines are treated as psychological realities because I believe that imagining characters as actual beings is the primary, natural act of reading the realist novel, and that re-reading is a poor thing if this is lost sight of.

I take my orientation in each chapter from within the space of each novel, rather than co-opting each into an overmastering argument. The word 'hidden' in this book thus has a wide range of meanings. It appears in all of these chapters, but it does not always point to the same aspect of the texts, for to explore the inner workings of each novel is to recognise, equally, that each one has its own unique atmosphere and agenda. Nevertheless, in all of them I hope to show how astonishing is Austen's penetration of the hidden inner motives and impulses of her imagined characters.

This book does not enter one realm that its title might seem to promise. *The Hidden Jane Austen* has nothing to reveal about Jane Austen's personal life. I have, however, been constantly reminded of the phrase – extraordinary in itself – that Austen's family included on her tombstone in Winchester Cathedral: among the familiar pieties is a line in praise of 'the extraordinary endowments of her mind'.

All references to Jane Austen's novels are to the Cambridge Edition of the Works of Jane Austen, 2005–8, and take the form: abbreviated title (where this is not clear from the context) in italics, volume number in roman, followed by a colon, chapter number, and page number in this edition. Thus (*P&P* 11: 14, 235). Most references take the form (1: 2, 21). Deirdre Le Faye's edition of *Jane Austen's Letters* (Oxford University Press, 1995) is cited as *Letters*.

Acknowledgements

I thank Dr Linda Bree for her initial encouragement and continual mentoring of this book. Her questions and suggestions throughout its development have been invaluable. My colleague Laura Carroll has also read the book in its penultimate draft and made suggestions about its structure I have found especially helpful. I thank too, the anonymous readers for Cambridge University Press. I'm indebted to my friends Ann Blake, Ira Raja, Max Richards and Bill Spence for their help and encouragement, in all sorts of ways. I would also like to thank Louis Le Vaillant and the staff at the Johnston Collection in Melbourne where I have been giving talks on the eighteenth century for the past five years, as well as the successive presidents of the Jane Austen Society of Melbourne, Andrea Richards and Mercia Chapman. My principal debt, however, is to a friend on the other side of the world, Professor Marcia McClintock Folsom, with whom I have collaborated on a volume about Jane Austen for many years and who has read and commented in perceptive detail on almost all the chapters of this book as they were drafted. I cannot thank Marcia enough for her continual kindness and support.

Chapter 3, 'Elizabeth's Memory and Mr Darcy's Smile', has had several previous incarnations. In this book I draw on some of the material in my chapter, 'Mr Darcy's Smile', in a volume on which I collaborated with David Monaghan and Ariane Hudelet, *The Cinematic Jane Austen: Essays on the Filmic Sensibility of the Novels* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 2009). Since the project of that book was to consider the novels in relation to the cinema, the essay here has a quite different focus. I gave a paper under the same title at the 'New Directions in Austen Studies' conference, Chawton House Library, 9–11 July 2009, and subsequently to the Massachusetts branch of JASNA in Boston later that year. At the 'Celebrating *Pride and Prejudice*' conference in Cambridge, June 2013, I presented a paper called '*Pride and Prejudice*: Memory and Smiles' which was a redaction, in part, of the chapter in this book. I thank the organisers of

these conferences, Dr Gillian Dow and Professor Janet Todd, respectively, for inviting me to speak. I would also like to thank my friend Paul A. Komesaroff, whose concept of micro-ethics has been a powerful influence on my reading.

An earlier version of Chapter 2 was given as ‘Concealments’ at a one-day conference celebrating *Sense and Sensibility* while I was a Visiting Fellow at the Chawton House Library, in September 2011, and subsequently at the ‘*Sense and Sensibility* after 200 Years’ conference that Laura Carroll convened in Melbourne, in October 2011. During my Fellowship I worked on this book and would like to thank Dr Dow and the staff at Chawton for making my stay so enjoyable. I gave a talk based on Chapter 5 to the Jane Austen Society of Melbourne in 2012, and thank the members for their appreciative suggestions.

I have collaborated with Professor Folsom on an edited collection of essays for the Modern Language Association, to be published as *Approaches to Teaching Jane Austen’s Mansfield Park*. I learned a great deal about the novel from our contributors, and would like to thank them all for their willingness to work with our suggestions. As I acknowledge in the chapters on *Mansfield Park*, I have found inspiration especially from the essays in the volume by Julia Prewitt Brown, ‘Questions of Interiority: From *Pride and Prejudice* to *Mansfield Park*’; Monica Cohen, ‘The Price of a Maxim: Plausibility in Fanny’s Happy Ending’; Dorice Williams Elliot, ‘Gifts Always Come with Strings Attached: Teaching *Mansfield Park* in the Context of Gift Theory’; and Kay Souter, ‘*Mansfield Park* and Families’. I have drawn also on the volume’s jointly authored Introduction. My chapter, ‘Jane Austen: Sight and Sound’ in *The Cinematic Jane Austen* (pp. 17–37) mentioned above, is an earlier version of the argument in Chapter 7 of this book.