

John Wiltshire, *The Hidden Jane Austen*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014. Pp. xii + 195. £17.99 (pb). ISBN 9781107643642.

In his elegant new study, John Wiltshire offers a sophisticated account of the subtleties of Jane Austen's art that is as much an examination of as a tribute to it. Austen fans will be disappointed and scholars relieved to find that *The Hidden Jane Austen* does not aim to provide yet another spurious account of the novelist's private life or a biographical interpretation of her novels. Rather, Wiltshire, like John Mullan in his recent *What Matters in Jane Austen?* (2012), demonstrates that the complexity and power of Austen's art lies in crucial details that escape the first-time reader, underscoring the importance of re-reading Austen, as well as the pleasure that derives from it. With its focus on the hidden, 'the silences in the novels' (4), Wiltshire uncovers 'the secrets of Austen's plotting' (5); he explores the interconnection between the novels' dramatization of attention and memory, central concerns for Austen, and their manipulation of the reader's own attention. The unconscious failings of memory are as important to this study as remembering. In these Wiltshire locates the 'unromantic intelligence' of Austen's work. As in *Jane Austen and the Body* (1992), Wiltshire develops this central idea not as a co-opting argument that unevenly binds her work but treats each novel as a stand-alone work with a distinct 'hidden' agenda.

One of the most illuminating points of this book is the examination of Austen's careful use of syntax, which carries meanings often hidden from the characters. Wiltshire invites the reader to 'pay attention to the rhythms and cadences of her prose as if it were poetry' (6). Emotions in Austen are often lodged in the novels' 'discursive gaps' (9), in dramatised silences, understatements, and what the narratives conceal by controlling the reader's attention. The modern psychological and psychiatric understandings of memory Wiltshire uses to support his reading of the novel seem here unnecessary as he convincingly demonstrates the inner logic and structure of the narratives.

An 'open text' (10), *Northanger Abbey* has little room for the hidden, but its treatment of memory and attention anticipates Austen's interest in these issues. Wiltshire identifies in *Sense and Sensibility* a novel that is interested in 'the processes of concealment' (30): secrets are found both in the plot and in the narrative. With this novel Austen introduces the technique of lodging her characters' emotions within the rhythms of their speech and of intimating silences that invite the reader to imagine the character's emotions.

Opening with Elizabeth's response to Darcy's smile in his portrait at Pemberley, the discussion of *Pride and Prejudice* focuses on how the novel manipulates the readers' 'reading memory' (52): readers are invited to recall a past that has in fact been tampered with by the characters' misremembering. The novel 'treats the memories of its characters' while 'the narrative manipulates the memory of its reader' (61) simultaneously. Memory also appears as an ethical question.

Wiltshire dedicates two separate chapters to *Mansfield Park*. The most striking element of his discussion is not its subtle analysis of the novel's treatment of self-examination and self-knowledge in the context of Enlightenment and Protestant thought but its radical and surprisingly moving rereading of Mrs Norris, possibly Austen's most unpleasant character. Wiltshire finds behind Mrs Norris's cruelty and love of money a woman governed by an unacknowledged yet far-reaching pain, that she is not a mother and is unloved. Focusing next on the figure of Fanny Price, Wiltshire considers *Mansfield Park* as the first 'narrative of displacement' (94). The novel explores the psychological impact of being removed from one environment to another, Fanny's hidden wound, buried in 'the rhythms and dexterities of Austen's prose' (112), where silences perform much of the novel's 'emotional work' (100). Her passivity, which so often puzzles and frustrates readers, is a

coping strategy that allows her to deal with unwanted feelings of resentment and rebellion that jeopardise the assimilation to Mansfield she so desperately wants.

Underlining the intensely aural nature of Austen's narratives, the chapters on *Emma* and *Persuasion* focus on the issue of overhearing and Austen's radical reworking of this common theatrical device. This narrative tactic allows Austen to give the reader the illusion of having access to two inner lives simultaneously, that of the characters overheard and the consciousness of the heroine overhearing. This 'technical ligature' (146) also manipulates the reader's attention. The heroine's capacity to attend takes on 'a high ethical value' (146). Where Emma's focus on the future interferes with this ability, an overwhelming past affects Anne's attention.

Wiltshire offers sophisticated, convincing, and enjoyable close readings of Austen's novels, outside of the current dominant historicist considerations; a welcome approach that reminds readers of Austen's great technical prowess and the endless pleasure of rereading.

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