


Throughout, Hershinow draws attention not to the life being led by the novice, but the life that *could* be led. Hershinow's novices and the novels they populate work in a register of the could be, could have been, should be, should have been, might be and might have been. They are figures that, by lighting up alternative stories and lives to the ones being lived, suggest that social, cultural and political configurations could be other than they are. The novice asks those with experience to unlearn the ways of the world in the service of creating a different—even better—one.

Those of us who love fiction and take it seriously—especially those of us who believe that fiction's power is not merely, only, or primarily about describing a social world—can draw on Hershinow's treatment of the novice to enrich and deepen our own accounts of fiction's capacity to take its own measure of the distance between the world in which we live and its world made of words. 

Katherine Voyles

Independent Scholar

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Tom Keymer, *Jane Austen: Writing, Society, Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), xiv+192 pp. ISBN 978-0-1988-6190-4; £10.99 (hb).

HOW MANY COUNTENANCES DOES JANE AUSTEN WEAR? Accounts in scholarly and popular venues of her as a woman, as a cultural figure, and as a novelist are varied, nuanced and contradictory; on some views, she and her fiction are reactionary, or at least conservative; on others, she gives voice to the precariat. She's alternately legible as someone of a specific time and place and class and rank, and a cipher, whose image is made and remade, across time and place with the power to drive and respond to shifts in social, political and cultural fashions. Tom Keymer's elegantly restrained, satisfyingly slim little volume, *Jane Austen: Writing, Society, Politics*, is a comprehensive, generous and open-handed account that takes seriously the variety of 'Austens' that exist even as it holds fast to its own vision of the author and her work. The book itself is less than 150 pages but is exacting and wide-ranging. Keymer covers issues ranging from Austen's narrative voice to her position as a wartime author, to her engagement with racial matters.

Keymer sticks close to Austen. In this sense he takes full reality of the fact that critics today can orient themselves to their subject matter in a variety of ways, which wasn't necessarily the case in the heyday of critical distance. His incisive prose doesn't carry her irony but does match her preciseness. He doesn't so much discard versions of Austen as refines his own. He writes: 'The following chapters


approach Austen as a novelist in whom an implicitly Tory worldview is frequently interrogated or disrupted by destabilising ironies and interruptions of satirical anger that are no less real for the elegance and wit of their expression' (p. 11). As he focuses in on his own 'Austen', there's a loosening, not a constriction, that is itself quite Austenian. She's not a Tory, she doesn't even necessarily take a Tory worldview, but her novels express one only to examine it minutely and stylishly.

Whatever else she may be, Austen is indisputably a celebrated miniaturist, the novelist who on her own account paints on a 'little bit (two Inches wide) of Ivory' (p. 4). On this restricted palate she draws fine discriminations, including of rank and temperament. By sticking closely to Austen, Keymer himself draws out fine discriminations between how *he* sees Austen and how Austen is conventionally viewed, and between her novels themselves. For both Keymer and Austen working in miniature, it turns out, is not merely an exercise in restriction, but in expansion, too. For Austen, the virtues of miniaturisation lay in how detailed precision opens out into accuracy and verisimilitude. Austen's oeuvre—its shape, its concerns and how these shift over time—come into view through Keymer's own fine-grained analysis.

Keymer's book unfolds chronologically based on when Austen drafted her fiction, not when it was published. Each of her six completed novels—*Northanger Abbey*, *Sense and Sensibility*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Mansfield Park*, *Emma* and *Persuasion*—gets its own chapter. To set his scene, though, Keymer begins with her early work in a chapter called 'Jane Austen Practising'. By tying his analysis to Austen's drafting of her novels, as opposed to their publication date, he shows how an individual novel can respond to the fashions of its day and how the novels respond to one another. The Austen of *Pride and Prejudice* who cheerfully marries off Elizabeth Bennet to the richest man in the novel is recognisable as, but distinct from, the Austen whose highest born heroine chooses a sailor over a landlord, the sea over English soil. Austen's artistry is also remarkably consistent in Keymer's hands even as he shows her changing, adjusting and developing as a novelist. The move from the epistolary form of her earliest fiction into Free Indirect Discourse is given special attention.

Critical interest today in the political violence and racial constructions of the era also come in for comment by Keymer. Austen as a wartime author, contra Raymond Williams's well-known gripe that she could not be bothered to write about the Napoleonic Wars, is in the foreground of the book. In discussing race, Keymer notes that it is only in *Sandition*, which was unfinished at the time of her death, that she writes a non-white character. Understanding the construction of Austen as a white author who writes predominantly white characters would also, though, seem to me to be important and would in fact build on crucially important work that is already underway.

Inside the issue of Austen's own likeness, and the answers to it, is the matter of whose Austen is the 'real' Austen. Whether the minuteness of her fiction makes her, above all, an author of her own day bound by the particularities of that time, or whether the sharpness of her close-in observations make her always already

up to date, is the central issue. Nestled inside concerns around Austen as only ever 'Regency' or Austen as relentlessly contemporary is how closely Austen identifies with the groups of people about whom she writes, where and how she directs her affiliations and disaffiliations. Whether she is claimed by and for the dully self-satisfied, whether she is the writer who sides with them or sneers at them, whether her dullness gives comfort in times of strife, including wartime, or whether her irony bites, are also all at issue. Readers of Austen, it turns out, want to move in closely to her to see her, to claim their own version of Austen as the authoritative version. Keymer never indulges in this kind of claustrophobic proximity: like Austen herself he knows when to back away, when to turn away. So, it is fitting that he ends by discussing Cassandra Austen's famous 1804 sketch of Jane seated and with her back to the viewer: '[T]he sketch also catches something important about Austen, her narrative style, and the authorial stance she adopts: poised yet also informal, even intimate to some degree, but with no interest at all in showing her face' (p. 148). 

Katherine Voyles
Independent Scholar

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Francesca Saggini and Anna Enrichetta Soccio (eds), *Transmedia Creatures: Frankenstein's Afterlives* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2018), 283 pp. ISBN 978-1-68448-060-9; £24.00 (pb).

WRITING ON SHELLEY'S *FRANKENSTEIN* (1818) TODAY might seem a superfluous exercise since, as Francesca Saggini highlights in the introduction to this volume, the last two hundred years have seen this novel explored by countless critics through a variety of methods. However, *Transmedia Creatures* offers an opportunity to look at this text anew by focusing on the vast world of its transmedial 'hideous progeny'. What makes this collection thought-provoking is its open understanding of *Frankenstein's* 'afterlives'. For Saggini, a text's 'afterlife does not inevitably entail a critique of the pretext' (p. 3) which the authors of these 'afterings' might not even be familiar with. Destabilising hierarchies imposed by the primacy of the 'original', and deliberately moving away from existing scholarship on the novel, *Transmedia Creatures* suggests that 'the true potential of the source text (or pretext) is most fully revealed by its long-term epistemological elasticity' (p. 1). Studying the 'afterlives' of *Frankenstein* in drama, film, music, poetry, comics and TV series, this volume provides exciting explorations that will interest scholars across disciplines and beyond Romantic studies.

a special issue of *ABO: Interactive Journal for Women in the Arts, 1640–1830*, 15.2 (2025), titled ‘Affective and Emotional Encounters in/with British Women’s Writing, 1600–1800’.

Katherine Voyles holds a PhD in English from the University of California, Irvine. From 2010 to 2020 she lectured at the University of Washington, Bothell. Her articles on miniaturisation and magnification in Austen’s novels appear in *INTERFACES* and *Persuasions*, and she engaged with the 2022 *Persuasion* directed by Carrie Cracknell for the *Jane Austen Review*. She currently works for the US Government and previously served as co-managing editor of *The Strategy Bridge*. The views here are her own and do not reflect official US Government policy.

