

William H. Galperin, *The Historical Austen*

Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003. viii + 286 pp.

Reviewed by Hidetada Mukai, Matsuyama University

At the beginning of 1990s Anthony Easthope argued that “[s]omething like [the establishment of a new paradigm in science] has happened in literary studies during the past two decades. Twenty years ago the institutionalised study of literature throughout the English-speaking world rested on an apparently secure and unchallenged foundation, the distinction between what is literature and what is not” (3). Easthope reinforced this argument by comparing *Mass Civilization and Minor Culture* (1930) by F. R. Leavis with *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (1983) by Terry Eagleton, as he continued to explain that “the old paradigm has collapsed” and “a fresh paradigm has emerged” (5) in the field of literary criticism. As Easthope predicted, although we can still say that, even now, ‘pure’ literary studies have remained dominant, the terrain has been irrevocably changed at a foundational level. These days, literary studies have evolved into a more comprehensive discipline, collaborating with other fields such as history, politics, sociology, anthropology and even science. Jane Austen studies is not an exception of this transition.

Unquestionably, whether we agree with it or not, one of the most influential analyses on Jane Austen in 1990s is Edward Said’s reading of *Mansfield Park*. In “Jane Austen and Empire: *Mansfield Park*”, Said connects Austen’s world with British imperialism. This controversial view aroused much discussion, debate and even emotional reactions from Janeite critics. Said himself modified his opinion by writing that it is his “unforgivable sin” (xi) in the introduction of *Representations of the Intellectual* (1994), but his contention could not be ignored when we find his book, *Culture and Imperialism*, in the bibliography of most of the recent, important texts on Austen. In this sense, he redefined critical approaches to Jane Austen Studies.* Of course, there were several critics, such as Mary Poovey and Marilyn Butler, who tried to historicise Austen prior to Said, but their contributions, whilst important, do not detract from his influence on Austen studies.

It should be noted that as a whole the author of *The Historical Austen* does not

* Galperin points out that Moira Ferguson “predates Said’s argument and to which he makes no reference” (262), but he is wrong with this point. It is true that *Culture and Imperialism* was published in 1993. But, Said had already made known his argument beforehand in *Raymond Williams: Critical Perspectives*, ed. Terry Eagleton, in 1989, and he definitely predates Ferguson. Maybe Galperin failed to check this fact.

ally himself with Said, stating that Said's argument is "too facile co-ordination of the imperialism" (262), but, as the title shows, this book is sure to be immediately placed within the context of Said's revisionist criticism. The book's author William H. Galperin is Professor of English at Rutgers University, New Brunswick, New Jersey. He is also the author of the two books on Romanticism, *Revision and Authority in Wordsworth: The Interpretation of a Career* (1989) and *The Return of the Visible in British Romanticism* (1993). Galperin has also written numerous articles on Romanticism and related topics, including several book reviews, which include Susanne Klingenstein's *Enlarging America: The Cultural Work of Jewish Literary Scholars, 1930–1990* (1998) in *Criticism* (Vol. 43, No. 1, 2001) and Sally Bushell's *Re-Reading "The Excursion": Narrative, Response and the Wordsworthian Dramatic Voice* (2002) in *Wordsworth Circle* (Vol. 34, No. 4, 2003). Undoubtedly Galperin's interest in Romanticism informs his readings of Austen's novels, placing them firmly within the framework of the Romantic Movement: a manoeuvre which is especially obvious in Chapter 2.

The Historical Austen tries to analyse the narrative discourse by Jane Austen in her historical authenticity by reading her novels as "a corrective to 'the historical Austen' that currently abounds in literary scholarship" (1). The word "historical" here does not mean just something connected with the past or the study of history and not something about people and events in the past. Citing de Certeau's *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other* (1986), he explains that: "... it is historical in a way that takes seriously Michel de Certeau's claim that 'over time, and in the density of its own time, each *episteme* is made up of the heterogeneous'" (7). Thus, "the historical Austen is recoverable", and he explores "the aesthetic discourses that Austen had at her disposal, which she managed alternately to satisfy and to contest, and the response of her contemporaries to her writing, on whose experience or practice of reading Austen any claim for yield of her work must ultimately rest" (7). By reading the history of her novels' reception through literary, aesthetic, social, and historical contexts, Galperin not only reassesses the Austen's achievement but also challenges the iconic Austen established by "pure' literary studies".

The Historical Austen is composed of two parts, each of which includes several chapters. In Part I, "Historicizing Austen", Galperin discusses the connection between Austen and her social background. There are three chapters in Part I: Chapter 1 "History, Silence, and 'The Trial of Jane Leigh Perrot'", Chapter 2 "The Picturesque, the Real, and the Consumption of Jane Austen" and Chapter 3 "Why Jane Austen Is Not Frances Burney: Probability, Possibility, and Romantic Counterhegemony". Part II is entitled "Reading the Historical Austen". Here Galperin offers startling and challenging interpretations of the six completed novels, the epistolary *Lady Susan*, and the last novel *Sanditon*, which is uncom-

pleted. This latter part includes the following five chapters: Chapter 4 “*Lady Susan* and the Failure of Austen’s Early Published Novels, Chapter 5 “Narrative Incompetence in *Northanger Abbey*”, Chapter 6 “Jane Austen’s Future Shock”, Chapter 7 “Nostalgia in *Emma*” and Chapter 8 “The Body in *Persuasion* and *Sanditon*”. In the first half of the book Galperin examines Austen in relation to several contexts like ‘silence’, ‘picturesque’ and ‘fictions of probability’, whilst in the latter half he takes up individual novels, *Lady Susan*, *Sense and Sensibility*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Northanger Abbey*, *Mansfield Park*, *Emma*, *Persuasion* and the unfinished *Sanditon* and tries to reread them respectively.

Part I relocates Austen in relation to various contexts, such as silence, picturesque discourse and “fictions of probability”. In Chapter 3 Galperin compares the novels of Austen with that of Fanny Burney and, although it seems a little trite, it offers an interesting approach to Austen’s narratives through various contexts, such as Austen’s silence on the trail of her aunt and picturesque discourse. In Chapter 2 Galperin examines how Austen “was developing as a writer” and how she derived “a remarkably firm sense of the uses and the abuses of a representational practice that we . . . call realistic” (8). Employing theories of picturesque representation to examine the narratives, his explanation in this chapter seems logical, understandable and persuasive, although it is the thesis offered in Chapter 1 that provides the most interest for Austen scholars.

Here, Galperin offers the first detailed study on the trial of Jane Leigh Perrot, which is not just an introduction of biographical facts. According to George Holbert Tucker, “James Leigh and his wife (Jane) were Jane Austen’s closest and most important maternal relations.” (82) In 1799 Jane Leigh Perrot “was accused of stealing lace to the value of twenty shillings” and was arrested. If she had been found guilty, she would have faced either death or transportation because “this being a theft of the value of more than twelpence was a felony at that time” (86). This was reported in newspapers, and disclosed to the public of the day. Of course, the Austens in Steventon worried about this, and it is said that Austen sometimes went to see her aunt in order to cheer her up, and sat in on the trial several times. Galperin notes that, although Austen herself knew this affair very well, she did not mention this in her letters, and draws attention to this silence.**

The question this silence raises acts as a trigger for the discussion that follows. Galperin begins with the narrative silence, which is a concomitant of all epistolary forms imperatively, arguing that “by no longer serving the ‘real’ in the way that unwritten language had done previously, Austen’s silence — a residual but pro-

** It is well-known that her sister Cassandra destroyed many of Austen’s letters after her death, and there are only twelve surviving letters in 1799 and 1800. Thus, of course, it is possible that Cassandra destroyed the letters in which Austen talked about the trial.

foundly functional silence in her case — was recruitable to other uses” (22) to expand, enhance and complicate the “real”. Besides, he suggests two more roles silence plays in Austen’s narratives. “First the silence inherited from epistolary complicates the dominant specularly on which the totalizing reach of a still-partial real depends” and “[s]econd . . . the complications brought by Austen’s silence involve a reconception of the ordinary as heterogeneous and susceptible to a level of difference that narrative and plot are unable to contain” (23). From this, he concludes that “Austen’s silence and the various complications to which her real is consequently rendered permeable have the effect of transforming her . . . into an historian of a dense and inscrutable present rather than an unwitting prophet of a dismal future” (23). Galperin cites Michael McKeon’s assertion in *The Origins of the English Novel, 1600–1740* (1987) that, “in the formation of novelistic narrative, the most important model was not another ‘literary’ genre at all, but historical experience itself” (238), to argue that this “seems the more germane with respect to the ‘historical Austen’” (25). Having raised these arguments, Galperin offers the following conclusion on the connection between Austen and the trial of Jane Leigh Perrot:

Now by “possibility” I am referring to two related things: the possibility that Perrot stole the lace for good reason or in order to reclaim something taken from her . . . , and the possibility . . . of a different, less contradictory social and psychological configuration, that the conflation of the probable and the unthinkable can, with an assist from Austen’s silence, be said to serve the act or tact on Austen’s part constitutes a very real resistance because it counts chiefly on the intractability of the real — the “trial” of Jane Leigh Perrot before *and after* the fact — to changes and improvements of the more customary and narratable kind. This resistance, which is also an invitation to a special kind of reflection on the part of the reader, is in many ways the central work of Austen’s major and still silent writings. (43)

In Part II, Galperin provides unique and interesting readings of Austen’s work, although his interpretations of individual novels are sometimes too perverse to be fully accepted. In Chapter 4, for example, he attempts a reconstruction of *Sense and Sensibility* by trying to reveal the darker side of “the avuncular Brandon” (114). Colonel Brandon, he contends, is in pursuit of Marianne Dashwood because he “is assuredly possessed of erotic feeling” toward her. Thus, it is jealousy, rather than Willoughby’s seduction and abandonment of a girl under Brandon’s guardianship, that inspires the older man’s hatred. In short, it is Brandon’s “erotic feeling” for Marianne, rather than a high moral stance, which severely prejudices him against Willoughby. With this logic Galperin comes to conclude that “[t]he most notable example of this coercion, as it continues undetected, remains

Willoughby's astonishing inability to link the mysterious, and to his mind unrelated, disclosures to Mrs. Smith and Sophia Grey to Colonel Brandon" (115). Galperin writes:

Nevertheless the real exposure of the authority now vested in Brandon comes in other, more concrete gesture, notably his refusal to inform Marianne directly of Willoughby's behaviour at a point when disaster could have been averted and his seemingly benevolent offer of a living to Edward upon hearing of the latter's estrangement from his wealthy mother. In the case of the decision to withhold information, all of which suggests that he has elected to disseminate it by other, more calculated means, Brandon justifies his behaviour with a daring that should give any reader pause — even as it fails to unsettle Elinor's sense of his rectitude. (115–16)

From Galperin's point of view, the villain of the novel is not the seducer Willoughby but the generous Colonel Brandon, who marries one of the heroines.

Another example of this perverse reading against the grain can be found in his analysis of *Emma*. In "Introduction" he points out that "[w]here an initial reading of *Emma* may likely be a reading for a plot, and aligned thereby with pedagogical trajectory that tracks and celebrates Emma's development under Knightley's tutelage, a rereading of *Emma* . . . is likely to recall readers to all that has been lost in a development where the prerogative of trying to make a difference must be relinquished" (12). I suppose many readers must admit this when they finish reading *Emma* a second time. Galperin then suggests that there was a peculiar intimacy between Miss Bates and Mr. Knightley before the story begins. Although it seems impossible for many readers to imagine that these characters had intercourse with each other in the past, Galperin justifies his argument by quoting several episodes disclosed through the long monologue by Miss Bates, before concluding:

I am speaking again of the attachment of Miss Bates to Mr. Knightley, which refers to events and contingencies in the prehistory of the narrative that no commentator has really noticed or explored. These contingencies circulate around the obvious, if significantly suppressed, fact that Miss Bates, a vicar's daughter, was at one time, and in the context of Highbury society, a conceivable mate for Knightley himself, who has managed instead — and under far less penalty than his same-aged counterpart — to remain unmarried in the decade and a half he has been eligible to wed. (193)

After reading Galperin's dexterous assertions and conclusions, it is not unnatural for the landowner and the vicar's daughter in his parish to be in an intimate

relationship when they were young, but is this really the case? Galperin's rhetoric in Part II of the book is superficially convincing and many readers will indeed share the conclusions that Colonel Brandon is a true villain and that there must have been a peculiar intercourse between Miss Bates and Mr. Knightley in the past. These are bold attempts to reread Austen's novels, and a degree of critical caution ought to be exercised. We should, for example, remember that none of these conclusions are given explicitly either in Austen's narratives or by any of the characters in the novels. Indeed, it seems to me that Galperin's assertions, whilst beguiling, are a little too devious to be uncritically accepted, and yet the comments on the book cover appears to reinforce the authority of Galperin's study.

Endorsing the book, Deidre Lynch, for example, says, "Startlingly original, scrupulously researched, and formidably smart" before stating that "*The Historical Austen* is the most important book on Jane Austen's works to appear in the last fifteen years." Adela Pinch also gives us her comment: "[t]his is a book that will revolutionize Jane Austen studies." Since both are the experts of the Eighteenth-century novel and know much about Austen, their endorsements legitimise the book. On the other hand, Bharat Tandon, the author of *Jane Austen and the Morality of Conversation* (2003), is lukewarm in his appreciation stating that "[w]ith its theoretical pugnaciousness, Galperin's study would probably be strong meat for entry-level readers of Austen's work" (12). Although I doubt Tandon really thinks it is so only for "entry-level readers", his reception offers a welcome counter-balance to the lavish endorsements offered by others. Nor is Tandon alone in his lack of enthusiasm for the work. Mary Waldron, the author of *Jane Austen and the Fiction of Her Time* (1999), says of Galperin's study, "[t]his is quite a tall order, and the study is often tortuously complex in its argument and even more frequently obscure in its expression. It is a taxing read" (751). Galperin's suggestions are undoubtedly interesting, or, to be more accurate, highly provocative, and he successfully casts new light on each novel. In this sense, this ambitious book certainly deserves to be read by those interested in Austen, but with some important reservations. At times, Galperin's style and convoluted arguments are difficult to read and understand. Indeed, the unqualified critical praise for the book is not as unanimous as the publisher would have readers believe.

Although the title, *The Historical Austen*, is fascinating for those who are studying Austen's novels at the beginning of the 21st century, it is too ambiguous and fails to fully represent the contents of the book. Arguably, one of the main reasons for feeling the book is full of obscurities is, as Waldron points out, "[t]he absence of a bibliographical list" because it "makes difficult to determine exactly how 'recent' are the critical works that Galperin aims to confront" (752). We have to deduce his references through brief indications by him, such as the notes and the index. Also, because the book draws heavily on literary theorists such as de Certeau,

Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, and Frederic Jameson, a high degree of specialist knowledge is assumed by Galperin.

In order to read and understand *The Historical Austen* more easily, the reader would be advised to examine the articles Galperin published in various journals beforehand where his core ideas are expressed more clearly. Before reading Chapter 2, for instance, an examination of "The Picturesque, the Real, and the Consumption of Jane Austen" in *The Wordsworth Circle* (Vol. 28, 1997) and "The Uses and Abuses of Austen's 'Absolute Historical Pictures'" in *European Romantic Review* (Vol. 14, 2003) would prove helpful. His other initial studies appeared in the following books and magazines: *Co(n)text: Implicazioni testuali, Criticism, Eighteenth-Century Life, European Romantic Review, Janeites: Austen's Disciples and Devotees* (Princeton UP, 2000), *The Lessons of Romanticism: A Critical Companion* (Duke UP, 1998), and *The Wordsworth Circle*. Though interesting, *The Historical Austen* is certainly not for the uninitiated reader.

References

- Easthope, Antony. *Literary into Cultural Studies*. London: Routledge, 1996.
 Ferguson, Moira. "Mansfield Park: Slavery, Colonialism and Gender", *Oxford Literary Review* 13 (1991).
 Said, Edward W. *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Vintage, 1994.
 ———, *Representations of the Intellectual*. New York: Vintage, 1996.
 Tandon, Bharat. "Universal truths revised", *The Times Literary Supplement*, June 6, 2003.
 Tucker, George Holbert. *A History of Jane Austen's Family*. Stroud: Carcanet New Press, 1983.
 Waldron, Mary. "Reviews", *The Modern Language Review*, Vol. 99, Pt. 3, July 2004.

Jonathan Bate, *John Clare: A Biography*

New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003. 648 pp.

Reviewed by Kazumi Kanatsu, Doshisha University

John Clare was a great Romantic poet, but one who has always been overshadowed by other major poets of the period. This long-standing perception of the poet, however, is decisively changed by the publication of Jonathan Bate's latest work, *John Clare: A Biography*. Bate writes the book out of his conviction that Clare is "the one major English poet never to have received a biography that is worthy of his memory" (xv). The biography is a laudable effort to accomplish this