Jane Austen and Her Readers, 1786–1945 by Kate Halsey (review)

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singing, and perhaps even composing music. For well over a century, "cultivated" American musical life revolved entirely around canonical figures and works, and many of its participants, blinded by their own seeming glory, separated themselves from the ruffians they imagined as lacking in learning and taste. Prior to the 1960s (and change came slowly at first during the following decades), musicology itself was all about what connoisseurs knew and the complex notated artifacts they alone were able to interpret. Only recently have music historians embraced the possibilities that "average listeners" matter, that performances matter, that even popular music matters, and that all are subjects worthy of study.

To question whether American university music programs should expect their graduates actually to know something about *music*, however, smacks of another form of blindness. In recent years whole books "about" music that scarcely mention that art form have appeared in print. More than a few of the music departments Cavicchi criticizes for mandating ensemble-performance participation and a modicum of keyboard ability have started lowering their standards. Some of them are turning out composers whose creativity is limited to the laptop software they own. Of course listening is important—no, *invaluable*. Of course it is possible to live a fulfilling musical life without specialized training. But where will the music come from unless some people receive such training? Scholars and critics have too often ignored those who are able to absorb music (to borrow Claude Levi-Strauss's terms) without being able to secrete it. I only hope that music historians of the future will also pay attention to music itself: as material for reception studies as well as for innumerable and delightful purposes of other kinds.

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Kate Halsey. *Jane Austen and Her Readers, 1786–1945*. London: Anthem, 2012. 298 pages. $99.00 (cloth).

Katie Halsey combines reader-response criticism, book history, and literary close reading in her study of an author for whom reading is a particularly apposite theme. Jane Austen's novels emerged from her family's close and affectionate reading community, at a time of public concern over women's reading, and their style and content encouraged readers to create an imagined reading community with the author.

Using a battery of methods too rarely combined, Halsey ably examines some major ideas to produce a successful and stimulating example of the benefits of a holistic, "book-historical" approach to an author, her texts, and her readers.

Close analysis of the novels as texts and material objects helps make sense of some reader responses, while, conversely, acts of historical reading help our understanding of the texts. The first part of the book focuses on "Jane Austen's reading" (the texts and the circumstances of their production) while the second, longer part looks at her readers, including the material qualities of successive editions and contemporary opinion about novel reading, Austen's changing cultural capital, and the status of female novelists.

In the introduction to part one, Halsey acknowledges the scholars whose work she develops: for the hypothetical reader, she uses ideas from Bakhtin, Jauss, Iser, Fish, de Certeau, Barthes, and feminist theorists (reflecting her primary orientation) such as Fetterley, Felman, Harris, Mezei, Pearce, Mills, Flynn, and Schweikart. For the historical reader, she builds on the scholarship of Darnton, Chartier, Rose, Vincent, Eliot, Grafton, Hammond, Murphy, and Flint. Halsey argues that the tension between these two paradigms of the reader occurs in any act of reading, between the ideal reader and "the actual reader who may or may not be prepared to meet the demands made of the ideal reader, and whose responses are outside textual control" (8). The book covers British responses, from those first recorded to the point in the mid-twentieth century when Halsey believes that print culture was overtaken by other media.

Chapter 1, "Jane Austen's Reading in Context," establishes the important point that Austen was reared in a physical and geographical interpretive community of friends and family, who were both producers and consumers of texts and who wove their reading, enjoyment, and criticism of each other's writing into their relationships. This community believed that one's choice of reading revealed one's character, but was not bound by contemporary attitudes to women's reading, which saw novels as potentially challenging women's subordinate status.

Chapter 2, "Jane Austen's Negotiations with Reading," studies Austen's responses to her reading of conduct books (offering advice on behavior to young women), histories, and novels to position her within contemporary debates on reading and to show how she "read and used other types of reading matter" (35). Austen identified with many of the values of conduct literature, while subverting others. I suspect that the longest chapter, chapter 3, "Jane Austen's Games of Ingenuity," was the one that Halsey most enjoyed writing. The whole book is well written, but this chapter flows particularly smoothly, with Halsey in complete control of her material. Close readings explore "three ways in which Austen plays with and manipulates her readers' expectations: . . . free indirect discourse, her use of the feminine blush, and her deployment of allusion" (59). Austen's free indirect style, particularly her use of parodic narration, makes readers feel complicit, in on the joke, while literary allusions to "spectral texts—literary works that hover in the margins of her novels" (75) create "ghostly and unsettling voices in our memories" (85).

Halsey's introduction to the second part of the book includes a useful summary of the concepts behind the history of reading and a meditation on the nature of reading itself. Chapters 4 and 5 provide context for reading Austen across the period, with chapter 4 addressing the material qualities of successive editions of the novels (a valuable summary) and noting how even the most intellectual of readers, such as historian Thomas Babington Macaulay, were influenced by supposedly peripheral aspects such as illustration. Chapter 5 broadens the context to discuss changing "cultural stereotypes about reading," about fiction, and about Austen that affected readers' responses. Halsey argues that Jauss's idea of a reader's "horizon of expectations" should be broadened to include "extra-textual influences, such as the cultural value of a particular form or genre, as well as a particular author's reputation" (134).

The next four chapters discuss the responses of historical readers, with each chapter drawing together shared reactions. That she can find common responses is significant in itself, in contrast to other scholars such as Heather Jackson (*Marginalia: Readers Writing in Books*, 2001), who found no pattern in readers' comments in Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, only personal and idiosyncratic reactions. Chapter 6, "Affection and Appropriation," presents the thoughts and feelings of Mary Russell Mitford, Macaulay, and other literary figures, drawn largely from private correspondence and highlighting "playful, receptive, and sometimes appropriative" responses (150).

Chapter 7, "Opposition and Resistance," demonstrates how Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Charlotte Bronte, and others honed their identities—as both readers and writers—in opposition to Austen. Much of the chapter is taken up with detailed analysis of a friendly but argumentative correspondence between Mitford (for Austen) and Browning (against). Chapter 8, "Friendship and Criticism," focuses on published responses to Austen in periodicals, noting how an 1870 memoir of Austen by her nephew, James Edward Austen-Leigh, greatly influenced public perceptions of her. Supporters saw the long-deceased Austen as a friend, while opponents, according to Halsey, were overly influenced by the distorting Austen-Leigh memoir, which presented the author as amateur and conventional. Halsey returns here to a continuing theme: the ubiquity of Austen as comparator for all nineteenth-century female writers.

Chapter 9, "Sociability and Devotion," perhaps the weakest chapter, establishes that affection, even devotion (as among the "Janeites"), is a common response to Austen herself and that readers whose own families incorporated shared reading into their communication assimilated Austen and seemed to identify with her particularly strongly. Halsey concludes that Austen is well suited to small reading communities such as families or a provincial Quaker reading club whose records she uses. A four-page conclusion reiterates the main points.

I have only minor criticisms or debating points. One is the chapter structure, which is logical but rather diagrammatic and uses the same sources to make similar points in more than one chapter. I suspect this is a minor downside of the ambition of such a rounded study: How do you structure a piece of writing that aims to approach an author, her texts, contexts, and readership from all angles? Halsey chooses to start with the text rather than the readers, implicitly taking a more traditional literary approach. Beginning with the readers would make a different statement but would be equally problematic if one accepts Fish's point—as Halsey seems to—that readers and writers overlap in interpretive communities. Other criticisms involve the fact that occasionally lists of similar comments from similar sources could have been summarized quantitatively, and some discussion of sources and methods, which Halsey underplays, but which are numerous and wide ranging, would have been welcome. One particularly fascinating source, the minutes of a small local reading group stretching from 1895 to the present, appears to have been shoehorned into the book despite adding little to the argument.

These quibbles, however, are far outweighed by the book's strengths. The focus on a small number of texts by one well-known author creates a manageable introduction to reader-response criticism and book history, especially for those coming to these topics from literary studies. Halsey shares many insights into the nature of reading and makes many original points about how Austen transmitted her own reading community onto the page and into the lives of readers, about the importance readers placed on extratextual factors, and about the impossibility of a "pure" feminist approach to a writer so often mediated by men. Halsey also enables us to see some literary figures in a new light, as particular types of Austen readers. More broadly, this book is a prototype for the kind of fully rounded study suggested by Robert Darnton's "circuit of communication" model.

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Uriel Heyd. *Reading Newspapers: Press and Public in Eighteenth-Century Britain and America*. Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2012. 302 pages. $105.00 (cloth).

As digital publication continues to increase—and perhaps even overwhelm—our options as consumers, scholars interested in the production and reception of texts necessarily have focused substantial energy on the particulars of these