

# Introduction

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This issue of *Critical Survey* derives from a selection of the papers first read at ‘Locations of Austen’, an interdisciplinary and international academic conference which took place at the University of Hertfordshire from 11 to 13 July 2013. These articles represent a modest percentage of the wealth of topics considered over the course of that three-day event, but they nevertheless provide an authentic sense of the eclectic mix of disciplines and intellectual approaches to Austen studies during what proved to be a successful, and most enjoyable, academic forum for scholars of literature, history, film and cultural studies.

2013 marked the two hundredth anniversary of the first publication of *Pride and Prejudice*, yet what remains abundantly clear is that the whole of Austen’s canon continues to inspire new generations of general enthusiasts and scholars, who find in her writing a fascinating cultural nexus. The University of Hertfordshire’s call for papers for ‘Locations of Austen’ invited potential delegates to address questions about ‘how Austen’s writing is located in its historical moment, how it is located geographically and topographically, and how it is located within our own contemporary culture’. All of these concerns are indeed addressed throughout the articles herein contained. They also extend beyond these parameters, taking into consideration the comparative significance of some of Austen’s most notable contemporaries – William Cobbett, Anna Barbauld, William Gilpin and Uvedale Price among them – as well as the complex literary legacy Austen inherited from eighteenth-century novelists such as Fielding and Richardson.

In the articles contained in this edition of *Critical Survey*, robust critical analysis of Austen’s canon – both in terms of the published texts and their cinematic adaptations – offer a vibrant and fascinating insight into the breadth of the Austenian cultural legacy. If the current

level of interest in Jane Austen tells us anything about this author and her writing which previous decades and centuries could not, it is the extent to which global appropriation of her importance has not compromised the integrity of scholars who seek to understand, from both the universal and local perspective, her enduring appeal.

Part of this appeal, undoubtedly, derives from her texts' seemingly infinite capacity to generate, on repeated reading, further layers and nuances of meaning hitherto unnoticed. If the landscape of an Austen novel appears, at first glance, entirely knowable, it is highly likely that a second or third 'journey' through its familiar locations will reveal unexpected vistas which reconfigure – perhaps even dislocate – readers' comfortable acceptance of what they have read. It is a testament to this most succinct of authorial personages that truly dedicated readers of Austen's canon will always return to scrutinize the original texts, again and again, in order to 're-orient' themselves in this way. The five scholars whose articles are contained in this edition are no exception.