***Jane Austen and the Morality of Conversation*, by Bharat Tandon. London: Anthem Press, 2003. Xiv + 303, 4 colour plates and 2 b/w illustrations. ISBN 1-84331-101-1 (hardback); 1-84331-102-X (paper).**

The title of Bharat Tandon's recent book might seem to position it as the latest in a long series of works that treat an aspect of Jane Austen's art in historical context: David Selwyn's *Jane Austen and Leisure* (1999) and Marilyn Butler's *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (1979) are but two such studies included in Tandon's own bibliography. Not only do such works announce their focus in their very titles, but their stated emphasis on Austen suggests that they are aimed at general readers and "Janeites" as well as a scholarly audience. Tandon's publisher makes much the same claim on the back cover of the paperback edition of *Jane Austen and the Morality of Conversation*, describing it as "[w]ritten in a lively and accessible style [. . .] of interest to scholars and general readers alike."

Jane Austen and the Morality of Conversation does contain many of the elements that a reader would expect from its title and the back-cover blurb: a consideration of the various meanings with which eighteenth-century writers, from journalists to conduct-book authors, invested the act of conversation; analyses of conversations in Austen's novels; and well-crafted, often slyly memorable observations on Austen's art. Tandon's investigation is a great deal wider than his title suggests, however, a breadth that constitutes both his work's greatest strength and arguably its chief weakness.

Tandon announces in his preface that his aim is to enlist a host of theories and disciplines – principally literary stylistics, narratology, linguistic and social history, and language-use philosophy – in order to investigate what he calls the "constitutive atmosphere" of Austen's fiction: the possibility for confusion and misunderstanding inherent in the contemporary significances of conversation. He coins the term "differential narrative" to encapsulate his view of Austen's relation to her contemporary culture, both social and literary, or, as he puts it at one point, "the multitude of ways in which Austen both reproduces and outflanks the generic conditions with which she is surrounded, refusing to be defined by what confines her" (64). While Tandon is far from the first critic to present Austen as actively and creatively engaged with, rather than a mere reflector of, Regency mores, he does so with uncommon vigour.

His first and most densely theoretical and historical chapter, "The Morality of Conversation," traces the changing implications of conversation from Addison and Steele, through Swift and Chesterfield, to Austen; presents eighteenth-century linguistic theories; sets up Austen's "morality of reading" in light of Richardson and Sterne, as well as the French narratologist Gérard Genette; discusses Austen's critical reception; and analyses two examples of twentieth-century "ethical criticism" – all while finding time to consider representative passages of Austen.

Not only does he weave in each of the disciplines and theories mentioned in his preface – an impressive range of reference – but he displays a very solid command of twentieth-century Austen criticism, with one surprising omission that I shall discuss at the end of this review.

In his subsequent chapters, he reverses his primary and secondary emphases, placing Austen's works at the centre of his examination while allowing himself plenty of time to pursue connections and parallels to other authors ranging from Shakespeare to Cowley to Wordsworth, as well as to the portraiture of Ingres. These chapters concentrate in turn on Austen's early fiction (the juvenilia and *Northanger Abbey*) and the topics of "Flirting" (which he investigates chiefly in *Pride and Prejudice*), ventriloquism or "Throwing the Voice" (Austen's letters, *Lady Susan*, and *Emma*), and "Habitats and Habitation" (*Mansfield Park*, *Sanditon*, and *Persuasion*). The content of each of these chapters bears approximately the same relation to its title as does the content of the book to its own title: "Flirting," for instance, is more of a catch-all term for what Tandon wishes to examine in *Pride and Prejudice* than a strict principle of organisation. "Throwing the Voice" is the most argumentatively unified chapter, and to my mind the strongest. Tandon makes little effort to link "Habits and Habitation" – which is, on its own terms, an enlightening exploration of different kinds of space and furniture in Austen – to the supposed theme of this book.

Tandon's work will appeal alternately – though rarely simultaneously – to those readers who like a scholar to be a virtuosic omnivore of many disciplines and those who prefer insightful attention to texts and their contexts, without pyrotechnic references that sometimes fizzle rather than illuminate. At times, Tandon appears a bit like an extremely gifted student at exams, more eager to draw connections among everything he remembers, and to analyse every text with equal fervour, than to weigh those connections and that analysis carefully. (The decade that he has spent reviewing books for the *Times Literary Supplement* may account in part for both his wide range of reference and his occasional indiscriminacy.) Often, however, he settles down for a close reading of an Austen passage, informed by stylistics or narratology, and emerges with a fully persuasive and memorable account, as for instance his description of how, with such materials as verbs and long dashes, the early part of *Persuasion* marginalises and silences Anne Elliot.

Tandon himself briefly admits to one gap in his study: *Sense and Sensibility*. This is no minor omission, given the novel's emphasis on the challenges of interpretation, the significance of gossip, and the possibility of communicating as much through hesitation and silence as through an easy flow of words. Another noteworthy exclusion that Tandon does not acknowledge is that of women authors and feminist criticism. In his presentation, Austen takes her place almost exclusively among the canon of male authors: she is an heir of Richardson and Sterne, a counterpart of Wordsworth, an important influence upon Tennyson and James. Furthermore, several of Tandon's key topics – for instance, the "voice" manifested

by Austen's heroines – possess great importance to feminist criticism, to which he does not refer. Had Tandon made these decisions explicit and justified them, they would not necessarily have detracted significantly from his investigation. In the absence of any such acknowledgment, Tandon's study – for all its pioneering interdisciplinarity and breadth of reference – seems incomplete.

Juliette Wells

***New Approaches to the Literary Art of Anne Brontë*, edited by Julie Nash and Barbara A. Suess. Gateshead, Tyne & Wear: Athenaeum Press, Ltd., 2001. Xiv + 232. ISBN 0-7546-0199-4.$74.95 (hardback).**

The image of Anne Brontë as the "also wrote" Brontë sister has been reconsidered. The title of several recent studies feature the idea of reassessment, including the "New Approaches" of the book under review. A quick electronic check of the MLA Bibliography shows how much work could still be done: there are 1,199 entries for Charlotte, 688 for Emily, and 154 for Anne. At least she beats out Branwell who has 37 entries; but then again he never wrote a novel and Anne wrote two. Why this need for reconsidering Anne? Basically, her work has been under-appreciated beginning with the earliest critics, including her own family.

The brief Preface by Julie Nash and Barbara A. Suess addresses the myth of Anne Brontë as "Waiting Boy," seen as "nothing, absolutely nothing" by her brother, and as a severely limited writing talent by her sister Charlotte, only capable of reproducing details from her own life "as a warning to others" (qtd. ix). The authors contend that her writings "transform experience into art by coupling careful literary techniques with a boundless imagination" (x). The essays in the volume offer new readings of her life and novels and suggest "new critical frameworks with which to approach them" (xiii). Certainly this is a welcome accomplishment.

The only deficiency in this current volume is the lack of range of the essays. Four essays relate to *Agnes Grey*; seven essays examine *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall.* Only one begins outside Anne Brontë's two novels – Maria Frawley focuses on the notes made in Anne Brontë's personal Bible. While this volume is limited to Anne Brontë's "literary art" and so would not include articles primarily connected with her artistic creations (reference to her drawing occurs only in a footnote to Deborah Denenholz Morse's essay), certainly articles on her poetry would be expected.

Frawley scans Anne Brontë's own Bible as a source for information on her religious belief, life, and works. At the start of Anne Brontë's reading program for herself, begun when she was twenty, she asks, "What, Where, and How Shall I Be When I Have Got Through?" (qtd. 1). Frawley remarks on the similarity between this statement and others in Anne Brontë's diary papers and suggests they are