

A Tangible Vision of Jane Austen's World

Emma: An Annotated Edition

By Jane Austen; edited by Bharat Tandon.

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119 color illustrations. Hardcover. \$35.00.

Review by Laurie Kaplan.

Bharat Tandon's annotated edition of *Emma* is a paragon—a comprehensive textual and visual canvas presenting the Regency world. Tandon has excavated “the often extraordinary, subtle ways in which *Emma* engages with its genre and its historical moment,” and his encyclopaedic knowledge of the period serves this project well. From definitions of individual words to summaries of abstract concepts, Tandon's informative and illustrative marginalia serves to remind the reader to connect a detail with the larger picture. *Emma*, says Tandon in his Introduction, “dramatizes ideas in things, behind things, about things—and . . . between things.” From apples and strawberries and spruce beer to mourning clothes and “nervous fever,” the marginal notes present a tangible vision of Jane Austen's world.

As marginalia, the annotations serve as guideposts that mark—but never interrupt—a reader's progress through the novel. Confusing household routines, such as breakfast and dinner times, require only a few words of explanation. Examination of the concept of “manners” requires at least three different notes, while a dissection of the “cara sposo” vs. “caro sposo” debate fills a whole column and leaves open the debate about whether the misspelling was Jane Austen's or Mrs. Elton's mistake. Tandon says, “I have chosen to retain the original inconsistencies of spelling, so that readers may choose to attribute them as they see fit.”

Visual and textual information about some of the influential authors, works, and ideas of the period provides the *mise-en-scène* for the events in Highbury. One work mentioned in

Emma is Vicesimus Knox's *Elegant Abstracts*, published in 1770, and Tandon has chosen the beautiful title page to illustrate the text. He includes as well the title page of *Observations on Fevers, Especially Those of the Continued Type, and on the Scarlet Fever Attended with Ulcerated Sore-Throat* (1780)—a work that certainly would have frightened poor Mr. Woodhouse. A note describing the differences between “fancy” and “imagination” accompanies Mr. Knightley's observation that Emma “will never submit to any thing requiring industry and patience, and a subjection of the fancy to the understanding.” In a long note accompanying the discussion between Emma and Mr. Knightley regarding Harriet's refusal of Mr. Martin, Tandon explores “the precise gradations of Highbury's class system.” This note supplies a delicate—and immensely useful—disentanglement of Highbury's social structure.

A pleasing mix of illustrated mini-essays on topics as various as apothecaries (two columns), ladies' seminaries, Harriet's dental treatment in London, and even the strawberry, truly enhance the text, with Sowerby's botanical drawings of *Fragaria vesca* and *Fragaria elatior* supplying perhaps the most lovely visuals in the book. Fashion and furniture illustrations abound, with plates showing military uniforms, ladies' gowns and hats, and a Regency piano-forté, with accompanying dancing instructions. A particularly evocative illustration is a page from Jane Austen's own music manuscript.

Regency life in all its varieties is evident through cartoons by Rowlandson, Gillray, and Cruikshank. Contemporary recipes for “Rich Rice Pudding,” gingerbread, and apple dumplings and tarts correspond to the abundance of food in the novel. A watercolor seascape of Weymouth, an engraving of ladies and gentlemen at the card table, and an “address of thanks . . . to the Right Hon. Mr. Influenzy for his kind visit to the country” (1803), with a short treatise on epidemics, provide illuminating contexts

for the plot. Tandon describes the social conventions that make up the texture of *Emma*: the process of folding and sealing letters, the standards of courteous visiting behavior, the cost of posting letters. These contemporary examples help the reader view the period through the daily lives of the inhabitants of a small English village in the early nineteenth century.

Extending his comments to literary analysis, Tandon points the reader to examples of Austen's free indirect style as well as to her selective word choice and punctuation. Exploring the narrator's reference to Augusta Hawkins' father's job as “—merchant, of course, he must be called,” Tandon probes the “typographical flinch of the long dash” to show how Austen's punctuation calls attention to the fact that “something isn't being said”—that “something” points to the subtext of slavery. In another note, Tandon comments not only on Austen's “precision of style” but also on her “refined use of . . . creative imprecision.” Austen's sly choice of the indefinite word “something” in *Sense and Sensibility* and “a something” in *Emma* is shown to be intensely humorous. Many readers will appreciate the information about Austen's precise imprecision.

This splendid edition of *Emma*, part of *The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press's Annotated Austen* series, would make an exciting addition to the library of any admirer of Jane Austen's novels. To read Austen's text along with Bharat Tandon's annotations is to experience the intellectual, medical, botanical, literary, and social richness of *Emma*'s Highbury.

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