

**Mary Brunton, *Self-Control*, ed. Anthony Mandal. Chawton House Library Series. London: Pickering and Chatto, 2013. Pp. 405. £60. ISBN 9781848934023.**

**Ingrid Tieken-Boon van Ostade, *In Search of Jane Austen: The Language of the Letters*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014. Pp. 304. £41.99. ISBN 9780199945115.**

Mary Brunton's *Self-Control* is probably best known today because of Jane Austen's caustic comment on the work. In a letter to her sister, Cassandra Austen, of 11 October, 1813, Austen commented that *Self-Control* was an 'excellently-meant, elegantly-written Work, without anything of Nature or Probability in it. I declare I do not know whether Laura's passage down the American River, is not the most natural, possible, every-day thing she ever does'. But, as Anthony Mandal points out in the introduction to the edition under review, Austen must in fact have read *Self-Control* at least three times, and that she learned something from it is unquestionable. It, rather than Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*, was 'the sensation of the year' (xiii) when they both appeared in 1811, and it is, of course, one of the ironies of history that Austen's astonishing success has meant that most readers first come across the name of Brunton as a footnote in editions of Austen's letters.

Pickering and Chatto's Chawton House Library series is doing important and necessary work in helping to re-introduce reader to the forgotten novels of the long eighteenth century, written by women such as Brunton. Mandal's edition of *Self-Control* is a valuable addition to the series. It benefits from an admirably clear introduction, which sets the novel within the contexts of Brunton's life and the evangelical novel movement. The introduction also covers the novel's textual history and reception, and interestingly discusses the relationships between doubleness and discourse throughout the novel. Mandal embeds all of this within a broader discussion of the literary marketplace of the early nineteenth century, which helpfully summarises some of the key factors which led to Brunton's contemporary popularity. Among these are, of course, the transformation of the novel into a form perceived as capable of providing moral improvement, widespread interest in the possibility of representing women's lived experience in new ways, and a growing appetite for 'psychological portraiture' (xxxix). Mandal argues correctly that although the flowering of the evangelical novel was short, it had profound effects on the development of the novel form.

The edition has been carefully prepared. Mandal chooses the first edition for his copy-text, clearly explaining the rationale for this choice in the introductory Note on the Text. Collation against the four editions published during Brunton's lifetime, the 1832 edition published by Bentley for the Standard Novels series, and the pirated Boston and Philadelphia editions of 1811 has also been carefully and scrupulously done. Textual variants are noted unobtrusively but exactly, and silent corrections are all noted and listed.

This edition also profits from a select (and well-chosen) bibliography, and a brief chronology of Mary Brunton's life. Brunton's dedicatory letter to Joanna Baillie, and her Advertisement to the second edition are also reproduced in this edition, providing further useful context. The endnotes are judiciously managed to provide sufficient information without overwhelming the reader.

*Self-Control* is, Mandal points out, a 'messy, rich and rewarding text' (xxxix). Despite Jane Austen's criticisms about its verisimilitude, it is true that *Self-Control* is worth reading. The novel has its faults, but Laura's trials, tribulations and misadventures form an exciting narrative, and the work's focus on the importance of self-denial and self-control in the face of

almost unbearable sorrow is generally well managed. We are lucky to have a new scholarly edition which so admirably points its readers to the rewards of the text.

‘The tranquil current of domestic happiness affords no materials for narrative’, writes Brunton at the end of *Self-Control* (356). For Jane Austen, of course, the opposite was to be true, and Ingrid Tieken-Boon van Ostadé’s *In Search of Jane Austen: The Language of the Letters* reminds us of precisely how important the domestic sphere was to Austen. Tieken-Boon van Ostadé takes a corpus linguistics approach to Jane Austen’s writing, but unusually her focus is on Austen’s letters, rather than the language of the novels. The aim of this work is to ‘throw light on Jane Austen’s linguistic identity in as far as it can be reconstructed from her letters’ (5), and the author argues that Austen’s letters provide a valuable opportunity for sociolinguistic analysis, because they are as close as possible to ‘the spoken language of the period’ (6). The sociolinguistic method is carefully and meticulously explained in the Introduction, and the strengths and limitations of this approach in relation to Austen criticism have obviously been considered by the author, although greater immersion in the existing scholarship on Austen would have been beneficial to this monograph. For example, the author asserts in the Introduction that ‘studies of Jane Austen’s *language* are few and far between’ (1; original italics). While it may be true that full-length studies limited only to Austen’s language are rare, in fact it is almost impossible to read a work of criticism on Austen that does *not* engage with her style and language. A number of key works of Austen scholarship which deal with language in relation to other subjects are missing from the bibliography. In my view, Mary Poovey’s *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer*, Claudia Johnson’s *Jane Austen: Women, Politics and the Novel*, and Marilyn Butler’s *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* would have been particularly helpful to the author in formulating her argument about Austen’s ‘linguistic identity’.

While the focus of the monograph remains firmly on the linguistic features of Austen’s writing in the letters, it does also cover other ground, such as the historical context and conventions governing letter-writing in Austen’s period, and Austen’s epistolary network. The more strictly linguistic analysis is divided among five chapters, and covers, among other subjects, spelling, grammar, neologisms and innovations, and Austen’s use of self-corrections, short forms, punctuation, ‘vulgar’ or cant words, and conventional or polite phrasing. Extensive discussion of these subjects allows Tieken-Boon van Ostadé to draw a number of conclusions about Austen’s linguistic identity, and about Austen’s singularity – perhaps the most interesting of which is that Jane Austen is frequently misrepresented in the *OED*, and there may be a number of her first uses which do not appear in that dictionary. Nonetheless, Tieken-Boon van Ostadé argues that Austen was not in the vanguard of linguistic change: ‘Her language is at times conservative, while at other times it appears to have set its own pace of change, irrespective of larger developments going on around her’ (230), and that ‘in several linguistic features Jane Austen’s usage goes against the trend of the times’ (229).

Overall, *In Search of Jane Austen* contains few conclusions that will surprise Austen scholars, although it does offer strong evidence for a slightly altered dating of *The Watsons* (1805-1806), rather than the one based solely on family tradition (1803-1805). The volume also thoroughly and painstakingly provides the linguistic evidence for a number of assertions which might previously have been based on intuition or common sense, such as that Austen’s changing forms of address (‘My Dear X’, ‘My Dearest X’) in the letters reflect the degree of closeness to the recipient, or that increasing intimacy with a correspondent was marked by a change in tone and style in the letters. It demonstrates exemplary caution and modesty in making its claims, pointing out where this kind of analysis cannot give definitive answers, and it is clearly an excellent example of the sociolinguistic approach to written text. Its many

tables and graphs, and the Appendices, are helpful in presenting and summarising the argument, and these are likely to prove very useful to scholars in the future.

*Katie Halsey*  
*University of Stirling*