

**JANE AUSTEN AND TRANSLATABILITY:
PRIDE AND PREJUDICE ILLUSTRATED**

Vitana Kostadinova
Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv

The text traces several definitions of “translatability” as a concept, drawing upon Walter Benjamin, Wolfgang Iser, Jacques Derrida, and Mary Snell-Hornby, in order to focus on the intersemiotic translation Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* in the following illustrated editions: Bentley’s (1833), Allen’s (1894), Macmillan’s (1895), Winston Co’s (1949), and Marvel’s (2009). The novel proves to be translatable into the language of the visual, and popular enough in the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries. It justifies Virginia Woolf’s evaluation of Austen: “She stimulates us to supply what is not there.”

Key words: Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, translatability, illustrations, popularity

Austen-mania at the turn of the twentieth into the twenty-first century is both fascinating and puzzling as a phenomenon. In a book called *Jane’s Fame: How Jane Austen Conquered the World*, Claire Harman claims that the author’s name has been turned into an “exploitable global brand,” which has “little to do with reading” (Harman 2010: 3). Yet, in the beginning, it was reading that triggered Austen’s popularity. With reading in mind, I would like to approach several illustrated editions of *Pride and Prejudice*, the novel that contemporaries and posterity rate as her best. Back in 1813, it was “the fashionable novel” according to Annabella Milbanke (later Lady Byron), who wrote in a letter that she thought it “a very superior work” because “the most probable” novel she had ever read (Southam 1995: 8; Elwin 1963: 159). A century later, A. C. Bradley confirmed the real-life charm of Austen’s fictional world: “In reading of Elizabeth Bennet ... it is impossible for me to doubt either the author’s intentions or my own feelings. I was meant to fall in love with her, and I do” (Bradley 1911: 28). By 2011, a contemporary American writer has found out he cannot resist the heroine better than anyone else – apparently,

Elizabeth Bennet is the most charming character his first-person narrator has ever met (Deresiewicz 2011: 44).

The process of establishing a connection between the author's text and the reader's context is often a process of translating literature into the language of experience. To take this a step further, the popularity of a text seems to be the function of its translatability. Reputedly used by Walter Benjamin for the first time, translatability is, in his opinion, "an essential property of certain works"; to him, the task of the translator was "to bring the seeds of universal language to ripeness in translation" (Benjamin 2006: 299, 304). His seemed to be a belief in the universal deep structure that finds a different expression in the various surface structures of the different languages: a form of essentialism, which does not recognise the role of the reader and would not account for the changing tides of authors' popularity. To my mind, a definition of translatability would have to account for the communicative function of reading, wherein the author brings the text and the readers their context. Thus, Iser's understanding of translatability "as a set of conditions that are able to bring about a mutual mirroring of cultures" is not applicable either because it ignores the properties of writing altogether (Iser 1996: 248).

Of course, any initial premise that popularity is synonymous with translatability is threatened by Derrida's deconstructivist double take on the relationship between the two:

A text lives only if it lives *on* [*sur-vit*], and it lives *on* only if it is *at once* translatable *and* untranslatable (...). Totally translatable, it disappears as a text, as writing, as a body of language [*langue*]. Totally untranslatable, even within what is believed to be one language, it dies immediately. Thus triumphant translation is neither the life nor the death of a text, only or already its living *on*, its life after life, its life after death. (Derrida 2004: 82)

The implication is that total untranslatability prevents understanding, while the complete appropriation of a text would deny its originality and would erase the identity of the author. Identity and originality are historically grounded categories, so it appears suitable to approach the Jane Austen myth by retracing its chronological developments in terms of these questions: which characteristics of her writing have been singled out by critics, how has translation into other languages affected the style of her novels, and what alternative media have been used to relate her stories? The answers will elucidate what is translatable in Austen's texts (or rather

has been at a certain point of time) and what might resist translation in a new context. The three fields of inquiry refer to Jacobson's three types of translation: *intralingual*, *interlingual*, and *intersemiotic* (Jacobson 1959/2000: 114).

Part of the broader research topic "Jane Austen and translatability," this paper takes up the *intersemiotic* aspect of translation and focuses on several visual transformations of *Pride and Prejudice*, i.e. it examines the illustrations in several editions of the novel. The examples include the very first illustrated edition that appeared as part of Bentley's five-volume set (1833), the best known Victorian publications with Hugh Thomson and C. E. Brock as the artists (1894 and 1895), a mid-twentieth century attempt to re-visit the visual in book format after the advent of film adaptations (1949), and a recent comic-book version of the novel featuring Hugo Petrus's artwork (2009).

Understandably, from the very beginning, the main character of the story was in the centre of attention: Elizabeth Bennet was not only celebrated by male critics, as documented by Saintsbury among others, who claimed that "to live with and to marry, I do not know that any one ... can come into competition with Elizabeth" (Austen 1894: xxiii); in some ways she was Austen's favourite heroine. The author had tried to find her portrait at the Exhibition in Spring Gardens, she wrote in a letter to her sister Cassandra (24th May 1813). The letter refers to Elizabeth as Mrs. Darcy and imagines her in a yellow dress (Le Faye 1995: 212), which, had it been known at the time of the Bentley edition, may have had its impact on the visualisation therein. No Austen letters were publicly available in 1833, however, and the artists (Pickering and Greatbatch) opted for their contemporary pre-Victorian fashion: they depicted Elizabeth in both the frontispiece and the title-page illustration.

The two images in this first illustrated edition – disappointingly, there are no other plates in it – seem to signal that the story of *Pride and Prejudice* was perceived as contemporary and the heroine was brought up to date. The choice of an episode for the frontispiece is captioned as: "She then told him what Mr. Darcy had voluntarily done for Lydia. He heard her with astonishment." In this scene of the novel Elizabeth asks her father's consent to marry the man of her choice. The caption does, therefore, bring the courtship-and-marriage plot into relief but somewhat indirectly. Even though the father is not depicted old enough, patriarchal values seem dominant and the situation appears dramatic. The two figures are in the centre of the page: the posture of Mr. Bennet reveals his being taken aback,

his feet are wide apart to help him keep his balance as if on a boat, whereas his interlaced fingers reveal a combination of resolution and defensiveness; Miss Bennet, on the other hand, is much more dynamic, reaching out to him with one arm and emphasizing what she seems to be saying with the other, her body is bent towards him, she is walking towards him and is fully prepared to give him a hug. If we go back to the wider context of the novel, the text emphasizes the emotional exchange between the two:

Elizabeth, still more affected, was earnest and solemn in her reply; and at length, by repeated assurances that Mr. Darcy was really the object of her choice, by explaining the gradual change which her estimation of him had undergone, relating her absolute certainty that his affection was not the work of a day, but had stood the test of many months suspense, and enumerating with energy all his good qualities, she did conquer her father's incredulity, and reconcile him to the match. (Austen 1833a: 330)

It is worth mentioning that Mr. Bennet has given Lizzy his consent prior to that. So it is not for the sake of permission that she appears agitated, it is rather a desire to re-assure her parent she will be happy. The sentences chosen for a caption have this double reference to the moment we can see illustrated but also to what has happened previously. The mention "of what Mr. Darcy had voluntarily done for Lydia" echoes Elizabeth's feelings on reading his letter, "when she grew absolutely ashamed of herself" (Austen 1833a: 182); those feelings were reiterated when she acquainted herself with her aunt's communication, which explained the gentleman's role in her sister's wedding: Miss Bennet was first thrown "into a flutter of spirits" (Austen 1833a: 284) and was then "humbled", though "proud of him" (Austen 1833a: 285). Thus, one of the emblems of the novel, the frontispiece implies, is the heroine's change of heart, i.e. her growing up to realise that her first impressions and her judgments were nothing to be proud of. In other words, the 1833 edition sells the novel as a romance but also as a female coming-of-age story.

An interesting counterpart to this pictorial representation of the novel's entirety is the title-page illustration of Elizabeth, *en face* and with a parasol, and Lady Catherine, in profile, with her elaborate hat hiding her face, holding the wrist of the young woman with her left hand, while wagging the index finger of the other hand at her. The caption reads: "This is not to be borne. Miss Bennet, I insist on being satisfied. Has he, has my nephew, made you an offer of marriage?" The image and its tag

reconstruct the scene in which Mr Darcy's aunt demands to be reassured that Elizabeth has no intention of becoming Mrs Darcy (Austen 1833a: 309). It counters patriarchal with matriarchal sentiments and introduces the social hierarchy of the world of the novel. Her Ladyship is at the top of the social pyramid: saying *no* to her makes the young heroine a rebel all the more appealing for her charming strength of character to defend her right to love.

The couple of plates that Bentley went for are countered by the 160 drawings in the Allen edition (1894). Spielmann and Jerrold have estimated that 11,605 copies of the book were sold within twelve months (Spielmann, Jerrold 1931: 91f). Claire Tomalin, one of Jane Austen's biographers, does not give credit to the artist; she claims:

Hugh Thomson's drawings, with their soft Edwardian version of the Regency world, must have done her reputation more harm than good over the years. 'Girlie books', a bookseller called her novels to me the other day. I wondered if he was put off by Thomson's dressmaker's dummies, or by the way so many screen versions set the books in an imaginary golden age in which England was entirely peopled by the comfortable classes. (Tomalin 1997)

Tomalin sounds somewhat prescriptive with regard to the popularity Austen and her novels should have had. Thomson himself had doubted the suitability of *Pride and Prejudice* for illustration (Spielmann, Jerrold 1931: 86) but his friends were delighted with the result. Dobson reassured him: "You are at your best, the critics are shouting themselves hoarse in your praise," and critic, poet, playwright and theatre manager Comyns Carr wrote in a letter: "I am inclined to think it is quite the best thing you have done: in delicate definition of character, and in felicity of actual workmanship, it is certainly in advance of all that has preceded" (Spielmann, Jerrold 1931: 91, 93). When his illustrated volumes of *Sense and Sensibility* and *Emma* appeared in 1896, "the new Austen novels ... were hailed with the same general approval as that which had been accorded to the *Pride and Prejudice*" (Spielmann, Jerrold 1931: 106). Thomson's biographers believe that no less than 25,000 copies of that first illustrated edition had been circulated by 1907 (Spielmann, Jerrold 1931: 91f).

Leafing through that 1894 edition, it is intriguing to trace which aspects of the text have been highlighted by the illustrations. The frontispiece is no longer representative of the whole, and it does not need to be, as more visuals are to come in the volume; the depictions are

integrated in the reading experience by being wrapped in the text rather than afforded a page of their own. Fashion appears to be important, with all the attention paid to dresses, jackets, shoes, hats, hairstyles, parasols, etc. In terms of setting, the reader is treated to both exteriors and interiors, furniture is drawn in detail; we have a dinner table overlaid with glasses, plates, candelabra, and vases; there is a profusion of carriages, which are closely related to social status. Jane Austen did not deem it necessary to describe any of those, giving her readers the space to imagine them. In Thomson's rendition, the novel was transformed into a period piece, a glimpse into the agreeable world of the past. Bentley's edition had made Elizabeth Bennet, her father and Lady Catherine de Bourgh the contemporaries of the 1933 reader. Thomson's illustrations established the connection between Austen and the material culture of *her* time – one of the attractions for filmmakers nowadays. While, in his introduction to the novel, Saintsbury chose to praise the structure of the plot, the minor as well as the major characters, and the narrator's use of irony, the drawings highlighted the details of setting and appearances. Thus, they were the first to signal the chronological gap between characters and readers.

This lavishness of visuals was reinforced by the Macmillan edition in 1895, for which C. E. Brock was hired to do the plates, forty of them: he was "one of the younger illustrators of the day, who had been most markedly influenced by Thomson's work" (Spielmann, Jerrold 1931: 101f). This is to say, we are still faced by the world of Regency England but the strength of the Brock illustrations is the attention to character and the charming depiction of narrative irony. The comedy of manners has been visualised quite successfully and some of the faces and postures are absolutely hilarious; these drawings promise an entertaining read. The underprivileged make an appearance as well: say, the housekeeper and the maids who are shown Lydia's ring, or the peasants being scolded off "into harmony and plenty" by Lady Catherine de Bourgh. Mr. Collins is as cartoonish as in the text. Mr. Darcy is every bit as proud as readers would imagine him to be. Mr. Bennet's being ineffectual transpires in his reaction to the news of Lydia's elopement with Wickham: sprawled lifeless in a chair at the forefront of the picture, with Mrs. Bennet having a fit of hysteria in the background.

An undated edition of *Pride and Prejudice*, published by Thomas Nelson (in the first half of the twentieth century according to library catalogues), includes eight drawings by C. E. Brock but, interestingly, these are not identical with the drawings in the Macmillan edition. This

book can boast the most amusing Mr. Darcy, especially as caught in the still of handing his letter to Elizabeth (Austen n.d.: 173).

If Pickering and Greatbatch contemporized *Pride and Prejudice* for the audience of the 1830s, and Thomson's and Brock's illustrations highlighted the chronological distance between Austen's world and the readers', the American publication of 1949, illustrated by Douglas Gorsline, attempted both effects at once. It was the second title in a series "selected by W. Somerset Maugham as the ten greatest novels in the world" (Austen 1949: v). *Pride and Prejudice* made it into the top ten because the editor thought it "wonderfully readable" (xviii). Gorsline contributed black-and-white drawings as well as colour paintings to the volume. The paintings (five of them) reveal the artist's innovative approach, adding an abstract quality to the realistic setting. The result of the modernist technique is a twentieth-century feel to the atmosphere, particularly intriguing in the third painting, in which a company of four, two ladies among them, "sat down to a game of whist," the caption says. The phrase is reminiscent of Chapter 16, in which Mr Collins had the chance of obliging Mrs. Phillips "by sitting down to whist" (Austen 1833a: 67), but it also echoes the late nineteenth-century work by American writer E.P. Roe, *From Jest to Earnest*, in which "The two other young ladies, and Harcourt and De Forrest, sat down to a game of whist" (Roe 2007: 24). In *Pride and Prejudice* the heroines do not seem to be actively engaged in card games, in spite of the hints at it in Chapter 21: it mentions Mrs Bennet's "rapacity for whist players" as a result of which Elizabeth and Darcy "were confined for the evening at different tables, and she had nothing to hope, but that his eyes were so often turned towards her side of the room, as to make him play as unsuccessfully as herself" (Austen 1833a: 298). Whether Elizabeth is unlucky at cards or in love, or both, remains ambivalent. Certainly, Austen's ladies are not unfamiliar with the game: in *Sense and Sensibility* "Elinor was obliged to assist in making a whist table for the others. Marianne was of no use on these occasions, as she would never learn the game..." (Austen 1833b: 141). This said, Gorsline's picture features women much more liberated than in Regency England and their body language seems to transpose the scene to the early twentieth century. His rejection of quotations from the text as captions, and the visual improvisations on the plot estrange the viewer from the story line. The dress code appears a bit inconsistent: the pictures evoke Austen fashion but some of the drawings feature figure-hugging clothes and slim waists (cf. Austen 1949: 24, 42, 146, 228).

The equivocal effect of visual representations is carried forward by a twenty-first century interpretation of Austen's novel in the form of a comic book (2009). To begin with, the cover art (Sonny Lewis) is much admired but it doesn't have much in common with the style of what one finds inside (Hugo Petrus). The trimming of the story in order to fit it into the new medium is reminiscent of the American series of "the ten greatest novels in the world" discussed above: the general foreword there acknowledges that "[i]n some cases Mr. Maugham has felt that abridging strengthens the stories by eliminating cumbersome dissertations" (Austen 1949: v). The *Marvel Classics* approach certainly relies on a similar philosophy, but Janeites are not thrilled by losing the nuance and complexity of the original: "the richness of Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* is sacrificed for brevity and the brilliance of Austen's characterizations is missing" (Horner). At the same time, Nancy Butler, who adapted the text, has been accused of being unable "to refashion Austen's story to better suit a more diminutive length" – this reviewer draws a parallel with Joe Wright's film (2005) and finds the same fault with both: "the lack of pruning that made Keira Knightley's version such a wreck" (Hahne). Of course, award-winning writer Nancy Butler has her admirers; in the opinion of one of them, she "was able to condense the story of *Pride and Prejudice* without losing any of the good Austen-ness of it" (Lillian).

It is Hugo Petrus' art, however, that is more controversial. The Bennet sisters appear to be twenty-first century girls with 1980's hair-styles, who wear lip-stick and pout prettily; in the phrase of an indignant literature student, "They look like airbrushed porn stars" (Jeremy). At the same time, their clothes bridge the gap between the nineteenth century and today as if we are in the midst of a fancy dress party. Thus, the period-piece type of appreciation is packed together with a contemporary feel. A different aspect of the visuals in this interpretation of the novel is the characters' theatricality. Their body language is often overwhelming; perhaps, this has to do with a tradition in the medium, which is summarised in the observation: "this book is more 90's Spiderman than artsy adorable love story" (Staffer). The exaggerated grimaces translate words into the idiom of an audience brought up on graphic novels: "He [the artist] does a wonderful job showcasing Elizabeth Bennet's personality through her facial expressions and capturing Mr. Darcy's arrogance and, later on, the softening of his personality" (Horner). For the uninitiated, puzzled by these facial expressions, it is a relief to have read the original. Judging by appearances, which in this case are essential, the

twenty-first century adaptation of the novel has produced the effect of “cultural inflation” (Klapp 5); it has diminished the value of the symbol.

Of course, Austen did not describe appearances or setting, neither did she explicate the specificity of her contemporary culture, giving us the freedom to fill in the missing information. These “gaps”, to resort back to Iser’s term,¹ stimulate us “to imagine what is not there” (Woolf 1957: 174); they have allowed generations of readers to envisage the past or map the text onto their present. In other words, the extent to which her novel is “embedded in its own specific culture” does not make it untranslatable, and neither does “the distance that separates the cultural background of source text and target audience in terms of time and place” (Snell-Hornby 1995: 41). *Pride and Prejudice* has had numerous translations into the semiotic system of visual imagery ever since the nineteenth century. To what an extent these translations have been *successful* remains debatable and the debate is inevitably concerned with values. Nevertheless, the contemporary graphic adaptations of the novel advertise the title even if the author’s name is replaced by that of the script writer and the different interpretations of the illustrators confirm that the text “lives on”.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Austen 1833a:** Austen, J. *Pride and Prejudice*. London: Bentley, 1833.
Austen 1894: Austen, J. *Pride and Prejudice*. London: George Allen, 1894.
Austen 1895: Austen, J. *Pride and Prejudice*. London: Macmillan, 1895.
Austen 1949: Austen, J. *Pride and Prejudice*. Philadelphia: J. C. Winston Co, 1949.
Austen 2009: Austen, J. *Pride and Prejudice*. New York: Marvel Comics, 2009.
Austen n.d.: Austen, J. *Pride and Prejudice*. London: Thomas Nelson, n.d.
Austen 1833b: Austen, J. *Sense and Sensibility*. London: Bentley, 1833.
Benjamin 2006: Benjamin, W. The Task of the Translator. Transl. by James Hynd and E. M. Valk. // *Translation - Theory and Practice: A Historical Reader*. Eds. Daniel Weissbort and Astradur Eysteinnsson. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006, 298-307.

¹ “Even in the simplest story there is bound to be some kind of blockage, if only for the fact that no tale can ever be told in its entirety. Indeed, it is only through inevitable omissions that a story will gain its dynamism. Thus whenever the flow is interrupted and we are led off in unexpected direction, the opportunity is given to us to bring into play our own faculty for establishing connections - for filling in the gaps left by the text itself.” (Iser 1988: 216).

- Bradley 1911:** Bradley, A. C. *Jane Austen. // Essays and studies by members of the English Association*, vol. II, collected by H. C. Beeching. Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1911, 7-36.
- Deresiewicz 2011:** Deresiewicz, W. *A Jane Austen Education: How Six Novels Taught Me about Love, Friendship, and the Things That Really Matter*. New York: Penguin Press, 2011.
- Derrida 2004:** Derrida, J. *Living On*. Transl. by J. Hulbert. // *EPZ Deconstruction and Criticism*. Harold Bloom et al. New York: Continuum, 2004, 62 – 142.
- Elwin 1963:** Elwin, M. *Lord Byron's Wife*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1963.
- Hahne n.d.:** Hahne, S. *Pride and Prejudice*. Good Ok Bad. 28 Feb., 2013 <http://goodokbad.com/index.php/reviews/pride_and_prejudice_review>.
- Harman 2010:** Harman, C. *Jane's Fame: How Jane Austen Conquered the World*. Edinburgh: Canongate, 2010.
- Horner 2013:** Horner, A. *Jane Austen's Pride & Prejudice (Marvel Illustrated) by Nancy Butler and Hugo Petrus*. 6 Feb., 2013. *Diary of an Eccentric*. 28 Feb., 2013. <<http://diaryofaneccentric.wordpress.com/2013/02/06/review-jane-austens-pride-prejudice-marvel-illustrated-by-nancy-butler-and-hugo-petrus/>>.
- Iser 1988:** Iser, W. *The reading process: a phenomenological approach. // Modern Criticism and Thought: A Reader*. Ed. David Lodge. London: Longman, 1988, 211 – 228.
- Iser 1996:** Iser, W. *The Emergence of a Cross-Cultural Discourse: Thomas Carlyle's Sartor Resartus. // The Translatability of Cultures: Figurations of the Space Between*. Eds. Sanford Budick and Wolfgang Iser. Stanford University Press, 1996, 245 – 264.
- Jacobson 1959/2000:** Jacobson, R. *On Linguistic Aspects of Translation. // The Translation Studies Reader*. Ed. L. Venuti. London: Routledge, 2000, 113-118.
- Jeremy 2009:** Jeremy. *Pride and Prejudice Comic, WTF?* 20 April, 2009. *Minds in the Gutters*. Class blog for WMST 425B, a University of British Columbia student-directed seminar about gender and women in comics. 28 Feb., 2013. <<http://comixubc.blogspot.com/2009/04/pride-and-prejudice-comic-wtf.html>>.
- Klapp 1991:** Klapp, O. *Inflation of Symbols: Loss of Values in American Culture*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1991.
- Le Faye 1995:** Le Faye, D. (compiler and ed.) *Jane Austen's Letters*, 3rd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995.
- Lillian 2012:** Lillian. *Pride and Prejudice*. 17 Sept., 2012. *Lillian's Reviews*. 28 Feb., 2013. <<http://www.goodreads.com/review/show/416626377>>.
- Roe 2007:** Roe, E. P. *From Jest to Earnest*. Wildside Press LLC, 2007.
- Snell-Hornby 1995:** Snell-Hornby. *Translation Studies. An Integrated Approach*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1995.
- Southam 1995:** Southam, B. (ed.) *Jane Austen: The Critical Heritage*. Volume 1. London: Routledge, 1995.

Spielmann, Jerrold 1931: Spielmann, M. H. and W. Jerrold. *Hugh Thomson: His Art, His Letters, His Humour and His Charm*. London: A. & C. Black, 1931.

Staffer 2011: Staffer, J. *Pride and Prejudice*. 26 Jan., 2011. EZRead eBookstore's Reviews. 28 Feb., 2013. <<http://www.goodreads.com/review/show/143824109>>.

Tomalin 1997: Tomalin, C. *The Good Book Guide Magazine*, November 1997, Issue 107. Quoted online at *Austen Illustrated*. 11 Sept. 2004. Jane Austen Society of Australia. 13 Dec. 2012. <<http://www.jasa.net.au/illo/index.htm>>

Woolf 1957: Woolf, V. *The Common Reader*, First Series. London: Hogarth Press, 1957.