

**PARATEXTS AND READERS:  
AUSTEN’S *NORTHANGER ABBEY* AND THE EXPLANATORY  
NOTES IN THE BULGARIAN TRANSLATIONS OF THE NOVEL**

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This paper looks into the culture inscribed in Jane Austen’s *Northanger Abbey* and discusses the explications provided in Silviya Nenkova’s and Nadezhda Karadzhova’s footnotes and endnotes for the Bulgarian translations published in 1992 and 1995. It draws upon Cecilia Alvstad’s concept of a “translator’s pact” and argues that translation blunders that lead to logical incoherence make the translator *visible*.

**Key words:** Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, paratexts, translation

Two Bulgarian translations of Jane Austen’s *Northanger Abbey* became available in the last decade of the twentieth century: Silviya Nenkova’s in 1992 (Slavcho Nikolov i sie) and Nadezhda Karadzhova’s in 1995 (Merlin Publication). No foreword or afterword has framed either edition, so the essential paratext emerges in the form of explanatory notes, although cover illustrations, author name and titles should not go unnoticed.

Paratexts are important for different reasons: on the one hand, they “structure the reading and are therefore relevant for reader-oriented narratological analyses” (Alvstad 2014: 276); on the other hand, they may open up an “ideological gap between author and translator” or demonstrate “ideological agreement” (Hermans 2014: 293). In any case, explanatory notes are usually an expression of the translator’s voice: “Here ‘the translator’ can be heard most clearly” (O’Sullivan 2003: 17). When it comes to literary translation, explanatory notes are meant to fill in the “lacunae in the TL reader’s knowledge of the SL culture” (Landers 2001: 93). Claims regarding literature itself as a source of knowledge go back a long way; in 1583, Sir Philip Sidney defined *poesie* as “a speaking picture, with this end to teach and delight” (Sidney 1995). Since then, poetry has been persuasively re-grouped with prose in order to be distinguished from

“Matter of fact, or Science” (Wordsworth 2000: 602n). Yet, despite the fact that literature can be perceived as instructive, some professionals advise translators to minimize explications because notes are “always a sign of weakness on the part of a translator” (Eco 2001: 50), they “break the flow, disturbing the continuity by drawing the eye, albeit briefly, away from the text to a piece of information that, however useful, is still a disrupter of the ‘willing suspension of disbelief’” (Landers 2001: 93). That is to say, the focus is on the entertainment value of the text. Others, however, enthusiastically recommend “‘academic’ translation, translation that seeks with its annotations and its accompanying glosses to locate the text in a rich cultural and linguistic context” in order to curtail the damage of easy relativism that threatens to obliterate “the rich differences of human life in culture” (Appiah 2000: 427).

Certainly, the intervention of the translator is very much a function of the text in hand and its cultural distance from the reading public, but it is inevitably influenced by personal choices and publishers’ policies. To take an example with Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*, Zheni Bozhilova’s translation is accompanied by half a dozen explanatory notes, while the latest edition, in Snezhana Mileva’s translation, has about twice as many. Unlike the scarcity of interjections in the ever-so-popular *Pride and Prejudice*, the two Bulgarian translations of *Northanger Abbey* contextualise the narrative with copious notes. The first signal that the novel needs explications comes from Jane Austen herself; in 1816 she wrote: “The public are entreated to bear in mind that thirteen years have passed since it was finished, many more since it was begun, and that during that period, places, manners, books, and opinions have undergone considerable changes” (Austen 2004: 216). The author’s disclaimer indicates that the text is steeped in a cultural context indispensable when deciphering the message. This paper looks into the culture inscribed in the novel and discusses the explications provided in the translators’ notes for the Bulgarian editions in 1992 and 1995.

A convenient starting point, in view of the role that paratexts play in the reading process, is the concept of a “translation pact”: “a rhetorical construction through which readers are invited to read translated texts as if they were the originals” (Alvstad 2014: 274). Alvstad points out that the “downplaying of the translator encourages readers to read translations as if they were produced solely by the author” and goes on to claim that “the foregrounding of the translator on the cover, in a foreword or in footnotes does not necessarily challenge the pact but may in fact strengthen it” (280). With the first Bulgarian edition of *Northanger Abbey* in 1992, the

translation pact is established in a classical manner: the front cover features the name of the author and the Bulgarian version of the title, while the publishing house is mentioned on the back cover. The translator's name, Silviya Nenkova, gets mentioned on the title page. The islandish outfits of the gentleman and the young lady as imagined by the cover artist correspond to the Englishness of the original. The illustration offers the first hint that this is a novel about novels: the girl is holding an open book, staring away into the world of fiction. The translator's presence is made explicit by the one hundred and fourteen footnotes marked by the abbreviation "B. np." [= translator's note]. Out of these, only two are linguistically motivated by puns that cannot be translated. In Chapter 14 Jane Austen has Catherine solemnly declare, "I have heard that something very shocking indeed will soon come out in London" (Austen 2004: 77), and arranges a dialogue around Miss Tilney's misinterpretation of the sentence. In her translation, Silviya Nenkova has opted for the Bulgarian version of "I have heard that something very shocking indeed will soon *take place* in London" and has explained in a footnote that the same English expression means both "to publish" and "to take place, to happen" (1992: 96, emphasis added).<sup>1</sup> The next linguistic conundrum is less straight-forward and concerns Catherine's phrase "promised so faithfully" in Chapter 24 (Austen 2004: 134). According to Johnson's *Dictionary of the English Language*, only the fifth meaning of the adverb "faithfully" is relevant to Catherine's usage: "with earnest professions; with strong promises," and the example offered comes from Bacon's *Henry VII*, "For his own part he did *faithfully* promise to be still in the king's power" (Johnson 1785, vol. 1). Austen's Henry ironizes Catherine's choice of words in his retort, "I have heard of a faithful performance. But a faithful promise..." (Austen 2004: 135), as her phrase does not utilise a primary meaning of the word in question; but neither does his – she has at least Johnson's authority on her side, whereas the hero throws his weight around in a rather patriarchal manner; still, at another level, he is making a comment on Isabella's character because she does not mean what she says, she is a performer, she plays roles. The nuances get lost in the translation and Nenkova's footnote does not really help the matter (Austen 1992: 168).

Irony lends authority to the narrative tone and this authority is transposed onto the translator. Quite a few of the footnotes in the 1992 edition are preoccupied with geography, and here are a couple of

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<sup>1</sup> Here and hereafter, for the purposes of this discussion, quotes from the Bulgarian translations of *Northanger Abbey* have been rendered in English unless the Bulgarian reference is deemed indispensable.

examples: “Wiltshire – a county in the South of England; Fullerton – a fictitious name; Bath – a historic town in the South-West of England, a spa resort with hot mineral springs” (Austen 1992: 9). The greatest number, however, reconstruct the literary awareness expected of the reader. Some of them attribute a title to its author, as in the case of “The Beggar’s Petition”: “a poem by Thomas Moss” (Austen 1992: 6). Others provide a brief introduction of authors mentioned in the text: “Samuel Johnson (1709 – 1784) – an English poet, novelist, and lexicographer – *A Dictionary of the English Language*” (Austen 1992: 91). Still others identify textual references: when the narrative mentions “the night that poor St. Aubin died” a footnote comes to the rescue, explaining that this is “a scene from *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. The character’s name is Aubert” (Austen 1992: 69). This seemingly omniscient competence of the translator is challenged by the occasional blunder; in this case, St. Aubin is rendered in Bulgarian as if a Christian saint, “Свети Аубин” (Austen 1992: 69). Of course, we have to allow for the fact that in the early nineties, i.e. before the internet era, information was rather difficult to find or confirm. Still, this mistake is accompanied by a footnote with the correct name of the character in Ann Radcliffe’s novel, which points towards an annotated source text that has apparently provided the comments on literary references. According to the copyright page, the original was translated from a 1965 edition of *Northanger Abbey* published by the New English Library Limited in London, New York and Scarborough, Ontario, but to what an extent this is reliable remains uncertain; scepticism is reinforced by the English spelling of the author’s name as *Austin*. Another bewildering treatment of literary allusions has to do with several quotes from Shakespeare’s plays in Chapter 1. Austen took her references from three different texts, *Othello*, *Measure for Measure*, and *Twelfth Night*. In Nenkova’s translation, none of these is referenced in a translator’s note, which seems odd in the company of a reference to James Thomson’s “Spring” – a poet obscure enough to have his name misspelled as Thompson in the English text of the novel (Austen 2004: 7), as well as in the explanatory notes provided by both Bulgarian translators (Austen 1992: 8; Austen 1995: 251). What is more, Silviya Nenkova has not opted for existing translations of Shakespeare either.

Shakespeare notwithstanding, every time the narrator relies on the readers’ erudition in matters literary and non-literary, there is a translator’s prop in the 1992 edition; when the Reformation gets mentioned in Chapter 17, the following footnote clarifies the concept: “Reformation – a social and religious movement in the countries of Western and Central Europe in

the sixteenth century. In that period, Henry VIII (1491 – 1547), king of England, discarded the supremacy of the Pope and gave away the landed property of the church” (Austen 1992: 119). A similar approach underlies any reference to money: a guinea is defined as “an English gold coin equal to 21 shillings” (Austen 1992: 10), to measurements: yards, inches and pints are transferred into the metric system (Austen 1992: 18, 35, 52), or to dances: a *cotillion* is “a ballet dance of French origin, dating back to the eighteenth century, a dance-game managed by the master of ceremonies (Austen 1992: 60). The sites of Bath are elaborated on in detail: the Pump-room, the Lower Rooms, and the Upper Rooms are contextualised (Austen 1992: 15 – 16), the Royal Crescent is described and dated (Austen 1992: 25), and the Union Passage is mapped out (Austen 1992: 33), giving the reader the status of a visitor. Cultural specificities of nineteenth-century etiquette are readily unveiled, bridging the gap between readers and characters. Mr Allen’s premise that Mr Tilney is a clergyman prompts this aside, “in those days, the clothes of clergymen in England did not differ from other people’s clothes” (Austen 1992: 20). The fashionable hours in Bath are helpfully specified as between 1 and 4 pm (Austen 1992: 21). The fact that Isabella and Catherine call each other by their Christian names is immediately put into perspective: “in Austen’s time, the forms of address were strictly observed. Even husbands and wives addressed each other with ‘Mrs’ and ‘Mr’. Isabella’s breach of etiquette betrays the vulgarity of the Thorpes” (Austen 1992: 26). Ironically, nothing is said of Catherine’s “breach of etiquette” and the reader might become suspicious of the translator’s voice being identical with the narrator’s. On the topic of greetings, the translator explains: “A handshake was an expression of great familiarity. Austen describes her characters by means of etiquette, the nuances of which are not obvious to readers today. For the ill-mannered John Thorpe a careless bow was an expression of the ultimate amiability” (Austen 1992: 34 – 35). A footnote that mentions the name of the author throws the translator into relief and reminds the reader that the latter’s is an alternative voice. Yet, I would agree with Cecilia Alvstad, who argues that paratexts work in favour of the translation pact. If translation is the “replacement of the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text with a text that would be intelligible to the target-language reader” (Venuti 1995: 18), explanatory notes do exactly that. With or without footnotes, “Little can be demanded of him [the reader] except his attention. Knowledge, standards of comparison, Classical background: all must be supplied by the translator ...” (Cohen 1962: 33; qtd. in Venuti 1995: 30). What is important for the translation pact, I would suggest, is the ambience

of coherence. It is the instances of discord that make the translator *visible*. Discord is not identical with a mistake, though it may ensue as a result of it. Bulgarian readers would not notice that “nursing a dormouse” (Austen 2004: 5) has been transformed into “[taking] care of injured insects” (Austen 1992: 5) as it does not contradict the immediate context, but the description of Catherine as “ordinary” (Austen 1992: 5) coupled with “a thin awkward figure, a sallow skin without colour, dark lank hair, and strong features” might give them a pause – the logical inconsistency in the latter case comes from the wrong adjective in Bulgarian, a result of misinterpreting “plain” from the original text (Austen 2004: 5). A similar logical discrepancy is noticeable in a previous sentence asserting that “A family with ten children is considered a wonderful thing because the heads, arms, and legs are enough” (Austen 1992: 5), a muddled version of the English, “A family of ten children will be always called a fine family, where there are heads and arms and legs enough for the number” (Austen 2004: 5). Bulgarian readers do not need to compare and contrast the translation they are reading against the source text in order to decide who is to blame; they would immediately suspect the translator of misrepresenting the original. In this case, rightly so: a hilarious effect is produced by Silviya Nenkova’s translation of the phrase “at dressed or undressed balls” in Chapter 5 (Austen 2004: 21); her “at balls with or without clothes” is a gaffe regardless of the footnote specifying “there were different requirements with regard to dress” (Austen 1992: 25).

The explanatory notes in Nadezhda Karadzhova’s translation of *Northanger Abbey* are somewhat different. Visually, there appear to be less of them and one of the reasons is the discrimination between footnotes and endnotes, another – the blending of explanations together when literary references appear in proximity on the same page. In addition, none is marked as a translator’s note, and it remains uncertain if the editor has had her own contribution there. The few footnotes are more closely related to the immediate understanding of the text: these outline the meanings of *guinea*, *yard*, *pint*, *coquelicot*, etc. The endnotes reconstruct the context, thirty-six of them altogether (Austen 1995: 251 – 254). The practice reflects contemporary recommendations for translators to use endnotes rather than footnotes, if they must, thus allowing “the reader to decide whether to break the mimetic flow” (Landers 2001: 96). A later edition of this translation has eliminated all footnotes but has left the asterisks next to the previously defined words, a rather frustrating combination that raises the readers’ expectations and then fails to deliver (Austen 2008). Locations, historical figures and events are not footnoted (endnoted) as

religiously as in 1992. Such *omissions*, in the sense of Landers' understanding of the term, "what is omitted is the explanation, leaving the reader to his own devices" (Landers 2001: 95), have to do with the processes of opening Bulgarian culture towards European and Anglo-American realities in the 1990s. As a result, foreignizing vocabulary is left for the readers to deal with on their own. Notably, the first note in the new translation contextualises an allusion at the very beginning of Chapter 1, "Her father was a clergyman, without being neglected, or poor, and a very respectable man, though his name was Richard" (Austen 2004: 5). Nadezhda Karadzhova informs the reader that the turn of phrase originated in a family joke: Jane Austen wrote in a letter to her sister, Cassandra, on September 15, 1796, "Mr. Richard Harvey's match is put off, till he has got a Better Christian name, of which he has great Hopes" (*Letters* 1995: 10; cf. Austen 1995: 251, n. 1). The explanatory note is readily available in annotated editions, such as the Norton critical edition (cf. Austen 2004: 5, n. 1). The translator's attention to biographical detail is representative of the *Jane Austen Collection* project intended for the Bulgarian market by Merlin Publication: four of the author's six major novels were published in 1995, the other two followed suit in 1996, along with a volume containing *Lady Susan*, *Sanditon*, and *The Watsons*.

The explications of literary allusions in the 1995 edition are not exactly identical to those in the first Bulgarian translation but they are inevitably reminiscent of it because they reference the same names and titles. Often, the translator offers more literary background in the later publication: e.g. "John Milton (1608 – 1674) – an English poet, author of *Paradise Lost*, who has mapped the culture of classicism onto his baroque vision" (Austen 1995: 252, n. 12), or "In Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, the heroine faints when she lifts the black veil covering a large picture. It is eventually revealed to the reader that it is not Lady Lorentini's skeleton (Lady Lorentina in Jane Austen's novel) but a wax figure in clothes of mourning and disfigured by worms; this, however, comes as late as three chapters before the end of the novel" (Austen 1995: 252, n. 14). The presumption is that the general reader of the translation would be unaware of English authors and titles, and unfamiliar with gothic fiction that was never rendered in Bulgarian.

In the case of the quotes from Shakespeare's plays, Nadezhda Karadzhova has documented the references, indicating the Bulgarian translations she has used to represent the English original: Lyubomir Ognyanov's for the excerpt from *Othello* 3: 3, Valery Petrov's of *Measure*

for *Measure* 3: 1, and Boyan Danovsky's of *Twelfth Night* 2: 4 (Austen 1995: 251, n. 7).

A rather different type of note explains the word “commerce” [“комърс”] borrowed from the English original to denote a game of cards that the characters play in Chapter 11. Nadezhda Karadzhova draws a parallel between the rules of the game, which allow participants to exchange a lower-numbered card for a higher-numbered card, and Isabella's attitude towards men, her inclination to exchange a poorer suitor for a richer one. This extended metaphor evokes Newmark's distinction between literary and non-literary texts: “in a non-literary text the denotations of a word normally come before its connotations. But in a literary text, you have to give precedence to its connotations, since, if it is any good, it is an allegory, a comment on society, at the time and now, as well as on its strict setting” (Newmark 1988: 16). Indeed, the fact that Catherine wins the game of cards is a mark of the narrator's approval of her honesty and loyalty, and anticipates the denouement of the story. The connotation of “commerce” was obviously lost on Silviya Nenkova. The game of cards is virtually obliterated in her version of the chapter, the characters seem to be engaged in a conversation, and the mention of “Kings, I vow” in the end remains inexplicable (Austen 1992: 75 – 76).

An essential element of the narrative is the famous defence of novels accommodated in Chapter 5. Susan Fraiman is tempted to argue “that in thus theorizing and justifying her project, Austen actually resembles these celebrated Romantic poets [Wordsworth and Coleridge], with their penchants for aesthetic manifestoes” and goes on to explain that her emphasis is unlike theirs (Austen 2004: 23, n. 3). But what is more important in the apology is the implicit feminist stance. No footnote in the 1992 edition explains that Sterne is himself a novelist but is inexplicably grouped with eminent poets and essayists – the inference of the original is that only novels written by women are ignored or decried, a suggestion reinforced metaphorically by “the *labour* of the novelist” (Austen 2004: 23, emphasis added). By the end of the paragraph the hint is spelt out, it is Frances Burney's *Cecilia* or *Camilla* and Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda* that are undervalued. The point is feminist enough to be taken up in the late twentieth century but neither of the translators has done that, even if in 1995 Sterne is duly endnoted as an English novelist, one of the founders of novel-writing, famous for *Sentimental Journey*, which provided a label for the sentimental trend in literature, the annotation informs us (Austen 1995: 252, n. 12).



The feminist setting is unwittingly provided by the very first chapter of the novel, which informs the reader that Catherine “greatly preferred cricket [...] to dolls” (Austen 2004: 5). The remark might be taken as the voice of experience because Jane Austen herself grew up with a lot of boys around her: not only her brothers but also the boys who attended the school that her parents used to run, which meant that “In summer, there was cricket on half holidays” (Tomalin 2000: 25). Sports and games were very important in channelling the energy of boys in nineteenth-century schools; girls’ schools, however, “concentrated mainly on music, dancing and posture” (Wely 2009: 33, 40). So, when Catherine “began to curl her hair and long for balls” at fifteen (Austen 2004: 6), it was the result of her social education. A contemporary reader would readily interpret such a sequence as foreshadowing Simone de Beauvoir’s observation, “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (Beauvoir 2011: 283).

Austen’s feminism is an ideological issue and invites different attitudes. For translators willing to make a comment, forewords, afterwords, and explanatory notes provide the medium. To put it differently, paratexts could be framing the text with an ideology, while “the translated words are embedded in the translator’s reporting discourse” (Hermans 2014: 289). Overall, the Bulgarian translators of *Northanger Abbey* have chosen to reconstruct the context of the narrative to the best of their knowledge, reinforcing the author’s positions on social norm and rules of behaviour. Thus, the translator’s positioning, in both cases, could be construed as empathetic with the author’s, which, naturally, strengthens the translation pact; at the same time, it shields the reader from too much opacity, trying to make the text more transparent to the reader (Bleeker 2014: 238). The two Bulgarian editions of Austen’s first novel do not demonstrate a radical shift in translation practices in the 1990s or a dissonance between translator and author. Both Silviya Nenkova and Nadezhda Karadzhova have attempted to shorten the distance between the original text and the Bulgarian reader, and their explanatory notes facilitate the appreciation of the narrator’s irony when it comes to behaviour and gothic presumptions. Their intervention, however, does not highlight Austen’s defence of novels and women novelists; neither does it help the reader comprehend that the author’s realism attributes gothic qualities to every-day relations in nineteenth-century society rather than to extraordinary or supernatural occurrences.

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