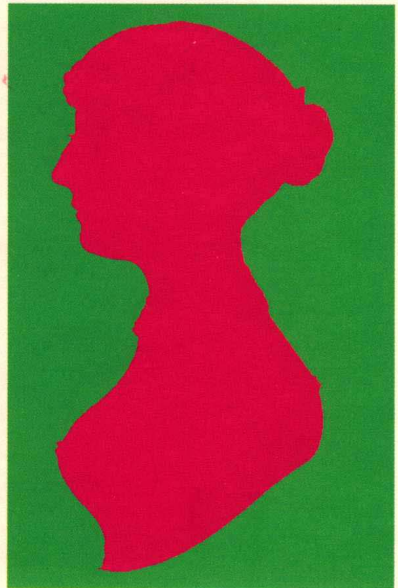
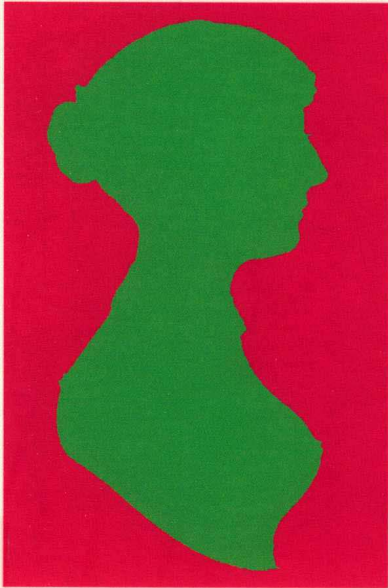
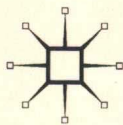


Uses of Austen

Jane's Afterlives



Edited by Gillian Dow
and Clare Hanson



Uses of Austen

Jane's Afterlives

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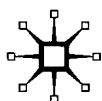
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VIRGINIA WOOLF

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Introduction

Gillian Dow and Clare Hanson

In her classic essay on 'Austen cults and cultures', Claudia L. Johnson explains that its focus is on 'the uses to which we have put [Austen] and her achievement'.¹ John Wiltshire also invokes the term 'use' in his study *Recreating Jane Austen*, although for him it is a word that 'oscillates between exploitation and honourable deployment'.² Wiltshire's comment bears traces of the concern about fidelity that marked earlier analysis of film adaptation and that, as we shall see, has a long history in discussions about translations, adaptations and reworkings of Austen's texts. However, the contributors to this volume share Deidre Lynch's conviction that the questions raised by the cultural uses of Jane Austen are more significant and more intriguing than debates over the fidelity or otherwise of individual recreations.³ Austen has for decades been a crossover author, bridging high and low culture, and more recently 'Jane Austen' has morphed into a cultural signifier with global recognition. In response to this phenomenon, the essays in this volume explore the values that Austen's life and works can be made to represent in diverse cultural contexts. They engage too with the history of her literary reputation and with her construction as a canonical author, and examine the long-standing tension that has existed between the responses of her 'common readers' (to borrow Virginia Woolf's term) and the views of the literary-critical establishment, a tension that has been strongly marked by gender.

There is a frequently quoted letter from Jane Austen to her niece Anna written in September 1814 that shows Austen's mock indignation on learning that Walter Scott is about to publish his first novel, *Waverley*:

Walter Scott has no business to write novels, especially good ones. – it is not fair. – He has Fame & Profit enough as a Poet, and should

not be taking the bread out of other people's mouths. – I do not like him, & do not mean to like Waverley if I can help it – but fear I must. – I am quite determined however not to be pleased with Mrs West's Alicia de Lacy, should I ever meet with it, which I hope I may not. – I think I *can* be stout against any thing written by Mrs West. – I have made up my mind to like no Novels really, but Miss Edgeworth's, Yours & my own.⁴

This extract is revealing of Austen's interest in, and knowledge of, the literary marketplace of 1814. It has been used by literary historians and by critics to demonstrate variously her mentoring relationship with some of her nieces and nephews, her professionalism, her acerbic wit, her sense of rivalry with Scott and her superiority over Jane West. Here we turn the quotation to a different use. By aligning herself with her would-be novelist niece, Anna, and the most popular woman novelist of her day, Maria Edgeworth, and with her rejection of Scott, Jane Austen situates herself firmly within a community of women writers. This quotation takes on increased importance when we remember, thanks to Kathryn Sutherland's scrupulous editing of the various Austen memoirs and biographies written by her brother and her brothers' descendants, that the first published version of this letter replaced the 'Yours' with 'James's', changing the emphasis on the female tradition. Similarly, Henry Austen's first 'Biographical Notice' of his sister published just after her death in 1818 praises her as the author of 'those novels, which by many have been placed on the same shelf as the works of a D'Arblay and an Edgeworth'.⁵ In subsequent editions of this 'Biographical Notice', the reference to D'Arblay (Burney) and Edgeworth disappeared.

Yet Austen did privilege these women writers of novels, despite her family's insistence on her deep love of Richardson, *Sir Charles Grandison* in particular. In *Northanger Abbey*, Austen sets the authors of *Cecilia*, *Camilla* and *Belinda* against 'the abilities of the nine-hundredth abridger of the History of England, or of the man who collects and publishes in a volume some dozen lines of Milton, Pope, and Prior, with a paper from the Spectator, and a chapter from Sterne'.⁶ It is in part this 'defense' of women writers – her 'laughing feminism', to appropriate the title of Audrey Bilger's 1998 study of Burney, Edgeworth and Austen⁷ – that has attracted women readers throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. But there are naturally many other reasons why women writers, critics, directors and actors, bloggers, teachers and students continue to be inspired and provoked by Jane Austen, and indeed 'Jane Austen'. The

essays in this volume examine the myriad responses of what we may broadly call the ‘contemporary’ to Austen’s writing and, more generally, to her life and times.

In the introduction to his *Recreating Jane Austen*, John Wiltshire claimed that ‘[r]emaking, rewriting, “adaptation”, reworking, “appropriation”, conversion, mimicking (the proliferation of terms suggests how nebulous and ill-defined is the arena) of earlier work into other media is an important feature of the current landscape’.⁸ In terms of the responses of women writers to Austen’s work, however, the tradition has much deeper roots, which stretch back to the first Franco-Swiss translator of Austen’s novels in 1815. The landscape of early nineteenth-century Switzerland was far removed from the twentieth- and twenty-first-century landscapes that this volume investigates. But in some ways, the preoccupations of the first female reader of Austen who has left a record of her sustained engagement with the novels are remarkably similar to those female voices that this volume traces through subsequent generations. The predominantly female-authored texts of the ‘Austen industry’ that is situated firmly in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century – the prequels and sequels, the Austen-inspired genre fiction including detective stories, murder-mysteries and time-travel novels, the film and television adaptations and the Austen self-help guides – have their ancestor in Austen’s own lifetime.

Isabelle de Montolieu’s translation of *Sense and Sensibility*, a ‘traduction libre’ or free translation in her own words, was published in 1815. Montolieu (1751–1832) was a novelist in her own right: such was her celebrity Europe wide in 1815 when her translation *Raison et Sensibilité* appeared that the anonymous English author Jane Austen was, as Valérie Cossy has pointed out, ‘sure to be eclipsed by her translator’.⁹ In the preface to her translation, Montolieu tells her reader that the English author is undoubtedly a woman writer, because of her ability to ‘penetrate, with so much detail and with truth, women’s hearts’. The attraction for Montolieu, then, is that this unknown English writer shares her preoccupation and concern with the lives of women at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries. Several critics have argued with varying degrees of indignation that the changes Montolieu makes to Austen’s source text are little more than blasphemies. Certainly, a close reading of the translation demonstrates that Montolieu adapts and distorts the text throughout, changing both narrative and conversation, and forcing Austen’s prose to meet contemporary Franco-Swiss tastes for *sensibilité*. Most importantly, Montolieu radically changes the ending of the novel: Willoughby transfers his affections back to Marianne, who then

discovers that she truly loves Brandon in a remarkable scene where she unveils her feelings; the 'conversion' of Willoughby is complete when he marries the second Eliza, Brandon's ward, thus legitimizing their child. Montolieu's ending has none of the loose ends of Austen's, and clearly demonstrates her discomfort with Marianne's 'extraordinary fate', a fate that has troubled generations of women readers, critics and film makers. It is worth noting that the French filmgoer who was prompted to buy a translation of *Sense and Sensibility* after having seen Ang Lee and Emma Thompson's 1996 adaptation of the novel would have bought a re-edition of Montolieu's free translation: Alan Rickman's distinguished portrayal of Brandon makes the Marianne/Brandon relationship just as palatable for a modern viewer with an appetite for romance as Montolieu's altered ending made it acceptable for an early nineteenth-century Franco-swiss reader with a taste for European Romanticism. In her essay on the uses of translation for foreign readers of Austen in the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries, Gillian Dow identifies a global Austen who is constructed by her translators, and whose global reception as 'classic' or 'world' literature follows a complicated trajectory.

One can read Montolieu's 'translation' as marking the starting point of a long tradition of female receptions of Austen's novels that involve the creative reinterpretation of a fellow woman artist. Indeed, Montolieu's engagement with *Sense and Sensibility* was not unique in the European translations of Austen's novels. In a recent work on translation in France and England in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Julie Candler Hayes signals 'a small, but distinct, trend' of what she identifies as 'gynocentric translation'; that is, translations by women of women's writing.¹⁰ In terms of Austen's reception outside of Anglo-American culture, 'gynocentric translations' loom large: of the nineteenth-century translations of Austen (into French, German, Swedish and Danish), a high proportion were undertaken by women, and women writers at that.¹¹ In twentieth-century Europe, Austen's appeal is frequently linked explicitly to feminist concerns. As Peter Mortensen writes in an essay on Jane Austen's reception in Denmark:

The most recent wave of new Danish Austen translations all appeared within a few years in the mid-1970s [...] It can hardly escape notice that all the new translators of Austen were women, and indeed there is a suggestive historical coincidence between the dates of the new Austen revival (1974–78) and the emergence of the women's movement in Denmark. [...] Several of the new translators, not coincidentally, were active in the women's movement, and one,

Eva Hemmer Hansen, chaired the Danish Women's Society (Dansk Kvindeselskab) from 1968 to 1970.¹²

Marie Sørbo, in an essay 'Jane Austen and Norway', points out that despite Austen's obscurity in early twentieth-century Norway, 'she was at least recognized by our most famous female novelist of the early twentieth century and winner of the 1928 Nobel Prize, Sigrid Undset'.¹³ The first Serbian translation of Austen was by a woman, Danica S. Jankovic, who translated *Persuasion* in 1929. Jankovic was 'a highly educated woman, who graduated in Yugoslav and comparative literature, French and English, from the University of Belgrade (1918–22), studied in London and Oxford (1922–24), published her works on folk dancing in leading Yugoslav and foreign journals and translated books from English and French'; this, Svetozar Koljevic tells us, 'set the elitist academic, social, publishing and feminine patterns for several succeeding decades'.¹⁴ In a study of Jane Austen's fiction in Slovenia, Vanesa Matajč points out that late twentieth-century 'Slovene responses to Austen as a classic author may have been partly prompted by feminist research, which aimed to recover the value of neglected women writers'.¹⁵ There is significant evidence that women writers think back through their continental sisters, particularly in nations that do not have a recognizable tradition of women's writing, or where such a tradition is only just being reinvestigated. It is noticeable, too, that while male critics may be the first to publish 'appreciations' of Austen, it is women writers who publish creative responses and reworkings in their own fiction. In Japan, the great critic, professor of the University of Tokyo and novelist Natsume Soseki (1867–1916) is customarily credited with the popularizing of Austen in that country. He declared in his *Theory of Literature* that 'anyone who is unable to appreciate Austen will be unable to understand the beauty of realism'.¹⁶ It is, however, Japanese women writers who have used Austen to creative ends. Nogami Yaeko's serialized novel *Machiko* (1928–30) creates a Japanese, socialist Elizabeth Bennet.¹⁷ Later in the twentieth century, the experimental novelist Kurahashi Yumiko's *The Bridge of Dreams* (1971) sees the female protagonist, Keiko, writing a graduate thesis on Austen, and intertwines Austen's world with classical Japanese women's fiction. The novel is, Ebine Hiroshi points out, an experiment that 'introduces the unreal, the transgressive, and the erotic into Austenian domestic realism, resulting in a radical mutation of the Austen model'.¹⁸

In Anglophone culture, too, there have been significant disjunctions between the Austen constructed by professional critics and the responses

of women writers and readers. R.W. Chapman took the first step towards professionalizing Austen studies with his 1923 edition of the novels, published by the Clarendon Press at the very point when the academic discipline of English was emerging as a respectable alternative to the classics. Austen's reputation was strengthened by the growing prestige of English studies, while Chapman's linking of Austen with the classical tradition established continuities between the new classics and the old. In his edition, the methods that had been developed for the editing of Greek and Latin texts were for the first time applied to an English author, and the level of textual scrutiny to which the novels were subjected itself became a guarantee of their cultural value. In addition, the choices Chapman made in his extensive annotations to the texts ensured that Austen became more closely aligned with neoclassical rather than romantic values; her work was also firmly located in what Chapman perceived to be *the* major English literary tradition – Shakespeare, Milton and Johnson. As Kathryn Sutherland dryly notes, 'there is no suggestion that she shared literary or intellectual aspirations with a contemporary circle of female writers'.¹⁹ Austen's reputation was further enhanced through the championing of her work by F.R. Leavis, whose influential *The Great Tradition* (1948) opens with the pronouncement: 'The great English novelists are Jane Austen, George Eliot, Henry James, and Joseph Conrad'. In this study, Leavis aims to create a tradition for the novel analogous to that which T.S. Eliot had created for poetry. Indeed, he borrows the terms of Eliot's argument in 'Tradition and the individual talent' to make the case for Austen as 'one of the truly great writers', drawing attention to the 'retroactive' effect of her novels in reshaping our view of her predecessors; he also stresses her 'impersonality' as well as her moral intensity.²⁰

In contrast to this emphasis on the impersonality of the author – and the critic – twentieth-century women writers responded eagerly to what Virginia Woolf saw as Austen's direct invitation to readers and writers to enter into her novels and 'supply what is not there'.²¹ In her earliest essay on Austen, Woolf describes the ease with which Austen's characters 'move out of the scenes in which she placed them into other moods and circumstances' and imagines a social occasion where

if someone begins to talk about Emma Woodhouse or Elizabeth Bennet voices from different parts of the room begin saying which they prefer and why, and how they differ, and how they might have acted if one had been at Box Hill and the other at Rosings, and where they live, and how their houses are disposed, as if they were living people.²²