The Reception of Jane Austen in Europe
Edited by Anthony Mandal and Brian Southam

London and New York: Continuum, 2007, XXXVI + 424 pp.

This new volume in the fascinating series *The Reception of British and Irish Authors in Europe* (fourteen volumes published to date, series editor: Elinor Shaffer) brings again together a wide selection of essays, exploring this time the impact of Jane Austen's work in the different literary traditions of Europe, and – for the more recent decades – in what is becoming a common European culture. This is the second book to present the continental reception of a *woman* author. The first one was about the reception of Virginia Woolf, whose reception history not only is shorter, but might also be said less uneven and less influenced by film and television re-use of plots than Austen's.

The "unevenness" of the European Austen reception manifests itself right at the beginning, in the timeline (pp. XXI-XXXVI): out of its 16 pages, only 2,5 are about the 19th-century reception, and nearly 4 concern the years from 1990 onward. The authors of the articles also tend to split the two centuries into three periods, the first one being the longest, the last one the shortest. Annika Bautz's "The reception of Jane Austen in Germany", for instance, can be split into three main periods: 1811–1949, 1949–90 and 1991 onwards. While the middle period is determined by political events and the very different receptions in the two Germanies, and the third one is characterized by the presence of the image instead of the word, "during the long first period, there was a somewhat limited awareness among German readers of Austen" (p. 93).

The growing number of independent nation states is in part responsible for the unbalance: the last pages of the timeline mention translations published in Latvia, Estonia, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic – countries for which no articles are presented, possibly because they show developments too similar to those in other countries in this part of Europe, which often provide the same "difficult genealogy of interactive borderlands" as Tatjana Jukic remarks about Croatia (p. 275). On the other hand, the timeline's first pages actually focus only on one language: French. This corresponds to the first three articles (pp. 12–73), in which Isabelle Bour discusses Austen reception in France and also in French-speaking Switzerland (which previously had been studied in detail by Valérie Cossy in her *Jane Austen in Switzerland. A Study of the Early French Translations.* Genève, 2006). In contrast to the present global admiration for Jane Austen, the early reception seems indeed to have been virtually restricted to one language region. This is not true, however, for French was read in large parts of Europe during the 19th century, and copies of Austen-novels in French were found in such different countries as the Netherlands (p. 77) and Hungary (p. 239).

As literary historians outside England are not always aware of the very slow acceptance of this at present "universally acknowledged" author, one may consider it extremely useful that the case has now been examined in detail and argued for most European countries. Generally, the slow acceptance is attributed to the inveterate Englishness of Jane Austen's writing, including in particular her use of irony. As Barbara Benedict put it in a recent conference contribution, "Austen's narrator is talking to a very privileged audience; irony requires that". Possibly she was too demanding for many of her 19th-century potential readers. (And even now, irony is still "a mode relatively unfamiliar in Finnish literature and culture"; p. 186).

However, Mandal's and Southam's presentation of the "relative neglect" (p. 2) of Austen's works during the 19th century raises some questions. They pertain to the need, for editors of

such a volume – telling a series of seventeen parallel stories – to do some rigorous structuring and directing. The successive narrations of these parallel stories, however important, can become rather repetitive. Indeed, some authors must have been unaware that Austen's "absence" was not characteristic for "their" country. And a reader who read in the introduction that Austen remained "essentially unrecognized during the nineteenth century" (p. 5) may well be surprised to find that, for instance, the authors of the articles about the Low Countries or Denmark consider it "*odd* that the first publication of Austen in Dutch appeared as late as 1922" (p. 75, my emphasis), or find her early absence in Denmark "*puzzling*" (p. 119, id.). There is no need to consider this odd or puzzling, since not only the introduction but also subsequent articles state that in numerous other countries the first translations appeared much later than 1922: 1930 (Norway), 1932 (Italy), 1934 (Poland), 1943 (Portugal and Rumania), 1950 (Greece), or even 1967 (Russia) – to name just a few countries for which international connections during the 18th and 19th centuries have been studied.

The abundance of very recent reception traces, in some cases, due also to film and television productions – the same, of course, all over Europe –blurs also our view and raises the question whether the search for *earlier* traces has been complete or considered superfluous in light of the amount of modern material. Which sources have been looked for?

Clearly, translations – from the original version into the language spoken in the country under consideration – have been considered primary source material, because of the, often correct, assumption that foreigners did not read English. Indeed, in some countries translations seem to have been quite numerous. A table in the introduction (p. 3) provides numbers (including reprints): while there have been 47 translations (published between 1813 and 2001) into French (France, French Switzerland and possibly Belgium), those into German and Spanish were considerably more numerous, and even lead to rather absurd numbers (which are not accounted for in the timeline): 156 (between 1822 and 2002) and 162 (1919–2005), respectively. The German list possibly includes books published in Austria and German-speaking Switzerland (which are not discussed in the book). For Spanish, South American countries may have been included? Aída Díaz Bild – who even specifies that during the Franco regime "no translation was printed" – mentions right at the outset Jane Austen's "popularity amongst Spanish readers – or at least amongst publishers" (p. 188). For *Pride and Prejudice* she claims "at least seventy editions" (p. 189)! She admits, however, that "there are fewer opportunities for enthusiasm, as they tend not only to distort the original, but also to impoverish it" (p. 191), and she goes on listing six different categories of translation deficiencies, culminating in the remark: "The original is altered without any apparent need" (pp. 191–193). Yet, she urges readers not to underestimate the work that has been done – since English has become an academic discipline in Spain only in the 1950s. The apology seems out of place, but does reflect an awareness of the need for a context. In the cases where no actual deficiencies (which might be held "responsible for the limited interest" of readers; p. 217) can be found, the comparative study of translations is certainly fascinating, in particular because the early translations are in fact adaptations. The "clash of civilisations" taking place is extremely interesting. In early Finnish translation, for example, during the fifties, the result of this domestication is a shift of "the social setting of the narrative from the landed gentry, however impoverished or displaced, to the lower rural ranks or to the middle classes" (p. 173).

All in all, it seems to me that the amount of attention given by the contributors to translation into a given language, as a source of information about Austen's reception in a particular country, is somewhat disproportionate. Focus on translation/adaptation, which is

of course relatively easy to study once the copies have been traced, is risky since the original objective of the project was to provide a "comprehensive account of Austen's reception" (p. 2). Not only is there the risk of providing excessive details, they also tend to degenerate into value judgments of which the usefulness remains to be discussed. Thus, we read about a 1824 translation into French: "the opening sentence is clumsy; she makes minor changes, minor errors" (p. 30); or about a Serbian translation of 1929: "some English toponyms and family names, such as 'Somersetshire' or 'Musgrove', are rendered into Serbian as *Somersetsajr* instead of *Somersetsir* and *Musgrov* instead of *Mazgrov*" (p. 292); or about a 1970 translation into Norwegian: "they sometimes have significant problems coping with the English language" (p. 137).

Admittedly, the volume does not present translations as if they were the *only* source, but they represent a sizeable portion, containing many details, not always comprehensible for those unfamiliar with Italian (p. 219) or Slovene and Serbian (p. 267). And translation is in most cases isolated from the reception context as a whole, which seems somewhat artificial. Other intermediaries besides translators did play important roles at the time (critics, historians, travellers), and other testimonies besides translations (catalogues of private and public libraries, private diaries) are now important as a basis for an overview. In the articles of this volume the different categories have been separated, so that a possible "discussion" between a translator and a critic is sometimes cut into two distinct parts. Moreover, translations and prefaces or epilogues to the translations have been separated (for example: pp. 156 and 161).

Different sources need different interpretations, which is not always easy. One finds for example: "Jane Austen did not make her entrance into Italy and become visible to the Italian reading public until 1932, with a translation of *PP*" (p. 206). Ten pages later, it appears that "the earliest edition of Jane Austen's novels listed in the *Catalogo unico delle biblioteche italiane* is an anglophone *Sense and Sensibility*, in the 'Collection of British Authors' series published in 1864 by Bernhard Tauchnitz of Leipzig (four copies). This is followed by the remaining novels issued by Tauchnitz: *MP*, 1867 (two), *PP*, 1870 (seven), *NA* and *P*, 1871 (two) and *E*, 1877 (two)" – all of them probably purchased by readers well before 1932. Apart from the question when exactly Austen may have entered Italy, Beatrice Battaglia seems to make a mistake in considering these findings, from libraries in northern Italy, as evidence that "Austen was *practically unknown* in Italy before the first translation" (p. 216, my emphasis). Writing about Hungary, Nóra Séllei interprets more adequately the presence of some 19th-century editions in three different libraries (p. 239).

This kind of book-historical information apparently has not been considered for all of the countries represented in the volume. On the other hand, it is exactly this kind of information, which is becoming more and more accessible during the last years. The history of language teaching, for example, is one of those recent subjects, which for the Netherlands yielded an interesting supplementary information about a schoolbook presenting Jane Austen's novels as "very meritorious", though "on a lower level" than Scott's *Waverley*. The book (entitled *The Literary Reader*, 1874) is by a Dutchman, Taco de Beer, and an Englishwoman, Elisabeth Jane Irving, which tells us something not only about intense international contacts but also about the role of *women* as Austen receivers.

For the present volume, it would probably have been difficult to take a truly systematic approach of a complete range of potential reception sources researched in all European countries, concerning male as well as female readers. But in order to produce a really comprehensive and international overview of the reception of Jane Austen it would be worth trying to organize such a systematic collaboration. This can take place in the database that is

being prepared within the context of the same project, as Elinor Shaffer announces in her "Series Editor's Preface" (p. XI), for which this book is a wonderful and much inspiring stepping stone – in particular for Jane Austen, concerning whom one of the principal problems seems to be that, considered too English (?), she has not been followed, recommended, or adapted by important and prestigious foreign authors.

Presented in the very last chapter, the interesting case of Aleksandr Pushkin is a possible exception. Several 20th-century readers and critics had already hinted at similarities between *Pride and Prejudice* and *Evgeny Onegin*, which are further developed in the article by Catharine Nepomnyashchy. Admitting that there are no traces of Pushkin's reading Austen, she suggests that in the early 1820 s, when Pushkin started writing his work, early French translations may have circulated in the south of Russia where Pushkin was in exile, and where a woman, the Countess Vorontsova, might have provided him with copies. In addition to a rather brief but convincing comparative text analysis, Nepomnyashchy interestingly refers to comments regarding the recent film version. In 2006, one of the Russian reviewers pointed out the similarities of plots and characters, and also the "common, mocking view on literature and life, in good-natured irony and an almost supernatural lightness of style and thought" (p. 349) – showing that the typical Austenian tone has not completely been lost in film adaptations.

Suzan van Dijk

Der oft steinige Weg zum Erfolg
Literatur aus Deutschland im niederländischen Sprachraum 1900–2000
Herausgegeben von Leopold Decloedt

Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi, 2004, 214 Seiten
(Internationale Forschungen zur Allgemeinen und Vergleichenden Literaturwissenschaft 76)

Das Interesse für die deutsche Literatur in den Niederlanden und Flandern seit Ende des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts bis heute verteilt sich über zwei Perioden, die der Zweite Weltkrieg voneinander trennt. Vor 1933 verbrachten viele niederländischsprachige Schriftsteller einige Zeit in Deutschland und es wurden zahlreiche deutsche Autoren übersetzt oder sogar im Original gelesen. Das positive Bild der deutschen Literatur wurde, so Leopold Decloedt in der Einleitung der von ihm herausgegebenen Aufsatzsammlung, von ästhetischen und konfessionell-weltanschaulichen Überlegungen bestimmt. In den Jahren 1933 bis 1940 konnten bei niederländischen Verlagen die Werke deutscher Exilautoren erscheinen. Nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg jedoch (das gilt zumindest für die Niederlande) nahm die französische Literatur die Stelle der deutschen Literatur ein, bevor sie allerdings dann bald von der amerikanischen verdrängt wurde. Ein Rückgang des Interesses an der deutschen Literatur ist seit den Jahren um 1990 zu beobachten. Bis Ende der achtziger Jahre wurde vor allem sog. "gute" Literatur gelesen, das heißt, Literatur von kritischen und linken Autoren bzw. Autoren, die zur Moderne gerechnet wurden. Heutzutage sind empfindliche Eingriffe im Deutschunterricht an den höheren Schulen und die verstärkte Orientierung nicht nur des Durchschnittslesers, sondern auch der Wissenschaft an der englischsprachigen Literatur dafür verantwortlich, dass die Generation der unter Vierzigjährigen nicht mehr über jene deutschen Sprachkenntnisse verfügt, die bei den Älteren noch selbstverständlich waren. Dadurch änderte sich die Position