Jane Austen's Irony: Lost in the Italian Versions of *Pride and Prejudice*?

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Abstract

Ask a reader in Britain or the US why one should read Jane Austen, and the answer will unfailingly contain at least a passing reference to irony; ask a non-specialised Italian reader, and that most elusive of rhetorical figures will probably make room for other, more reassuring qualities. Jane Austen's novels, the Italian answer will run, are fascinating, highly polished, formally perfect representations of a fascinating, highly polished, formally perfect world: one goes to them in order to immerse oneself in the manners of a faraway age and place.

While irony and the representation of manners are not mutually exclusive – in fact, the ironic depiction of manners can be said to be one of Austen's great strengths – this difference in emphasis reflects deep-seated notions of literature and language in the English-speaking world on the one hand, and Italy on the other. For most English-speaking readers, the primary aim of fiction is to entertain, even though different levels of aesthetic and linguistic complexity are allowed for within this general framework. In the Italian cultural system, by contrast, great novels are thought of primarily as repositories of useful information and timeless moral values, with fun being frowned upon as a mark of popular (i.e., lowbrow) culture. English canonical novels are therefore translated and adapted in accordance to the taste of a general readership that tends to equate seriousness with a moralising attitude, and elegance with a high register.

In this article, Morini looks at some Italian translations and refractions of Austen's most popular and most light-hearted novel, *Pride and Prejudice*. By focusing on source passages that are arguably imbued with linguistic irony, the author demonstrates that most target versions tend to mute or erase all traces of non-literal meaning, thereby effectively aligning the novel with the "conservative" readings of Austen's art.

Keywords: Jane Austen, translation, linguistic irony.

1. Two Italian Austens

In the early twenty-first century, the idea that Jane Austen is an ironic writer seems to be as accepted in Italy as it is in the English-speaking world. In the academic domain, Beatrice Battaglia's studies have gone a long way towards characterising Austen's narrators as voices that do not always mean what they say (Battaglia 1983; 2002; 2009: 230-77). In the field of general education, schoolbooks for secondary students now commonly insist on the fact that "Austen's descriptions of life depend on dialogue and irony", even when they specify that "Her irony is always gentle, expressed in nicely balanced and acute observations" (Cattaneo and De Flaviis 2012: 207). Even the Italian version of Wikipedia, that first and last resource for lazy students, mentions Austen's "irony and wit" among her most distinctive stylistic features.

Things change, however, when one considers Austen's refractions (Lefevere 2004) in Italian popular culture. A number of sites dedicated to the English author, for instance, testify to an ever expanding interest not so much in the novels as in other aspects of what Roger Sales (1994: 25) called the "Austen industry" – including film, TV series, merchandise and period costumes. The names of the sites and blogs themselves are telltale: the "Jane Austen Sofa and Carpet Club" ("Club Sofà and Carpet di Jane Austen"[1]), or "A Tea with Jane Austen" ("Un tè con Jane Austen"[2]). In the post announcing its birth, the former presents itself as a "happy island outside of time" ("Un'isola felice fuori dal tempo"), dedicated to "literature, competitions, events, news [...] to share a world of lace that we adore" ("letteratura, concorsi, eventi, notizie [...] per condividere un mondo di pizzi e merletti che adoriamo"[3]). On Facebook, the "Jane Austen Italian Club" ("Club italiano di Jane Austen") has a post dedicated to choosing one male character from the novels as a valentine. In all these sites, irony is conspicuous for its absence, and the emphasis is shifted from stylistic questions to material culture: Regency teas and balls are organised for the

[1] Http://www.clubjaneausten.it/, last accessed September 20, 2017.

[2] Http://www.unteconjaneausten.com/, last accessed September 20, 2017.

[3] Http://sofaandcarpet.blogspot.co.uk/2010/01/le-frasi-piu-belle-da-mansfield-park.html, last accessed September 20, 2017.

members, who seem to be much more interested in living Austen's life than comprehending her writing.

While this might seem a mere question of distinguishing between highbrow and middlebrow readings, and though it is perfectly possible to appreciate Austen's style and want to try on a Regency dress, understanding widespread ideas on a given author may provide valuable insights into how that author is translated. According to a basic tenet of Descriptive Translation Studies, translations are "facts of target cultures" (Toury 1995: 29), and as such are at least as dependent on the translating habits and literary/linguistic convictions of those cultures as they are on the source texts that they strive to recreate. As Gideon Toury puts it in *Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond*:

> Thus, the position (or function) of a translation within a recipient culture (or a particular section thereof) should be regarded as a strong governing factor of the very make-up of the product, in terms of underlying models, linguistic representation, or both. After all, translations always come into being within a certain cultural environment and are designed to meet certain needs of, and/or occupy certain 'slots' in it. (Toury 1995: 12)

In these terms, the question is whether the Italian translations of Austen's novels are designed to appeal to professors, teachers and students, or to those readers and fans who are most interested in her works as an elegant comedy of manners. Again – if this distinction looks too Manichaean – it may be worthwhile to repeat that these two forms of appreciation can coexist within the same groups of people, and even in single readers. Still, it is fairly evident that the Italian idea of Jane Austen falls between these two visions, and therefore it is predictable that the Italian translations will also be somewhat polarised. As regards the rendering of "irony and wit", this may result in some versions being less sharp than others.

To sound a preliminary note of caution about analysing specific linguistic traits: while some translations may be lacking in irony, this does not necessarily mean that the omission is voluntary. In general, Italian translations of books perceived as (modern) classics have been shown to be rather stiff, formal, and adherent to the morphology and syntax of their sources (Venturi 2009a; Morini 2014) – all features which do not make for lively ironic writing (on

the effects of these habits on Austen's writing, see Battaglia 2007: 216-22; Morini 2009: 129-43). On the other hand, the very fact that English classics are translated in this manner may be responsible for Italian views of Austen – like those presented in some of the sites and blogs – as a merely formally elegant author. This article is not concerned with verifying what comes first, but only with observing significant connections between widespread ideas on a writer and the style of her Italian translators.

In what follows, a few Italian versions (both printed and audiovisual) of the *incipit* of *Pride and Prejudice* are therefore examined in order to verify whether Mr Bennet's sharp wit is retained, muted or exacerbated. The linguistic notion of irony underlying the analysis is an eclectic one, combining elements of classical rhetoric with Grice's implicature theory, Wilson and Sperber's "echoic" views, and Morini's perspectival revision of the latter (Grice 1991: 22-57; Wilson and Sperber 1996; Morini 2010, 2015). In the conclusion, I briefly return to some of the audiovisual adaptations in order to establish whether a certain degree of normalisation also occurs in the "intersemiotic" translations (Jakobson 1959: 233) of the English-speaking world.

One preliminary word must be said on the textual and audiovisual versions analysed below. The four book versions have been chosen because of their popularity, and also because they span eighty years of Italian publishing history. The earliest translation, Giulio Caprin's 1932 *Orgoglio e prevenzione*, published by Mondadori, has been reprinted most often, with a recent edition incorporating it into a series of books for young readers ("Bella and Edward's favourite books" – where Bella and Edward are the protagonists of the *Twilight* film franchise); Maria Luisa Agosti Castellani's 1952 and Isa Maranesi's 1975 translations are still being published by Rizzoli and Garzanti; Fernanda Pivano's 2007 version *Orgoglio e pregiudizio*, published by Einaudi, is a more recent addition to the canon. As for the big and small screens, the two versions under consideration are Andrew Davies' 1995 BBC series (shown in Italy on Sky Italia) and Joe Wright's 2005 cinematic version: again, popularity with today's viewing public has been the deciding factor.

2. The Analysis: How Austen's Irony Fares in Translation

The reasons for focusing on Chapter 1 of *Pride and Prejudice* are obvious enough, as it contains one of the wittiest exchanges in all of Austen's oeuvre – though perhaps the word "exchange" is misleading, presupposing as it does at least two active participants. In this opening, the comic effect is provided by the contrast between dull Mrs Bennet and her clever husband, who is declared by the narrator to be "a mixture of quick parts, sarcastic humour, reserve, and caprice" (Austen [1813] 2004: 3). This, however, only comes at the end of the chapter, when readers have had a substantial stretch of dialogue on which to ground their judgement of the character. The narrator comments only briefly on Mr and Mrs Bennet's words, which are prefaced by two general paragraphs – one of which is probably the most famous passage ever penned by Austen:

> It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife. (Austen [1813] 2004: 1)

Even if read in isolation, before the second paragraph revisits that "universal truth" as a rather partisan conviction held by parents with marriageable daughters, this sentence looks suspicious. The impression is that the narrator does not necessarily hold with the claim she is making, i.e., that she does not mean what she says, and is therefore being ironical. On the one hand, that impression is due to the fact that the "truth" looks too much like an opinion – or like mere wishful thinking – to be really universal; and on the other, the very self-assuredness of that "universally acknowledged" seems excessive, a breach of Grice's maxim of quantity creating the possibility of (ironical) implicatures[4]. The lady-narrator is protesting too much, and as a consequence, many readers will feel that she is echoing someone else's opinions (Wilson and Sperber 1996) or assuming someone else's perspective (Morini 2015), while simultaneously, and subtly, disengaging herself from those opinions or that perspective (Morini 2010).

[4] Grice (1991: 34) actually treats irony as an implicature exclusively resulting from a breach of the maxim of quality: but later scholars have shown that breaches of other maxims can produce much the same effect (cf. for instance Morini 2015).

To create the same effect, the Italian versions would have to be as absurdly self-assured as the narrator sounds in the source. That, however, is only rarely the case:

È una verità universalmente riconosciuta che uno scapolo provvisto di un ingente patrimonio debba essere in cerca di moglie. [It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man equipped with a considerable fortune must be in search of a wife] (Austen and Caprin 2010: 3)

È verità universalmente ammessa che uno scapolo fornito di un buon patrimonio debba sentire il bisogno di ammogliarsi. [It's universally allowed as a truth that a man furnished with a good fortune must feel the need to get married] (Austen and Agosti Castellani 2016: 39)

È cosa nota e universalmente riconosciuta che uno scapolo in possesso di un solido patrimonio debba essere in cerca di moglie. [It's a well-known and universally acknowledged thing that a single man in possession of a substantial fortune must be in search of a wife] (Austen and Maranesi 1989: 1)

È un fatto universalmente noto che uno scapolo provvisto di un cospicuo patrimonio non possa fare a meno di prendere moglie. [It's a universally known fact that a single man equipped with a sizeable fortune cannot help but taking a wife] (Austen and Pivano 2007: 3).

What all these versions have in common is a penchant for very formal, slightly implausible Italian ("provvisto di un ingente patrimonio"; "ammogliarsi"; "in possesso di un solido patrimonio"; "provvisto di un cospicuo patrimonio"), as well as the use of the subjunctive "debba" to translate the English "must". This form of the deontic verb *dovere* is probably selected by all the translators because they feel the subjunctive is – again – more formal than the indicative mood in Italian. Whatever the case may be, this choice also has the side effect of making the narrator's clause less assertive – because the subjunctive is the mood of probability, while the indicative is the mood of certainty. Due probably to a subservient attitude that is typical of classical translation (Venturi 2009a), nobody dares to reformulate the whole sentence so that the indicative can be used:

È una verità universalmente riconosciuta: uno scapolo con un buon patrimonio personale deve per forza essere in cerca di moglie. [It is a truth universally acknowledged: a young man with a good personal fortune is bound to be in search of a wife.]

Apart from the question of mood, the earliest version – here as elsewhere – is the one that proves most responsive to Austen's subtle use of irony. In this case, as shown by the back-translation, Caprin merely keeps close to the morphological and syntactic surface of the source, thus reproducing the faux intellectual arrogance of "a truth universally acknowledged" and the reference to marriageable girls of "in search of a *wife*" (italics mine). The strength of the former is lost by all the other translators, who either turn "truth" into a "thing" or "fact" (Maranesi, Pivano), or defuse that social and philosophical "acknowledged" into a weaker "allowed" (Agosti Castellani) or a confusing "known" (Maranesi, Pivano). While Austen's phrase expresses absolute certainty – and therefore invites an ironic reading – these three versions are slightly less assertive. As for the source narrator's reference to "a wife" – which can be read as a reference to all those families who would like to provide the young man of good fortune with that commodity – Agosti Castellani incorporates it into a verb ("ammogliarsi") that originates in the Italian noun for wife (*moglie*), but merely means "getting married".

As soon as the exchange between Mr and Mrs Bennet begins, the latter is revealed as exactly the kind of woman who would find the narrator's first categorical assertion true. Mrs Bennet's only "business" is "to get her daughters married", as readers are informed at the end of the chapter (Austen [1813] 2004: 3); her husband's only pleasure, by contrast, seems to reside in not giving his wife any satisfaction. Mrs Bennet is bent on telling him that there is new marriage material at nearby Netherfield Park, but he will not comply with the basic conversational norms – which dictate, for instance, that when someone offers information that is incomplete, it is one's duty to ask questions:

> Mr. Bennet made no answer.
> 'Do not you want to know who has taken it?' cried his wife impatiently.
> '*You* want to tell me, and I have no objection to hearing it.' (Austen [1813] 2004: 1)

When Mrs Bennet is forced to call her recalcitrant husband to order, he in turn calls her bluff and exposes the pragmatic drift of their exchange: it is actually *she* who wants to tell him all about the new tenant from the north of England, while he is only acting as a sort

of sounding board. Though his answer is less clearly ironic than the narrator's *incipit*, there seem to be some ironic undertones – many readers, here, would understand Mr Bennet to mean something like "I don't care at all, but if you insist". The reason for that is probably the "contrastive stress" employed by Mr Bennet, and described by Brown and Levinson as an "off-record" strategy for committing face-threatening acts (Brown and Levinson 1987: 217). In Gricean terms, that stressed "*You*" amounts to a breach of the maxim of quantity (the stress is, strictly speaking, unnecessary): it therefore creates implicatures, one of which is surely that Mr Bennet, unlike his wife, does *not* want to know, and is being forced to listen (Grice 1991: 26-7).

Again, the only translator who seems to catch Mr Bennet's thinly disguised contempt is Caprin, who keeps the contrastive stress of the source. The other versions are more overt:

«Sei *tu* che vuoi dirmelo, e io non ho niente in contrario ad ascoltarlo.» [It is *you* want to tell me, and I have no objection to listening to it] (Austen and Caprin 2010: 3)

"Se me lo vuoi proprio dire, io non ho nulla in contrario ad ascoltarti" [If you really want to tell me about it, I have no objection to listening to you] (Austen and Agosti Castellani 2016: 39)

«Visto che ci tenete a raccontarmelo non sarò io a impedirvelo, cara.» [Since you are keen on telling me I won't be the one to hinder you, dear wife] (Austen and Maranesi 1989: 1)

– Se non puoi proprio fare a meno di dirmelo, non ho niente in contrario a sentirlo. [If you really cannot help telling me, I have no objection to hearing it] (Austen and Pivano 2007: 3).

In Agosti Castellani's and Maranesi's versions, Mr Bennet expresses slight – but explicit – annoyance at being forced to listen ("If you really want to tell me"; "Since you are keen on telling me"). In Agosti Castellani's, that effect is heightened by the addition of "proprio" ("really"). That adverb also appears in Pivano's version, whose negative construction makes Mr Bennet sound angry, rather than annoyed ("If you *really cannot help* telling me"; italics mine). If Austen's – and Caprin's – Mr Bennet does not dare to voice his feelings openly, and prefers to talk over his wife's head, three of his Italian incarnations clearly state that they are not interested in what

their spouses have to say. Mr Bennet's psychological state may be more or less the same, but his conversational style is far different.

In the source, another demonstration of that style appears a few lines later, when Mrs Bennet owns up to thinking that the new tenant of Netherfield Park might marry one of their daughters. Mr Bennet's response is a textbook example of irony that can be analysed in a traditional pragmatic manner, as well as in echoic and perspectival terms:

> 'My dear Mr Bennet,' replied his wife, 'how can you be so tiresome! You must know that I'm thinking of his marrying one of them.'
> 'Is that his design in settling here?' (Austen [1813] 2004: 1)

On a purely semantic level, Mr Bennet's reply makes sense and is relevant – he is asking whether Mr Bingley has come from the north of England in order to marry one of their daughters. But by social and conversational (i.e., pragmatic) standards, his words are clearly absurd, and perceived as such by his wife ("'Design! Nonsense, how can you talk so!'"; Austen [1813] 2004: 2). In terms of Grice's implicature theory, he is breaching either the maxim of quality ("be truthful") or the maxim of relation ("be relevant"; Grice 1991: 26-7), because nobody in their right mind would think that someone else's purpose in settling anywhere would be to marry a specific young woman whose existence they are unaware of. According to Sperber and Wilson (1981: 301), he is imitating, presumably for ironic purposes, the thought processes of someone "with incredibly slow reactions". Alternatively, as Morini (2010; 2015) has it, he is only taking up his wife's ideological perspective, and making fun of it by stretching it to a logical extreme. In both cases, he is surely trying to expose the absurdity of his wife's scheming.

All three ironical readings have their merits – but all three hinge on the curt unexpectedness of Mr Bennet's reply – some of which, once again, ends up getting lost in translation:

> «Ma, mio caro» replicò la moglie «quanto sei fastidioso! Devi sapere che medito di fargliene sposare una.»
> «E il giovanotto si stabilisce qui con la stessa intenzione?» ["But, my dear," his wife replied, "how tedious you are! You must know that I'm thinking of making him marry one." / «And does the young man settle here with the same intention? "] (Austen and Caprin 2010: 4)

«Mio caro Bennet,» gli rispose la signora, «come fai ad essere così esasperante? Devi sapere che sto meditando di fargliene sposare una!»

«Ah! Si viene a stabilire qui con questa intenzione?» ["My dear Bennet,» his lady replied, "how do you manage to be so exasperating? You must know that I'm thinking of making him marry one." / "Ah. Is he coming to settle here with that intention?"] (Austen and Agosti Castellani 2016: 40)

«Mr Bennet,» replicò sua moglie, «come si può essere così noiosi! È evidente che intendo dargliene una in moglie!»

«È con le stesse intenzioni che Mr Bingley è venuto a stabilirsi qui?» ["Mr Bennet," his wife replied, "how can one be so tiresome! It is evident that I intend to give one of them to him as a wife!" / "Is it with the same intentions that Mr Bingley came to settle here?"] (Austen and Maranesi 1989: 2)

– Caro Bennet, – rispose la moglie. – Come sei noioso! Devi sapere che sto pensando di fargliene sposare una.
– È con l'intenzione di sposarsi che si stabilisce qui? [– Dear Bennet, – his wife replied. – How tiresome of you! You must know that I'm thinking of making him marry one of them. / – Is it with the intention of marrying that he comes to settle here?] (Austen and Pivano 2007: 4)

In this case, it is Agosti Castellani that conveys the use of irony in the most effective manner – while the other translators all diminish it to a greater or lesser degree: Caprin does so by lengthening Mr Bennet's reply, and using the formal expression "giovanotto" ("young man"); Maranesi by also employing a form of periphrasis, as well as missing the immediacy of the source by committing a logical non sequitur (if Mr Bingley has "the same intentions" as Mrs Bennet, he must intend to make himself marry one of her daughters); whereas Pivano, rather incredibly, has Mr Bennet just ask whether he comes down from the north in order to marry (which does not sound absurd at all, in the society depicted by Austen, and is therefore not ironical).

In this case, the reduction in irony begins in the preceding speech, which is not ironical but triggers Mr Bennet's scorn (and cohesive link: "Is *that* his design in settling here?" italics mine). In the source, Mrs Bennet admits that she is "thinking of his marrying one of them", i.e., hoping that he will, fantasising about it, scheming for it: all four translators, however, have evidently understood this to mean that she is "thinking of marrying him to one of them", which is much stronger and explicitly "directive", rather than simply "expressive"

of her hopes and feelings (Searle 1976; Levinson 1983: 240). Three out of four translators, indeed, use the expression "fargliene sposare una", which sounds very coercive (Maranesi employs the gentler "dargliene una in moglie"): the iteration, here as elsewhere, arouses suspicions about the hidden presence of Caprin's version in the later reworkings of *Orgoglio e pregiudizio*.

Finally, it is also interesting to note that all the translators except Maranesi render "you must know" with "devi sapere", which is back-translated literally here, but means something else in English. Mrs Bennet has just accused her husband of being "tiresome", because he "must know" what she means: that "must", therefore, indicates a high degree of probability, rather than a deontic necessity. The two Italian translators who render that modal as "devi" turn the phrase into an offer of information ("if you must know, then I'm going to tell you"), whereas Maranesi is the only one who catches Mrs Bennet's irritation by having her say that her meaning is "evident". Mr Bennet, she is presupposing, must be either dull or pretending to be.

It is fairly "evident", based on the textual examples collected so far, that Austen's irony does not fare very well in translation. Of course, it is impossible to establish whether this is because of ingrained ideas on the nature of Austen's writing and of the English classics in general (Venturi 2009b), or just a consequence of those processes of simplification and explicitation that have been proved to be statistically typical by corpus-based translation studies (Laviosa 2002: 18)[5]. Whatever the reasons, the Italian versions of *Pride and Prejudice* end up, on the whole, being less ironical than their source: an outcome that may very well be produced by a vision of the English author as a comfortable novelist of manners, but also contribute to that vision and, in turn, produce more textual and audiovisual versions that conform to it.

That this may indeed be the case seems to be confirmed by a couple of relatively recent dubbed versions which also seem to owe a debt to the textual translations in a more straightforward sense, in that it is difficult to think that the audiovisual translators would not have had at least one *Orgoglio e pregiudizio* at their disposal while

[5] See also Parks (1997: 154-7) for a useful illustration of how generic translational prudence can lead to loss of irony.

working on the adaptations. This, for instance, is the third passage analysed above as modified for the 2005 big-screen version of *Pride and Prejudice* (adapted by Deborah Moggach, directed by Joe Wright), and as dubbed in Italian in the same year (by PUMAISdue; Italian dialogue by Fiamma Izzo):

Mrs Bennet: Oh, Mr Bennet, how can you be so tiresome – you know he must marry one of them.

Mr Bennet: Aha – so *that* is his design in settling here! [italics mine, to indicate prosodic emphasis]

Mrs Bennet: Oh, signor Bennet, come si può essere così uggiosi – medito di fargliene sposare una.

Mr Bennet: Lui si stabilisce qui con questa intenzione? [Oh, Mr Bennet, how can someone be so tedious – I'm thinking of making him marry one. / Is he settling here with this intention?]

The influence of the written translations on the Italian version is unmistakable: in the first place, Mrs Bennet's hopeful statement ("he *must* marry one of them"; italics mine), itself more forceful than its textual source, is turned into the more coercive "I'm thinking of making him marry one", just as in the books. Secondly, and more conclusively, Mr Bennet's sardonic exclamation ("Aha [...] here") is returned to its original status as an ironical question (which might hark back to the source text or its translations). As regards irony, the problem, here as in the textual translations, is that the Italian version misses the cohesive link between Mrs and Mr Bennet's speeches, which is crucial if the husband's intervention is to be understood as absurd yet, in literal terms, appropriate. The subject of Mrs Bennet's concluding clause is, in fact, the same as in Mr Bennet's reply ("he", i.e., the young man; "his" in the source text); but in following the written versions of *Orgoglio e pregiudizio*, the translator here lost the connection, and therefore much of the strength of that riposte. In fact, it is a syntactic and logical non sequitur for Mr Bennet to ask whether Mr Bingley is "settling here with *this* intention" (italics mine), when the only intention that has been voiced is his wife's.

It is also notable that even in this constrained form of translation (Titford 1982; Mayoral, Kelly and Gallardo 1988), some space is found for the elevated register that characterises the written versions. Again, this may have to do with the *Orgoglio and pregiudizio* used as

a dubbing aid: but however that may be, it is still significant that in the quick thrust-and-parry of cinematic dialogue space is found for such an outdated term as "uggioso". The same kind of consideration can be applied to the Italian version (S.A.S.; Italian dialogue by Giancarlo Prete) of the BBC's 1995 miniseries on *Pride and Prejudice* (adapted by Andrew Davies; directed by Simon Langton). In this case, "tiresome" becomes the slightly less old-fashioned but formal "stucchevole", more commonly used nowadays with the meaning of "sickly-sweet", "saccharine"; and "design" finds a transliterated parallel in "disegno", more normally used in the sense of "drawing" than in its old-fashioned garb as a synonym for "scopo" (purpose, design):

Mrs Bennet: Oh, Mr Bennet, how can you be so tiresome, you must know that I'm thinking of his marrying one of them

[…]

Mr Bennet: So – that is his design in settling here, to marry one of our daughters.

Mrs Bennet: Oh, signor Bennet, come puoi essere così stucchevole? Spero che sposi una di loro! [...]

Mr Bennet: Ah, dunque è questo il tuo disegno, cercare di fargli sposare una delle nostre figlie. [Oh, mister Bennet, how can you be so tedious? I hope he will marry one of them! [...] / Ah, so that is your design, trying to make him marry one of our daughters]

Much of the irony in the source audiovisual passage is lost in the Italian, but for different reasons. In this case, the translator grasps the meaning of Mrs Bennet's words, which are reproduced verbatim from the novel in the English version: the lady is thinking of Mr Bingley potentially marrying one of her daughters, not considering marrying him off to one of them. But Mr Bennet's reply, in Italian, is starkly literal. Deliberate or not, this is a watering-down of the verbal irony that turns the most sardonic husband in the history of English literature into someone who merely cries "gotcha!" at understanding the plans of his wife – hidden in plain sight though they were to begin with. By a curious twist of translational fate – since this version and its dubbing predate Wright's film by ten years – this response, absolutely uncalled-for as it is by anything in its source, sounds a bit like Mr Bennet's (ironical) reply in the above-

quoted 2005 source film ("Aha – so *that* is his design in settling here!").

Again, it is impossible to tell how far certain stylistic features of the audiovisual translations may be derived from similar features in the textual versions of *Orgoglio e pregiudizio*. What seems to be certain is that those sections of the Italian public who like to think of Jane Austen as a dignified classical writer, rather than a great ironist, can find their views confirmed in the most popular films and series based on her works as well as in the novels currently available.

3. Conclusion: Austen's Irony Translated (Or Not) Into Film

Interestingly, if these two source audiovisual adaptations are regarded in their turn as intersemiotic translations, some of the observations made about the Italian versions still hold. Both the television series and the film, as a matter of fact, often normalise Austen's irony – if not by leaving it out altogether, at least by making it more explicit and, therefore, less disconcerting. Examples of this can be found in the very passages discussed in the preceding sections. As regards the "design" retort, for instance, the two audiovisual Mr Bennets are more garrulous and explanatory than in the novel – as evidenced, among other things, by the shift from the interrogative to the indicative mood:

> 'Is that his design in settling here?'
> So – that is his design in settling here, to marry one of our daughters.
> Aha – so *that* is his design in settling here!

Both versions use the conjunctive adverb "so" to make the connection with Mrs Bennet's matrimonial thoughts even clearer: in the 1995 version, the link is further underlined by the repetition of "to marry one of our daughters", while the 2005 film makes the irony more evident by adding a sardonic "Aha", and some prosodic emphasis on "that". All in all, while the textual Mr Bennet is deadpan and falsely naïve, these audiovisual versions of his character give off the impression of winking in the audience's general direction. It is to be noted that both exchanges are also witnessed by an internal audience that directs viewers' interpretations. In the 2005 film, Elizabeth appears to be listening to the beginning of her

parents' conversational battle from behind a windowpane, her amused smile beaming tellingly on their comic interplay; while in the 1995 TV series, the private indoors exchange is turned into a family outdoors scene, with all the daughters interjecting as they walk. Interestingly, this audiovisual Elizabeth Bennet appropriates the *incipit* of the novel, making it into a clearly ironic response to her mother's musings:

Mrs B: Oh, Mr Bennet, how can you be so tiresome, you must know that I'm thinking of his marrying one of them [looks at girls; camera on girls for a moment; they resume walking]
E: Oh, a single man in possession of a good fortune *must* be in want of a wife!
Mrs B [turning round]: Yes, he must indeed! [turning to Mr Bennet] And who better than one of our five girls?
[camera on girls; Jane scolds Lydia for laughing with a pig-like laugh]
L: If he should choose *me*!
K: Or *me*!
Mr B: So – that is his design in settling here, to marry one of our daughters.

If these are examples of how irony can be domesticated by being made more explicit, there is also a general sense in which the two audiovisual versions under discussion can be considered to be less ironic than their textual source – although still more ironic than either the Italian textual or audiovisual translations. In order to appreciate this difference, it is enough to compare the *incipit* of the book with the opening scenes of the TV series and the film. In Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, the narrator's brief introductory comments on marriage and money are followed by the exchange between the Bennets, also, ostensibly, about marriage and money. In the 1995 BBC series, a piece of lively classical-sounding music (actually composed for the occasion by Carl Davis) is interrupted by bugles announcing the appearance of Mr Bingley and Mr Darcy on horseback, discussing the merits of Netherfield Park; in the next sequence, viewers are presented with Elizabeth Bennet, who watches them briefly from a hilltop, then walks home through the fields with a bunch of flowers in her hand. The 2005 film opens on birdsong, a country dawn, and Elizabeth walking through the fields, book in hand; the music sounds romantic, Chopin-like (though this piece, like the one at the beginning of the series, was written by

modern composer Dario Marianelli), and it helps create a sense of bucolic peace and soft womanly charm.

In both cases, the exchange between Mr and Mrs Bennet loses its centrality, and other characters – as well as other concerns – are foregrounded. In the series, Mr Bingley cuts a very fascinating figure, serious-looking and mounted as he is; in the film, the focus is clearly on Elizabeth, whose pretty, slender figure and slightly unruly hair, as well as the fact that she is reading as she walks, mark her out as the romantic heroine. The whole of chapter one is presented, in both cases, as a corollary more than an ideologically relevant introduction: in the 1995 version, as seen above, it is used as the basis for a collective scene in which Elizabeth is made to voice the narrator's ironic introduction (which creates, for those who know the book, a strong identification between narrator and protagonist/reflector). In the film, Mr and Mrs Bennet are first perceived by viewers as seen and heard by Elizabeth, who smiles to herself as she looks at them: if it is true that the book also voices important monetary and societal questions in unobtrusive ways, here the impression is that the two parents are to be seen as mere figures of fun, and Mrs Bennet's preoccupations may be filed away as her private obsessions rather than legitimate concerns.

It might be objected that audiovisual adaptations are, self-evidently, adaptations, and that a book-length story needs to be made much more compact if it is to fit on the big or the small screen (even though a feature movie and a TV series are, in this respect, two very different propositions). Furthermore, recent studies of the Austen adaptations have shown how difficult it is to transpose such essentially textual features as narrative irony to the small and big screens (Nachumi 2001; Sørbø 2005, 2014). Even so, audiovisual stories can be made more compact in many different ways, and there is evidence – both internal and external – that these two audiovisual versions treat *Pride and Prejudice* as romance, rather than as an ironic description of a certain society at a given time. On the one hand, there are such declarations as those by Deborah Moggach, the screenwriter of the 2005 film, in whose opinion this is "the ultimate romance about two people who think they hate each other but are really passionately in love"[6]. On the other there is the

[6] Focus Features, *Pride & Prejudice: The Production*, web address http://

fact that the Austen canon has, very occasionally, been translated into darker, more irony-centred audiovisual products, such as Ang Lee's *Sense and Sensibility*, scripted by actress Emma Thompson. The ways in which characters' speeches are commented on by means of montage, or the scenes in which the camera moves away from the actors and frames them from above, speak of an attempt at reproducing Austen's verbal irony by visual means (MacDowell 2016: 22-6; Morini forthcoming). No such attempt can be observed in the two versions of *Pride and Prejudice* under discussion – where, at most, ironic exchanges are compressed and made subservient to the viewpoint of the romantic heroine.

Ang Lee's attempt at cinematic irony is, if not unique, at least very rare in the Austen film industry: and though many viewers may be well aware that the novels and the films are different propositions, the audiovisual tendency to emphasise the romantic and "costume drama" features of the books must have contributed to a world-wide view of Jane Austen as a tame period writer. Of course, this is as true for the English-speaking world as it is for Italy – and as a consequence, the UK and the US have their fair share of "Regency Dances" and "Jane Austen Regency Balls and Suppers" (one need only google the words "Jane Austen Regency Ball" to verify this). In the English-speaking world as well as in Italy, it is perfectly possible to think of a participant at these events who has never read a word of Jane Austen's novels: but in Italy, it is also perfectly possible to think of someone who has read all the Austen oeuvre, has failed to perceive any irony, and takes part in these events because s/he is convinced that elegant balls and formal suppers are all that Austen is about as a writer. As early as 1940, D.W. Harding identified a strain of what he called "regulated hatred" in the novels – and no matter how many mannered films are made out of them, English readers will continue to have the texts themselves to discover what made Harding (1998: 25) formulate his "lop-sided" views. Italian readers, on the contrary, have at their disposal translations which have been pruned of much of their irony: in these conditions, and in the context of the wider Austen industry, it is certainly the figure of the author as

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focusfeatures.com/article/pride___prejudice__the_production?film=pride_and_prejudice, last accessed March 23, 2017.

an inoffensive spinster drawing delicate portraits of the society of her time that will continue to have the upper hand.

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