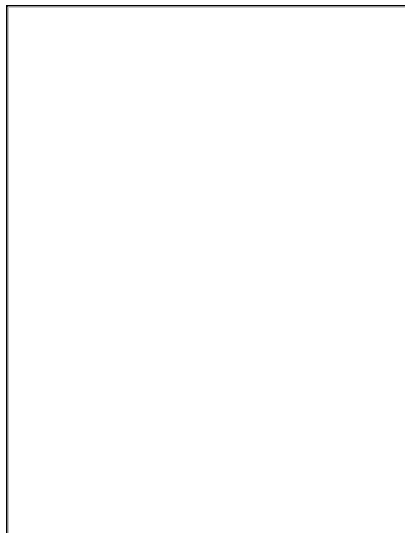


Why Austen cannot be a “classique” in French: New Directions in the French Reception of Austen

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THE RECEPTION OF JANE AUSTEN'S WORK in the French-speaking world, as Lucile Trunel's doctoral thesis on the history of French publishing demonstrates, is indeed that of a misunderstanding (480), sometimes grotesque, sometimes simply frustrating. The origin of this misunderstanding can be discerned in the early and influential translations. In my book *Jane Austen in Switzerland*, I charted these translations by the *Bibliothèque britannique* and by Isabelle de Montolieu, which produced a heavily didactic and sentimental Austen in French and debarred her novels entirely from their original humor and irony. The consequence of these early translations and of the “contempt” induced by the French publications is that the word “Austen” conjures up two very different authors among Francophone and Anglophone readers. In the English-speaking world, Austen is simultaneously a canonical and a popular author, a master ironist and an innovative novelist, something like a national monument with a global recognition. In the French-speaking world, she is mainly known as a sentimentalist and, consequently, as a minor popular author, one of those “romancières anglaises” usually regarded as outlandish curiosities by French reviewers. Apart from a few academics in English departments, nobody takes Austen seriously because nobody is aware of her status in the canon of English literature, and people tend to be rather sorry for you when they learn you are devoting your research to her novels.



The very word “romancière”—literally, female novelist—usually implies some kind of critical disparagement, as witnessed in the May 2006 issue of *Lire* and the June 2008 issue of *Le Magazine littéraire*. The masculine and the feminine forms do not exist in a symmetrical relationship in French. While the masculine “romancier” may denote a male novelist, it also refers, when used in the plural, to novelists in general. This is what is called in grammar the “masculin universel.” The word “romancière,” therefore, always connotes a singularity, that is, a truncated or problematic relationship with what is “universal” and, consequently, with literary “greatness.” Under the heading “romancières anglaises” French reviewers acknowledge the productivity and long-term history of British women novelists, which, in the present state of French scholarship, does not seem to have an equivalent in French. But this recognition goes by numbers, and the category “romancières anglaises” is a hotpot in which one finds Virginia Woolf alongside Agatha Christie, and Jane Austen next to Lauren Weisberger or Barbara Cartland. (In *Lire* Austen is actually presented, without irony, as the mother of chick lit.) When French culture constructs British “greatness” in literature as, for instance, in the December 2009-January 2010 literary supplement of *Le Point*, Austen, as a typical “romancière,” is conspicuously missing, . . . and greatness is almost exclusively male.

In this paper I am going to focus on some of the reasons why Austen's canonical status has failed to translate into

French while the “popular” Austen has been with us ever since Montolieu’s adaptations. In particular, I am going to look at those who have included her in “serious” literary criticism in French, either to confirm her marginal status or to try and canonize her work in the face of an incredulous readership. I will look briefly at two nineteenth-century texts published in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* and, as far as Austen today is concerned, at the critical apparatus of the first volume of her *Œuvres romanesques complètes* in the collection of La Pléiade as well as at the article published in the June 2008 *Magazine littéraire* mentioned above. Together these texts certainly add to the tableau, depicted by Trunel, of a misunderstanding. But what I would like to suggest in my own chapter of this rather sad story is that the reception of Austen in French criticism can deliver useful information—if not about Austen herself, then at least about the constraints regulating the French literary field. From the gap between English and French critical discourses emerge some of those “règles de l’art” through and against which, according to Bourdieu, the struggle for canonicity takes place.

Understanding those rules may explain why Austen’s work finds itself today in the paradoxical situation of being simultaneously available in French in two mutually exclusive collections, that is, in La Pléiade and in Archipoche. While the former is supposed to enhance respect for a definitive text, the latter is characterized by a completely opportunistic and mercenary exploitation of titles and authors’ names, often those made famous by film adaptations. Each volume of the collection of La Pléiade (published by the prestigious literary press of Gallimard) is produced by a team of academics who provide authoritative versions of the texts, a general introduction, explanatory notes and, when required, a genetic study of the various manuscript and/or printed versions. In the French-speaking world, a publication in La Pléiade constitutes the ultimate form of recognition for an author and a no less significant recognition for the academic specialists entrusted with his/her inclusion within the collection. But if La Pléiade usually signals great authors whose words cannot be tampered with, this does not apply to Austen. Six years after the publication of the first volume of her *Œuvres romanesques complètes* in the famous leather-bound, fine bible-grade paper collection of La Pléiade, Archipoche issued a new edition of Montolieu’s first adaptation of *Sense and Sensibility*. This adaptation actually transforms Austen’s novel into a French sentimental novel of the early nineteenth century through numerous and deep alterations of her style and plot. Yet nothing in the Archipoche volume alerts readers to those changes. While readers wrongly assume that what they have in their hands is “Austen,” Archipoche has simply managed to capitalize on her global success by publishing a “translation” free of copyright. Austen is the only foreign author in La Pléiade contending with such indignity in French.



Two types of discourse define the critical reception of Austen’s work in the nineteenth century: on the one hand the critic Philarète Chasles thinks that Austen’s novels cannot be regarded as great literature because of their sentimentality and because they are written about and for women. And, on the other, there is Léon Boucher, a critic convinced that her work deserves serious notice and who, as a consequence, carefully avoids the mere mention either of sentiment or of the author as a *woman* novelist.

Chasles’s 1842 article entitled “Du roman en Angleterre depuis Walter Scott” contains an alarming picture of what he considers to be the “decadence” of English fiction since Scott. His observations rely on an elitist and male-centered conception of English literature, defined, according to him, by an opposition between a small number of great geniuses with a universal significance (Shakespeare, Dryden, Pope, Fielding, Scott) and a multitude of provincial and puritan authors (Defoe, Richardson, Dickens, women). Chasles is worried by the fact that the narrow “puritan” tradition should renew itself, and he goes so far as to prophesize its debilitating impact on the English novel (207). According to his French expectations of universal relevance, the English novel is an accumulation of idiosyncratic subgenres of which he provides a parodic list: “historical, fantastic, material, professional, allegorical, scientific, educational, religious, of political economy; novels of the bourgeoisie and novels of the rabble, and even the philosophical and algebraic novels” (205).¹ No novel of the nineteenth century deserves to be remembered because none fulfils his definition of the genre, which is that the novel must reproduce life in its “variety” and not merely “a small obscure corner” of it (205). In his estimation, all women novelists belong to what he calls the “puritanical and pedagogical school” (193): “all these ladies are descendants of Richardson, their master” (193), a genealogy which, from his pen, is *not* a compliment. Austen is qualified through “a combination of sweet sensibility” (194), and she is presented alongside Frances Burney and Susan Ferrier as a pale copy of Maria Edgeworth. Their work is discussed in collective and derogatory terms:

From one female novelist to another, one only finds nuances and half shades. Imagination is not their dominant quality. Female pettiness, puritan prudishness, social decorum as produced by this prudishness, the habit of preaching morality inherited from Richardson, and the rather sickly investigation of the human heart and of characters are to be found in these delicate and graceful works. They have nothing in common with Fielding, still less with Cervantes. They are Richardson’s granddaughters. (194)

Chasles’s rhetoric represents the connotations attached to women’s fiction in French criticism of the nineteenth century: indebtedness to the sentimental tradition, didacticism, focus on the inner life and general ignorance of social, economic and political realities. As Margaret Cohen has written in *The Sentimental Education of the Novel*, the fact that such gender prejudices did affect the production and perception of fiction is more significant than the form such prejudices took: “the gendering of poetics was unstable; its details were less important than the fact that it occurred” (194). Relying partly on Bourdieu’s concept of the literary field and on his notion of the dialectical movements through which authors and genres earn legitimacy “at the expense” of others, Cohen has shown how, as far as fiction is concerned, the “great” realist

novel in French was established by novelists such as Balzac and Stendhal by explicitly repudiating the sentimental and feminine origin of the genre: “gender turns out to be a powerful symbolic weapon in Balzac and Stendhal’s campaign to assert the importance of their new practice. Both Balzac and Stendhal associated the invention of realist codes with the masculinization of a previously frivolous feminine form in their polemic and in their poetics” (13). In doing so they were reacting to the overwhelming success of some score of women novelists whose production dominated fiction and inflected fiction criticism from 1789 to 1830.

Chasles’s passing comment on Austen is thus representative of the new gendered poetics inaugurated by Balzac and Stendhal, implying a simple binary opposition and a qualitative hierarchy between great universal male geniuses and minor sentimental female authors. In this sense, Chasles’s article illustrates Bourdieu’s concept of “distinction” and it corroborates Cohen’s narrative of the history of the novel in France. Sentimentalism and women novelists are clearly suspect in Chasles’s discursive construction of the English novel: rhetorically they are those elements at the expense of which some kind of greatness can be established. His words suggest, furthermore, that vindicating a work as relying on “sensibility” or as “by a woman” is by then truly unthinkable in French criticism.

Cohen’s book, if not directly concerned with the reception of Austen in French, nevertheless provides a particularly helpful context, enabling one to make sense of the long-term misunderstanding of Austen’s work. Whereas Austen’s poetics implies a continuity between the sentimental and realist modes, her novels had to contend in French with a critical discourse marked by the realists’ struggle for hegemony: “From their emergence, realist works assert their claims to literary importance by identifying the novel with men, by forging a poetics associated with masculine forms of knowledge, and by undercutting the authority of the woman writer along with sentimental codes” (Cohen 195). In a footnote to this sentence, Cohen actually observes how this dichotomous poetics opposing the masculine to the feminine and the sentimental to the realist is alien to the English novel, especially to Austen’s narrative. Translated by and associated with one of the most famous sentimental “romancières” of the early nineteenth century—Isabelle de Montolieu—, Austen’s work could only be treated dismissively as secondary and trivial once the new era of French realism had begun. In her own survey of nineteenth-century literary criticism, Christine Planté has established that the hierarchy between “romancières” and “grands romanciers” was indeed a widespread commonplace of French critical discourse at the time (231).

As for Boucher, his article reveals the obligatory terms through which canonization could occur to Austen in France. His article, entirely devoted to Austen, is entitled “Le roman classique en Angleterre, Jane Austen,” and it appeared in 1878 to mark the publication in England by Bentley of the last volume of *The Works of Jane Austen*, which included James-Edward Austen-Leigh’s *Memoir of Jane Austen*. Published right at the moment when Austen’s reputation starts growing beyond the original circle of the “happy few,” Boucher’s article cannot be explained merely by the need to reflect an obvious opinion not yet dominant in England. Whatever the case may be, his aim is clearly to convince the readers of the *Revue des Deux Mondes* that Austen is a great author, that is, in French terms, a “romancier classique.” In order to achieve this goal, he needs to inscribe her in a masculine and realist canon and to conceal sensibility and the female novelist. His article is organized in three parts: one biographical section (relying on James Edward Austen-Leigh’s *Memoir*), one section about Austen’s novels considered collectively, and a last one focusing exclusively on *Mansfield Park*.

For Boucher, Austen is, indeed, “the author of *Mansfield Park*” (449), in contrast to her identity in England as “the author of *Pride and Prejudice*.” Clearly *Mansfield Park* is better adapted to Boucher’s purpose of conveying the image of a “realist” Austen. Thus he devotes an entire page of commentary to the sequence of chapters seven to fifteen in the third volume, in which Fanny Price spends time with her family in Portsmouth. Such a passage, which he describes as “pages vibrant with reality” (466), can show that Austen is good at depicting all kinds of social environments, not just the gentry and their nice country houses. Boucher also calls forth a number of male authorities in order to hammer further his message about the greatness of Austen: he mentions Macaulay comparing her to Shakespeare, and he himself compares her implicitly to the author of *Le Rouge et le Noir* by relying on the Stendhalian motif of the mirror (459)² With such a metaphor he establishes Austen as an objective and accurate observer of her time, hence as a realist novelist.

Ignoring, paradoxically, what is truly Fielding-like in her narrative voice, that is, her authorial interventions—of which we still find some instances in *Mansfield Park*, especially when she says “my Fanny”—Boucher praises what he regards as the neutrality or invisibility of her voice: “She never betrays herself” (465). If not entirely accurate, this observation enables him to establish Austen’s authority as a novelist by assimilation with Flaubert’s own style of narrative. He completes this male pantheon presiding over Austen’s art by simply asserting that she is the equal of Balzac and the heir of Fielding. He carefully eludes Richardson’s name and, to avoid all risks of contamination, states that the characters of her novels have “nothing to do with some Clarissa Harlowe or some Grandison” (459). The concluding sentences of his article may not tell much about Austen, but they are revealing of the terms in which canonicity could be delivered in nineteenth-century France:

Compared to the shining qualities of contemporary imagination, the talent of the author of *Mansfield Park* may seem to be rather dull. One might wish to find more grace in it, something more of the unexpected, something more feminine and less impersonal. It reveals nevertheless a superior woman, about whom one can say—borrowing from Balzac the phrase he applied to himself—that she carried a complete society in her mind. (467)

From this model of rhetoric and pseudo-apology for Austen's lack of feminine graces, one can easily gather that to call her work "feminine" would make it incompatible with the "roman classique." Her affiliation with realism must be stressed over and over again while dissociating her once and for all from the sentimental tradition and from the imagination, that is, from the "Romanesque," a term negatively and systematically associated with women readers and writers. Better "dull" ("terne") than "romanesque"!



This two-faced reception in French as embodied by Chasles and Boucher is still very much relevant to the French-speaking world today through a popular Austen, always available in paperback, and a "serious" Austen published in La Pléiade. The fact that her novels have always been available in French from the beginning of the nineteenth century suggests that the books of the "outlandish" Austen sell well. But the publication in 2006 of Montolieu's free translation of *Sense and Sensibility*—as if it were, indeed, a reliable translation—and the condescending tone adopted by reviewers when discussing film adaptations of her novels indicate how far Austen is from being taken seriously by the general public. The very publication of the early nineteenth-century translations of *Sense and Sensibility* and *Mansfield Park* in Archipoche, as Trunel has shown, suggests even that, as far as Austen is concerned, La Pléiade has failed in its usual function of establishing the canonical status of the work (Trunel 458).

And yet, with La Pléiade, Austen is exactly where she should be today in order to convince everyone that she is a "classique." Indeed, the very *raison d'être* of the collection of La Pléiade created by the publisher Gallimard in the 1930s is to enable French readers to constitute a "library" of the best authors of all times. But even if Austen has been awarded her rightful place, one gets the impression that her editor and translators are still impeded by the same "taboos" that regulated Boucher's vindication of the author of *Mansfield Park*: sentiment and gender. They clearly do not know what to do with these concepts. I should add that the first volume of the Austen La Pléiade available so far, published in 2000, contains *Northanger Abbey*, *Sense and Sensibility*, *Pride and Prejudice*, and the *Juvenilia*—that is, not *Mansfield Park*. These works seem to constitute a real challenge for serious criticism and canonization in French. If the critical apparatus of La Pléiade may appear unhelpful to the reader informed by Austen criticism in English, it is nevertheless interesting in so far as it reveals, by contrast, the implicit paradigms of French criticism and canonization.

In his general introduction to the Austen La Pléiade, Pierre Goubert mentions sentiment, for instance, as an element in the ideological debates through which Austen lived, never as a structuring device of the plots. He certainly contradicts himself on a number of occasions in this introduction, and the reason may be that he may not know himself what he wants to say about Austen. What he *does* know is what he must *not* say. Unlike Boucher's, his restrictions do not seem to be determined by a particular admiration for Austen's work but merely by his job as editor of the Pléiade edition. Abstaining from acknowledging the sentimental nature of the plots as love stories, he offers a sweeping survey of Austen "and the war of ideas." He clearly has not read Claudia Johnson's book, and, at the price of some caveats, he situates Austen among the "conservative moralists," among the Evangelicals, and among the true followers of Gisborne (Austen, *Œuvres* xxiv-xxv). He also finds it necessary to assert that she is a woman of the eighteenth century who did not take the romantic turn, thus a woman of the past, even in her own time (xxxi).³ He also firmly denies that there might be anything like the dawn of a feminist awareness in her novels: "Yet to see in Jane Austen an author determined to expose the flaws of a society based on masculine authority corresponds to a biased perspective" (xxiv). That is, he refutes one after the other all the reasons that make Austen popular in the English-speaking world today: her wonderful stories, her original responses to the challenges of her time, her sensitivity to gender and to women's plights in particular.

For a long time this introduction simply baffled me: it seemed to me as if Goubert was sabotaging his own work as an editor and as a translator (he translated *Sense and Sensibility* for this volume). This is where Bourdieu can help. Bourdieu's concept of "distinction" and his definition of the binary dialectics, implicit or explicit, on which it relies (181-83) may help us give some meaning to what is at stake here, rather than dismissing Goubert as merely absurd. Goubert's job as an editor of Austen in La Pléiade is to justify her place within this canonizing institution. But the terms through which he can "distinguish" Austen are not entirely his own; they are determined by the medium in which he writes. We may only guess what they are. My hypothesis is that Goubert has a choice between two evils and that he chose the lesser one: either Austen is to be regarded as sentimental, female, and trivial; or as conservative, unsentimental, and dull *but* serious and hence fit for La Pléiade.

The absence of gender as a critical category, while serving the "universal" ethos of La Pléiade and the vision of literature it underpins, has repercussions for the texts. Admitting or denying Austen's gender awareness directly affects the French text produced by the team of La Pléiade. Thus Goubert's translation of the first chapter of *Sense and Sensibility* is perfectly in tune with his observation about Austen not being politically aware of patriarchy. He chooses to suppress the repetition of the word "son" in the third paragraph (SS 4), thus mitigating Austen's emphasis on the injustice of patrilineal transmission by treating the repetition as a stylistic error (*Œuvres* 224). In the sentence that follows ("it was secured, in such a way, as to leave to himself no power of providing for those who were most dear to him"), he chooses to translate "those" in the masculine, "ceux," though the pronoun obviously refers to Mrs. Dashwood and her three daughters. Another example of the consequences of overlooking gender occurs in Pierre Arnaud's translation of *Northanger Abbey*. The translation of the end of chapter five, in which Austen vindicates women readers and women

novelists, is entirely translated in the masculine (*Œuvres* 26-27). It is true that French grammar may impose its own constraints here and that, theoretically, the French “masculin universel” is supposed to include the feminine. Yet an important dimension of Austen’s critique disappears without being even compensated by an explanation in a footnote. While this passage is often quoted in English criticism, it is here sidelined by an approximate translation and an absence of commentary. It is, of course, a passage in which Austen challenges, as a woman, the very process of “distinction” embodied by La Pléiade and male reviewers generally (*NA* 30-31).

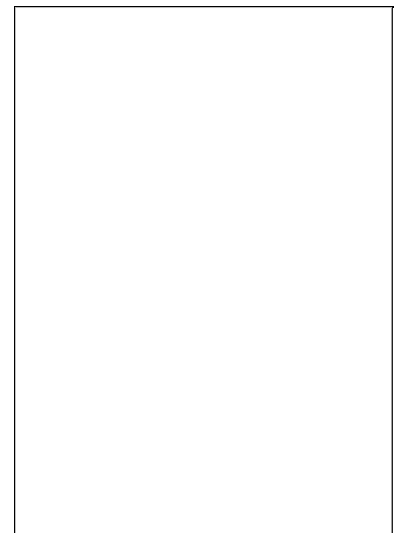
Each of the three translated novels in the first volume of the *Œuvres romanesques complètes* relies on a rather antiquated form of French. While this unusual use of the language may arise from a concern to reflect French usage in Austen’s era, it certainly deprives readers from the feeling of immediacy and from the impression of modern relevance that Anglophone readers can experience while reading the original.

This antiquated character is particularly true of Goubert’s translation of *Sense and Sensibility* entitled *Le Coeur et la Raison*, in which he chooses, for instance, to have Marianne and Elinor systematically address each other with the form of politeness, that is, in the second person plural (“vous”). Because, as his title suggests, he also chooses to emphasize the dichotomy between the two sisters, Elinor emerges, as a result, as much more pedantic in French than she is in English. The second person plural erases all trace of sisterly affection between Elinor and Marianne, and Elinor tends to express herself like a schoolmistress. This reader’s impression is actually confirmed by the translator’s own comment on her character: “Elinor is not faulty enough; she is too satisfied with herself; she is cold; she does not attract sympathy” (*Œuvres* 1042). In the scene of the quarrel between the two sisters in presence of Edward in chapter seventeen, for instance, in the course of which Elinor has to defend herself against Marianne’s accusation of being entirely governed by public opinion, the vigor of her repartee gets lost in French: “No, Marianne, never. My doctrine has never aimed at the subjection of the understanding” (*SS* 108). Elinor’s energy here has to do simultaneously with the depth of her convictions and with the way she is taunted by her sister’s mocking tone, perceptible in Marianne’s choice of the word “doctrine.” Under Goubert’s pen, Elinor remains the paragon of female conduct to which Marianne, in this exchange, tries to reduce her. Her vigorous “never” is toned down into a periphrasis (“à aucun moment”), and she is made to speak like some female instructress who, indeed, has a doctrine. Goubert’s style for her actually reflects Marianne’s opinion about her sister at her most unfair (*Œuvres* 303).

Goubert’s prejudice about Elinor’s character and his choice of an antiquated idiom also mean that he fails to convey her crucial function in the text, that of ironic observer. Her scathing contempt for Robert Ferrars, for instance (“Elinor agreed to it all, for she did not think he deserved the compliment of rational opposition” [286]), is conveyed in such a tortuous way in French that Elinor seems to be weighing, very seriously, how she ought to behave. Goubert underlines her in the process of passing judgment as if the situation was a matter of defining the right conduct. While Elinor is simply shown as perfectly able to recognize an imbecile when she sees one, she is made as ponderous as Mary Bennet in this passage in French.⁴



What I have just said about Goubert and the translators of La Pléiade can also be applied to the article signed by Christine Jordis and published in the June 2008 issue of *Magazine Littéraire*, devoted to “Les romancières anglaises.” Like Goubert’s introduction, Jordis’s article produces a rather uninviting portrait of Austen while somehow acknowledging her importance by including her in the survey as a founding figure. Also like Goubert’s, Jordis’s prose is filled with paradoxes or downright contradictions. The most obvious consists in qualifying a group defined by gender (“les romancières”) without mentioning a single feminist critic. One can only guess that Jordis has had a look at Gilbert and Gubar’s *The Madwoman in the Attic*, even though she does not mention it: this influence might account for her rather sad depiction of Austen’s novels as being about the seclusion of women (56). Whatever the case may be, the question that puzzles me is why Jordis chose this particularly unattractive way of introducing Austen—the more so because, as we learn from page four of this issue of the *Magazine littéraire*, she is “directrice du domaine anglo-saxon chez Gallimard” and, thus, might be expected to produce a discourse likely to encourage readers of the *Magazine* to buy the volume of La Pléiade.



So again, is Jordis just absurd, or is there something else at stake? What induces me to think that she is taken in the same rhetorical trap as Goubert (Austen must be either dull but serious or lively but trivial) is the way irony and humor are missing from her presentation of Austen—just as they are missing from all the texts I have discussed so far. That humor is difficult to translate is one thing; that critics, whether they are sensitive to it or not, do not mention this central feature of Austen’s fiction begs for questions. There must be something in the French critical culture that explains the universal repetition of this omission.

This omission of Austen’s humor and irony can be understood, as far as the nineteenth century is concerned, in

part, as a consequence of how Montolieu's reputation as a sentimental novelist probably inflected Charles's perception of Austen. We have seen how the terms through which Austen could be canonized within the French literary field obliged Boucher to focus on *Mansfield Park*, that is, on most serious (or the least playful) of Austen's novels. In Jordis's depressing account there is no place for granting a "writer of seclusion" anything like humor or subversive irony (57). As for La Pléiade, not only the translations, but the footnotes are, in this respect, an embarrassment. One finds, for instance, a footnote to the first sentence of *Pride and Prejudice*. The sentence itself is translated in such a way that, to the French reader, it appears like a perfectly straightforward statement, confirming Austen's status as a novelist of manners and of the private life:

Il est universellement admis qu'un célibataire nanti d'une belle fortune a forcément besoin d'une épouse.
(561)
(It is universally agreed that a single man endowed with an ample fortune naturally needs a wife.)

What is footnoted is the phrase "universellement admis," for which the translator, Jean-Paul Pichardie, provides an erudite explanation:

For Austen's contemporaries, the phrase "it is universally acknowledged" is clearly associated with philosophical reasoning. One finds it in David Hume's *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* (1748) . . . as well as in Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759). The narrator relies thus on two contrasting types of discourse directly following each other, one philosophical and the other mundane, in order to surprise the reader. (*Œuvres* 1062 n.1)

Are such references to two works which, after all, are not contemporaneous with *Pride and Prejudice* (they date roughly from sixty years back) necessary to understand the "philosophical flavor" of the phrase "universally acknowledged"? While the "effet de surprise" may be tentatively explained in this footnote, it does not belong to the experience of actually reading the sentence in French. "Effet de surprise," furthermore, does not imply any critical distance from what is actually said about money and marriage in this sentence. Further, the summary of the novel provided in the critical apparatus suggests that, for the translator, the novel is essentially a traditional didactic novel focusing on the errors of the heroine and on (only) *her* progress towards greater reason, for which she is rewarded through her marriage to Darcy: "Such is the meaning of the novel that we know under the title *Pride and Prejudice*" (1055). The notice containing this summary confirms the impression that neither the translators nor the general editor, Pierre Goubert, really know why Austen "deserves" to be in La Pléiade—or that if they do know it, they would not know how to express it within the context of Gallimard's canonizing collection. Accumulating more or less relevant erudite references to "serious" works may constitute for them a way out of the dilemma that Austen, as a woman and as an ironist questioning the hierarchies of her culture, poses them. These references to Hume and Smith justify Austen's presence by somehow associating her with "big names." They function as the justification for which La Pléiade's critical grammar is inadequate.



If hardly enlightening about Austen, the reception of her work in French criticism can function as an observatory to further our understanding of the literary field—in particular of the problematic place of gender and women writers in the history of the French novel from the *Revue des Deux Mondes* to La Pléiade and even to Bourdieu, who, in his *Règles de l'art* omitted gender as a category of analysis. If sexism was an explicit ingredient of critical discourse in the nineteenth century, Christine Planté's book remains, to this day, the only work dealing with the issue in French. In today's articles and reviews the expression of gender prejudices may be more inhibited, but these are still very much with us, conditioning readers' perception of literature and hampering the constitution of the canon, which the collection of La Pléiade embodies.

By a woman and about women, with a popular and a highbrow audience, simultaneously sentimental and ironic, subversive and yet with happy endings, dealing with the objective realities of money and rank as well as with her characters' inner lives, incredibly accessible and yet stylistically innovative, Austen's novels disrupt a number of French critical categories and assumptions about what constitutes a great novel. Their publishing history in French, the texts of the translations, and the words of reviewers can become as many strategic entries into the deconstruction of these categories and assumptions—assumptions that for more than two hundred years, have ignored, minimized, or simply made impossible the contribution of women to the French novel. While both Raymond Trousson, in the preface to his anthology of eighteenth-century women novelists (xxix-xxxii), and Pierre Goubert, in his presentation of *Sense and Sensibility* (1042), warn readers, paradoxically, that they ought not be bored by the apparent "limitations" of women's novels, neither provides the critical discourse likely to help French readers recognize their interests on their own terms. Not surprisingly, both dismiss gender and feminist criticism as irrelevant. In this context, the French reception of Austen could become a vital place in comparative criticism, where, with the help of women's and gender studies, one could explain to French readers that a woman's work need not be dull in order to be great.

1. All quotations from the French are my own translations.

2. Cf. Stendhal, *Le Rouge et le Noir*, vol. 2, ch. 19.

3. Locating Austen firmly within this or that century is actually made necessary by the physical presentation of the collection, in which each volume comes leather-bound, with one distinctive color for each century: red for the seventeenth century, blue for the eighteenth century, green for the nineteenth century, etc. The Austen volume thus came out with a blue binding, alongside Beaumarchais, Casanova, or Laclos, rather than in green with Balzac, Flaubert, or the Brontës.

4. Cf. *Œuvres romanesques complètes* 1:441: "Elinor acquiesça à tout, étant donné qu'elle ne jugeait pas qu'il méritait le compliment d'une opposition rationnelle." For a discussion of this passage in translation see my article in *Traduire* (58-59).

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The French Lieutenant's Woman. John Fowles. ! Home. Charles engages detectives to look for Sarah, but they fail. In the meantime, he receives a letter from Mr. Freeman, delivered by his solicitor, requesting that he attend a meeting with Freeman and his solicitors if he wishes to avoid facing an action in a suit for a breach of the engagement contract. Charles consults with his solicitor and friend, a Mr. Montague, who informs him that this letter, while unpleasant, is a stroke of luck. Montague tells Charles that he will probably have to admit publicly to having been dishonorable in his relations with the Freemans, but that such an admission i... Jane Austen Austen, Jane. I. INTRODUCTION Austen, Jane (1775-1817), English novelist, noted for her witty studies of early-19th-century English society. With meticulous detail, Austen portrayed the quiet, day-to-day life of members of the upper middle class. Her works combine romantic comedy with social satire and psychological insight. Two common themes in Austen's books are the loss of illusions—usually leading characters to a more mature outlook—and the clash between traditional moral ideals and the everyday demands of life. In most of her novels, her characters correct their faults th (The French Lieutenant's Woman 11). The word "riddle" is synonymous to the enigmatic character of Sarah. A contrast between the sea and the character is presented. While the sea represents flux, is an image of change, of protest and freedom; the land is the image of fixity and stability. The turmoil within her is represented by the image of flux in the epigraph. The paratext interacts with the main text and establishes a dialogic relationship between the two. One aim of Fowles behind the presentation of the epigraphs is to highlight "conflicting polarities" (Bowen 73) and in so doing he presents epigraphs from such Victorian texts as Jane Austen's *Persuasion* (1818). Epigraphs from the aforesaid novel is found in chapter 5, 10, 14, 28 of Fowles' novel. In chapter 5, the epigraph goes like this