

## Persuading Japanese Readers of Austen

### Persuasion [Settoku]

Translated into Japanese by Keiko Parker.

Kindaibungeisha, 2014. 278 pages.

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Review by Inger S. B. Brodey.

Even if one had no other evidence, the cancelled chapters of *Persuasion* alone would serve as indicators of the care that Austen invested in word choice and syntax in her last completed novel. Such knowledge might make any would-be translator flinch at the responsibility involved in conveying her meaning into a different language. Consider then, the difficulty of translating Austen into a non-European language, such as Japanese. In Japanese, there are no cognates to make parallel puns or wordplay convenient; subjects are naturally elided from sentence structure; little distinction is made between singular and plural for nouns; sentence structure and even verb endings differ dramatically based on who is speaking them (and to whom); and only context reveals the difference between present and future tense. These are just a few of the special challenges of translating into Japanese.

Long-time Janeite and JASNA member Keiko Parker of the Vancouver region has now translated her second Jane Austen novel into her native Japanese. Ms. Parker's edition of *Persuasion*, or

*Settoku*, is the result of nearly two years of work, and follows on the heels of her translation of *Emma*, which appeared in 2012. Ms. Parker is to be commended on her meticulous care in creating these translations.

While Ms. Parker acknowledges that the primary difficulty in translating Austen is maintaining "the spirit of Jane Austen" in atmosphere, style, and tone, her careful translation shows the knowledge she has gained of Jane Austen in her decades of membership in the JASNA-Victoria/Vancouver region, as well as through her own reading and education.

Personally, some of my favorite aspects of Austen's style are also those that can be very tricky to translate successfully. Austen subtly shifts the point-of-view in her narratives from an omniscient narrator (or at least a relatively unbiased one) to the partial understandings of her various characters without the indication of markers such as "she thought" or "he said." We know from her letters that Austen did not write for "dull Elves," and indeed these techniques often require multiple readings to understand. If we are not careful, we can take a foolish character's opinion as expressing an objective fact.

Ms. Parker has made some ingenious uses of characteristics of the Japanese language in her translations of Austen. Instead of just literally translating word for word, and also instead of liberating herself excessively from Austen's meaning, Ms. Parker treads the middle ground of loyalty to nuance, with especial care for the correct transmission of narrative sympathies. Just as Austen manipulates the feelings of the readers through her uses of free indirect discourse and other techniques, Ms. Parker has managed to harness her language to manipulate speakers of Japanese into the proper mindset for the novel at different times.

Her techniques involve favoring traditional Japanese nomenclature over more scientific Chinese-based terms, and also ensuring that the natural rhythms of the

Japanese language are preserved to prevent the novel from sounding "too translated." This preserves the direct connection of the reader to Anne's feelings. At the same time, she includes explanatory notes within the text (often in a smaller font) to clarify historical references that would otherwise not be clear to a contemporary reader of Japanese.

Ms. Parker's work has revealed to me that the Japanese syntax can be particularly conducive to Austen's narrative shifts. In particular, the elision of the subject from sentences favors the ambiguity of point-of-view, and serves as a convenient tool for Austen's shifting perspectives. Just as in English, one can choose to use quotation marks or not, and Ms. Parker carefully refrains from using them where it would destroy the effects of free indirect discourse. Additionally, Japanese is highly differentiated according to social context and the gender, education, and rank of the speaker (and addressee). This feature gives the translator additional tools for focalization, as well as for conveying Austen's subtle critiques of characters through their style of speech. The saccharine words of Mr. Shepherd and Mrs. Clay to Sir Walter and Elizabeth, as well as Elizabeth's dismissive addresses to Anne are equally well conveyed through variations in the elevation of speech in Japanese.

In short, Ms. Parker has translated Austen in a way that shows her own mastery of—and perhaps equally important—her own love of the text and particularly, Anne Elliot.

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