

## TRANSLATIONS OF JANE AUSTEN'S *PERSUASION*<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** This paper discusses the binary opposition of *persuasion* and *conviction* as central to the understanding of Jane Austen's *Persuasion*. The terms emerged in eighteenth-century rhetoric and reflected the gender stereotypes of femininity and masculinity common in those days. Jane Austen challenges these stereotypes and her usage of *persuasion* and *conviction* demonstrates linguistically the domestication of the hero "into conventionally female ways of knowing".

**Key words:** Jane Austen, translation, culture, persuasion, conviction.

Background knowledge of society and culture is important when reading Jane Austen's novels and an awareness of her literary milieu facilitates our understanding of the abstractions she puts forward. Needless to say, contemporary readers may lack more than a little when approaching the text, even if they are native speakers of the language of the original. Therefore, a number of guides and companions explicate the classics for us. Foreign-language readers, however, rely mostly on the translator and any explanatory notes the edition may have provided.

The heroine of *Persuasion* is a twenty-seven-year-old woman, young by today's standards, not so young back then. Age is very much related to marriage in Austen's world – in *Pride and Prejudice* Lydia passes this verdict on her eldest sister: "Jane will be quite an old maid soon, I declare. She is almost three and twenty!" (Austen 1894: 275) Anne Elliot, past her bloom at twenty-seven, has half-embraced the role of an old maid. It is her good nature but also her Christian duty to her family that she should look after her sister Mary, and then stay in to watch over her sick nephew, or that she should play the piano for the Musgrove girls, who want to dance and flirt: "In Jane Austen's time, women of the gentry who never married were expected ... to conduct their lives in a way that served others" (Teachman 1997: 87). Such a Protestant-ethics nuance in Anne's behaviour would be entirely lost on most of the Bulgarian readers of the novel.

This paper will focus on the binary opposition introduced by the title and will consider the prerequisite knowledge needed when approaching *Persuasion*; it will also trace the binary opposition in the Bulgarian translations of the novel. The juxtaposition of "persuasion" and "conviction" emerged in eighteenth-century rhetoric. Arthur Walzer discusses the terms with reference to Francis Bacon, George Campbell and Hugh Blair. We do not know whether Austen read their works, but her novels, the critic claims, display a familiarity with the "most famous among Campbell's distinctions ... his distinction between persuasion and conviction" (Walzer 1995: 690). Walzer quotes an episode from Chapter 10 in *Pride and Prejudice* in order to introduce his point; it is on the topic of Bingley's rashness in making his decisions, and the influence of others on what he is to do next – the most important part of the conversation is this exchange between Elizabeth and Darcy:

[Elizabeth]: "To yield readily – easily – to the *persuasion* of a friend is no merit with you."

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<sup>1</sup> Костадинова, Витана: доклад, изнесен на конференцията *40 години филологии в ПУ „Паисий Хилендарски“* – 10-12 октомври 2013, Пловдив. Предстои публикация в Научните трудове на Пловдивския университет.

[Darcy]: “To yield without conviction is no compliment to the understanding of either.”

(Austen 1894: 64, emphasis in the original)

Certainly “persuasion” and “conviction” are no synonyms in this instance. The only reliable dictionary to fall back on was Dr Johnson’s *Dictionary of the English Language*. Dr Johnson was an important figure in Austen’s writing; he had the authority of a mentor and “his ideas became a distinctive presence in her writing” (Gross 1989: 53). According to his definitions, quoted after the sixth edition of the dictionary here, this is what the two nouns meant:

CONVICTION – 1. Detection of guilt, which is in law, either when a man is outlawed or appears and confesses, or else is found guilty by the inquest. 2. The act of convincing; confutation; *the act of forcing others, by argument, to allow a position*. 3. State of being convinced.

PERSUASION – 1. The act of persuading; the act of influencing by expostulation; *the act of gaining or attempting the passions*. 2. The state of being persuaded; opinion.

(Johnson 1785, emphasis added)

The difference made between the two comparable meanings of the words is between *argument* and *passions*, i.e. *reason* and *emotions*. As Walzer claims, “Both Campbell and Blair distinguish persuasion as intended to lead to action, therefore as directed toward the will and requiring emotional appeal; they conceive of conviction as intended to instruct and directed toward the understanding” (Walzer 1995: 690). Campbell is believed to have codified the distinction for the first time in his *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* published in 1776. Johnson’s *Dictionary* (1755) predates the treatise by some twenty years.

Precedence aside, the eighteenth-century stereotypes of masculinity and femininity have a lot to do with the attribution of rationality to men and of sentimentality and feelings to women. In his discussion of Austen’s *Persuasion*, Walzer acknowledges the stereotypes prevalent in those days: “Persuasion is feminine and persuadability is womanly. As Reverend Bennett remarks, if women ‘were constituted to have our *firmness* and our *depth*... they would cease to be women’ (88)” (Walzer 1995: 704, emphasis in the original). The author of *Sense and Sensibility* was anxious to emancipate women as creatures of sense, but something else seems to have been at stake in her later narrative, which “seeks to defend rather than suppress a feminine discourse” (Kastely 1997: 146). This does not come totally unexpected, it is signalled in the example from *Pride and Prejudice* quoted above: Elizabeth is the one in favour of being influenced by a friend, regardless of the friend’s arguments, whereas Darcy insists that giving in to influence without proper argumentation is beneath a gentleman’s conduct. In other words, “encoded in Elizabeth’s and Darcy’s exchange are encompassing gender stereotypes that have migrated into the rhetorical concern with persuadability and firmness” (Walzer 1995: 694). Eventually, as it turns out, Darcy’s love for Elizabeth does not recognise the strength of his own reasoning and Bingley is unhappy he has been prevailed upon to give up Jane. Thus, the author demonstrates her preference for the female perspective on life and relationships. A very similar binary opposition we have in the face of Anne Elliot and Captain Wentworth in *Persuasion*. She is rather feminine in her readiness to accommodate others and to yield to persuasion, whereas he is very masculine in his firmness and independence. As the title points out, this is a novel about the advantages and disadvantages of the female predisposition.

The first problem, arising in the Bulgarian translations of the text, is the lack of such a distinction between “persuasion” and “conviction” – according to the *English – Bulgarian Dictionary* of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, both can be rendered as “убеждаване”, “убеждение” (Атанасова 1985). Two different versions of Jane Austen’s title appeared as a result: in 1992 Maria Rankova translated *Persuasion* as “Въздействие”, a word quite similar in its implications to “influence”, whereas in 1996 Anna Elchinova rendered it as “Доводите

на разума”, a phrase echoing “the voice of reason”. “Въздействие” is broad enough and does not exclude convincing; the Online dictionary of the Bulgarian language defines it as the act of influencing with the goal of achieving a result or a change [“Действие с цел упражняване на влияние или за постигане на резултат, промяна” (OnlineRechnik)]; it shares with “persuasion” the sense of a “discourse that ... ends in action” (Walzer 1995: 690). “Доводите на разума”, on the other hand, refers to “the reasons of the mind” and is rather limited to the concept of “rationality”. In effect, the Bulgarian translations are both asymmetrical to the original title, with Anna Elchinova’s actually overturning the initial reference to emotions and, therefore, femininity.

The word “persuasion” and its derivatives have been used approximately 30 times in Austen’s text. Meaningfully, the first example of this appears in Chapter 4, when Lady Russell discusses with Anne the financial situation of the Elliot family: “‘If we can *persuade* your father to all this,’ said Lady Russell, looking over her paper, ‘much may be done...’” (Austen 1833: 223, emphasis added). It was Lady Russell, some seven years earlier, who persuaded Anne to give up her engagement to Captain Wentworth. Therefore, the fact that she uses the verb “persuade” in Active voice is telling about her role in the narrative. The Bulgarian versions of these words express the meaning of the sentence, even if unable to link it to the title. Nevertheless, matters are further complicated when, in the same speech, Lady Russell adds, “I hope we may be able to *convince* him and Elizabeth, that Kellynch Hall has a respectability in itself” (Austen 1833: 223, emphasis added) – persuading and convincing go hand in hand; affecting his emotions will make Sir Walter act, but the arguments should not be left far behind. The incident seems to illustrate Walzer’s point:

Austen’s understanding of the mechanics of persuasion conforms to the account in the rhetorics: persuasion is a process by which desire moves will to action. But the place of reason and the moral import of the process are quite different in her presentation from the rhetorics’ account. In Austen, reason does not necessarily function as an independent faculty capable of directing an instrumental will; reason is, rather, an instrumental faculty in the service of either a desire for good or a desire for pleasure. (Walzer 1995: 699-700)

Under the circumstances, Lady Russell is willing to release the baronet from debt by proposing “vigorous measures” of economy (Austen 1833: 223). The binary opposition is related in the earlier Bulgarian translation of *Persuasion* by the use of two different words for “convince” and “persuade”:

– Ако успеем да *склоним* баща ти да приеме всичко това – каза лейди Ръсел, преглеждайки бележките й, – много нещо може да се постигне. ... Надявам се да *убедим* и него, и Елизабет, че почтеното име на Келинч Хол няма да пострада от тези икономии ... (Остин 1992: 12, emphasis added)

In fact, Maria Rankova consistently uses the verb “убежда” or the noun “убеждение” to translate “convince” and “conviction”. Anna Elchinova, on the other hand, blurs the distinction by resorting to the same verb twice:

— Ако успеем да *убедим* баща ти в необходимостта от всичко това, — каза лейди Ръсел, като гледаше съставения от нея списък, — ще можем да постигнем действително много. ... Много се надявам да *убедим* него и Елизабет, че Келинч Хол сам по себе си притежава достатъчно достойнство и подобни ограничения няма да му се отразят ... (Остин 1996: 11, emphasis added)

In revealing the pre-history of the relationship between Anne and Captain Wentworth, Austen highlights her heroine’s passivity by the use of the Passive voice: “She was *persuaded* to believe the engagement a wrong thing” (Austen 1833: 237, emphasis added). Passivity as an attribute of female excellence is what Mary Wollstonecraft protested against: “Do passive

indolent women make the best wives?” (Wollstonecraft 2008: 101) Gender roles were well established and rarely challenged in those days – to quote Rousseau,

In the union of the sexes, both pursue one common object, but none in the same manner. From their diversity in this particular, arises the first determinate difference between the moral relations of each. The one should be active and strong, the other passive and weak: it is necessary the one should have both the power and the will, and the other should make little resistance. (qtd. in Wollstonecraft 2008: 116, f.1)

Anne had no support from her father or sisters but we are to understand that Lady Russell’s opinion was of consequence; the latter used her role of a mother-figure in the girl’s life to play on her emotions with “steadiness of opinion, and ... tenderness of manner” (Austen 1833: 237). What consoled the young sufferer was “the belief of being prudent, and self-denying, principally for his advantage” (237), i.e. she chose to think that she was doing her fiancé a favour by sacrificing their engagement. When she broke the news to him, “he was totally *unconvinced* and unbending” (237, emphasis added) – unable to accept he was being given up without a good reason. The episode establishes the opposition already familiar from *Pride and Prejudice*: “persuasion” is a category associated with women, whereas men resort to “conviction”.

In the Bulgarian translations, these categories are imperceptible, especially so in Elchinova’s version:

Ан *повярва*, че е извършила грешка с този годеж, че е сбъркала, като го е обявила открито и че е извършила нещо недостойно, което никога не би се увенчало с успех. (Остин 1996: 24, emphasis added)

Капитан Уентуърт беше *непреклонен*, непоколебим и се чувстваше измамен от този принудителен разрив. (Остин 1996: 25, emphasis added)

In addition to the lack of Bulgarian terms for “persuasion” and “conviction”, Anna Elchinova has opted for the active form “повярва” [“she now believed”] in order to express “she was persuaded” – this transformation of nineteenth-century mores into contemporary manners is reminiscent of Sally Hawkins’ Anne in the 2007 film adaptation of the novel: the heroine no longer has the patience to wait for Captain Wentworth to initiate a conversation with her and, on seeing he is about to leave the concert hall, she dashes after him astonishing the entire assembly (Shergold 2007). Jane Austen, however, insists on passivity and when a couple of paragraphs later she reveals Anne’s regrets, she does it with the same passive construction:

She was persuaded that under every disadvantage of disapprobation at home, and every anxiety attending his profession, all their probable fears, delays, and disappointments, she should yet have been a happier woman in maintaining the engagement, than she had been in the sacrifice of it; ... (Austen 1833: 237).

It seems the heroine was now persuaded by her own feelings. This time it is Maria Rankova’s translation that ignores the author’s emphasis, probably in an attempt to distinguish between the past and the present:

*Смяташе*, че въпреки неприятностите, произтичащи от неодобрението на семейството ѝ, въпреки опасенията, свързани с професията на Уентуърт, въпреки всякакви страхове, колебания и разочарования, тя щеше да бъде пощастлива, ако не бе развалила годежа, ако не го беше пожертвала. (Остин 1992: 25, emphasis added)

Anne’s position with her own family is obviously not exactly rewarding. She does not care about “her noble family’s genealogy” (Todd 2009: 114), i.e. she does not share their values – in return they do not think much of her: she “was nobody with either father or sister; her word had no weight; her convenience was always to give way – she was only Anne” (Austen 1833: 217). Perceived differently by the Musgroves, she feels more at ease with them, it seems: Charles had proposed to her before making her sister Mary his wife, and his

family now wish she had accepted because they would have liked her better. At the same time she is very much aware of her own superiority: contemplating the happiness of the Musgrove girls, “she would not have given up her more elegant and cultivated mind for all their enjoyments” (Austen 1833: 248). This different positioning of the heroine with reference to the other characters can be traced in Austen’s choice of Active and Passive voice – upon her visit at Uppercross both Anne’s sister and her brother-in-law address her in turn as their confidante, and the requests she has to deal with invite persuasion:

“I wish you could persuade Mary not to be always fancying herself ill,” was Charles’s language; and, in an unhappy mood, thus spoke Mary: “I do believe if Charles were to see me dying, he would not think there was anything the matter with me. I am sure, Anne, if you would, you might persuade him that I really am very ill—a great deal worse than I ever own.” (Austen 1833: 251)

Here Anne is imagined in the active role of persuading the wife or the husband into what suits the one or the other, respectively. The linguistic expression of her importance in the changed context is the use of Active voice, but the distinction is lost in the Bulgarian translations of the novel for the lack of contrast with a previously used Passive voice.

Jane Austen’s take on “persuasion” is closely related to the fate of Louisa Musgrove. She is a young girl flirting with Captain Wentworth, much to Anne’s distress, who is still in love with him. In Chapter 10 Louisa declares: “I have no idea of being so easily persuaded. When I have made up my mind, I have made it” (Austen 1833: 290). In Walzer’s opinion, “The distinguishing values Louisa declares are not her own but reflect Wentworth’s, making her claim to a masculine resolution rather an instance of a stereotypical type of feminine suability” (Walzer 1995: 702). Her companion, the captain, does not recognise her position as an echo of his own, he marvels at her “fortitude and strength of mind” and celebrates her “character of decision and firmness” (Austen 1833: 290). In his understanding of the world, “it is the worst evil of too yielding and indecisive a character, that no influence over it can be depended on” (290). This, of course, is a comment on Anne, who was persuaded to believe he was not a good match. At the same time, it is deeply ironic that he makes a claim on her being influenced by him but not by others. As a result, to his mind, happiness is a direct consequence of being “firm” (290-291). Maria Rankova’s translation renders this leitmotif with words such as “непоколебимост и воля”, or “твърд и решителен характер”, and honours Wentworth’s complaint about Anne’s character by referring to the title: “Най-лошото при един податлив и нерешителен характер е, че не може да се разчита на въздействие върху него” (Остин 1992: 64, emphasis added). Thus, in the Bulgarian text of 1992, his “influence” has become the “persuasion” he laments – a befitting turn of phrase, which highlights the narrative irony, or as Kastely has phrased it, “Wentworth persists in valuing a firm and unpersuadable temper whose chief value is a conviction of the rightness of his own judgment” (Kastely 1997: 159).

Louisa’s firmness and resolution are more the wilfulness of a child and this is best illustrated with the accident in Lyme. The modal verbs “must be” and “had had to” emphasize her persistence, whereas the usage of “delightful” and “enjoyment” reveal that her behaviour was governed by the pleasure principle:

There was too much wind to make the high part of the new Cobb pleasant for the ladies, and they agreed to get down the steps to the lower, and all were contented to pass quietly and carefully down the steep flight, excepting Louisa: she must be jumped down them by Captain Wentworth. In all their walks he had had to jump her from the stiles; the sensation was delightful to her. The hardness of the pavement for her feet made him less willing upon the present occasion; he did it, however. She was safely down, and instantly to shew her enjoyment, ran up the steps to be jumped down again. He advised her against it, thought the jar too great; but no, he reasoned and talked in

vain, she smiled and said, "I am determined I will": he put out his hands; she was too precipitate by half a second, she fell on the pavement on the Lower Cobb, and was taken up lifeless! (Austen 1833: 310)

The episode demonstrates that Captain Wentworth was not prepared to deal with girly determination; complying with the stereotype of masculinity, he tried to reason with the girl; stereotypically, it was emotions that mattered to her; eventually, he just gave in. It is Austen's irony that the consequence should have been an injury to the head. And when, a couple of paragraphs later, Henrietta is "persuaded" to believe that there is no usefulness in her staying with her sister (314), it transpires that "persuasion" has acquired quite a positive connotation. To make this re-evaluation absolutely clear to the readers, before the end of the chapter, the narrator has Anne speculating about the effect of the tragic occurrence on Wentworth's beliefs:

Anne wondered whether it ever occurred to him now, to question the justness of his own previous opinion as to the universal felicity and advantage of firmness of character, and whether it might strike him, that, like all other qualities of the mind, it should have its proportions and limits. She thought it could scarcely escape him to feel that a persuadable temper might sometimes be as much in favour of happiness as a very resolute character. (Austen 1833: 317)

Judging the heroine's psychological reaction, Janet Todd maintains she is "no 'picture of perfection'" because "when Louisa Musgrove falls, and it is unclear whether she will live or die, at this moment of utmost distress Anne thinks of herself and Wentworth, almost gloating that he would now know the difference between obstinacy and steadiness" (Todd 2009: 125). Nonetheless, it is a realistic account of the workings of the imagination to compensate life's misfortunes. What is equally important is the message the narrator is getting across: nothing good comes out of excess, and both resolution and persuadability are fine if in moderation. That is to say, Austen challenges the Enlightenment values of eighteenth-century rhetoric and Walzer points this out in his essay:

But *Persuasion* does not bear out the confidence the theorists express in reason as a remedy to persuasion's problematic psychology. Although it is true that reason in Austen plays a salutary role as a reality check, that Anne's critical reason, in Bacon's terms, "buckles and bows down the mind to the nature of things" (8: 441), reason is not in itself a sufficient safeguard because it is for Austen an instrumental faculty that can serve Sir Walter's vanity and Wentworth's anger, as well as Anne's morally inspired self-command. [...] *Persuasion*, then, offers in a distinctly feminine voice a counter to a rhetorical theory grounded in a rationalist ethic. (Walzer 1995: 705)

Austen allows for the happiness of both "a persuadable temper" and "a very resolute character" and this is reminiscent of *Sense and Sensibility* – the closing paragraph of the earlier novel implies that the constant communication between Barton and Delaford stands for the constant communication between feelings and rationality and neither is to be preferred over the other on its own. *Persuasion*, however, is not as centred on its heroine as Austen's previous works, it is "nearly as much Wentworth's story as it is Anne's, and as such it is a gendered tale" (Walzer 1995: 704). This claim goes hand in hand with the refutation of a class reading of the plot: "the novel is less the story of the ascendancy of Captain Wentworth than of his domestication into conventionally female ways of knowing" (689).

Unfortunately, the strategy of this domestication has been lost in translation – Bulgarian readers would have no problem with the implications of the narrative, but the connotations of Jane Austen's language have not survived the transfer. By Chapter 14, Captain Wentworth appears to have taken up the art of persuasion himself: he "wanted to persuade Captain Benwick to go with him" to Plymouth (Austen 1833: 330). The Bulgarian verb does not do justice to the distinction: "убеждавал капитан Бенуик да го придружи"

(Остин 1992: 94), or “да убеди капитан Бенуик да отиде с него” (Остин 1996: 109). In Chapter 22 the stereotypes are literally overturned: “Their last meeting had been most important in opening his feelings: *she* had derived from it a delightful *conviction*; but she feared from his looks, that the same unfortunate *persuasion*, which had hastened *him* away from the Concert Room, still governed” (Austen 1833: 411, emphasis added). The role reversal is not only at the level of their reactions to Louisa’s fall in Chapter 12, which Kastely interprets as challenging “the myth of male competence and female helplessness” (Kastely 1997: 161) – the rhetorical affiliations of “conviction” and “persuasion” have been changed; we are reminded of Anne’s “elegant and cultivated mind” (Austen 1833: 248) and become aware of Wentworth’s passions. Once again, without the fine stylistic juxtaposition, the Bulgarian texts remain roughly approximate:

Последната им среща беше много важна, тъй като ѝ разкри чувствата му и ѝ вдъхна приятна *увереност*. Но изражението му я уплаши, че същата злощастна *мисъл*, накара я го тъй бързо да напусне концертната зала, все още го владее” (Остин 1992: 156, emphasis added)

Последният път, когато се видяха, беше от особено значение за нея, тъй като успя да вникне донякъде в неговите чувства и това ѝ даваше основания за известна *увереност*, но съдейки по погледа му, Ан се страхуваше, че той все още е подвластен на онова злощастно *убеждение*, което го бе принудило да напусне преждевременно концертната зала.” (Остин 1996: 186, emphasis added).

The Bulgarian pairs of words (“*увереност – мисъл*” and “*увереност – убеждение*”) have not been attached to “conviction – persuasion” consistently enough in order to establish a pattern and make it recognisable.

No doubt, Jane Austen displays a feminine take on the world and does so with erudition and artistry. Her novel, however, is no feminist-revolution manifesto. The ending is quite traditional with the heroine settling in a patriarchal society: the only profession available to her at the end of the story is a “sailor’s wife” (Austen 1833: 440). Yet, even if the lady author did not transform social mores, she challenged stereotypes. She defied the gendered construal “representing good writing as masculine virtue and weak writing as a feminine subversion that undermines a manly enterprise” (Brody 1993: 3) – according to no lesser critic than F. R. Leavis, “Jane Austen, in fact, is the inaugurator of the great tradition of the English novel” (Leavis 1966: 16). One of the amazing achievements of *Persuasion* is the hologram effect – the narrative is encoded in the use of “persuasion” and “conviction” as a binary opposition. The Bulgarian translations of the words do not echo the story line but the message is still there – as with holograms, the whole can be seen in the fragment.

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