

**MATTHEW REYNOLDS
AND OTHERS**

PRISMATIC JANE EYRE

**Close-Reading a World
Novel Across Languages**



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VIII. Conclusions

Matthew Reynolds

We invite each reader to draw their own conclusions from this volume, and hopefully to re-draw them in the course of an ongoing conversation with it. Here are some of the conclusions that I have drawn, as prompts to that activity.

Reading in world-literary contexts means reading heterolingually.

Reading heterolingually entails reading collaboratively. This can be a matter of actual interpersonal collaboration (I think there should be more translingual shared reading projects like this one) but it can also be a disposition of mind.

Understanding in world-literary contexts is necessarily incomplete, and this incompleteness should be welcomed.

Abridgement is fundamental to *Jane Eyre's* existence in the world, and probably to that of all world novels.

The distinction between translations and other kinds of re-writing, such as versions and adaptations, is pragmatic; but it still has value because a translation makes a claim on the identity of the work.

A world work consists of the originary text and all its translations together.

Translation moves through language difference, not between languages; it participates in the organisation and regulation of language difference.

Texts are written with repertoires, not in languages.

Jane Eyre's multilingual repertoire takes on salience in a world-literary context. No one translation known to me is as heterolingual as the text that Brontë wrote; but together the translations constitute a massive realisation of the heterolingual potential of the source.

Re-publication of an existing translation in a new place can play an important role in the diffusion of the work: it is an ‘act of translation’.

Jane Eyre translation has sometimes been promoted as part of a programme of English soft power (as in Greece after World War II).

But more often the choice to translate is an active one on the part of writers and publishers in the ingurgitative culture.

In these cases, translation can be a vehicle for imaginative and ideological freedom (as in Spain under Franco, or Iran after the 1979 revolution).

Translations in India and South America have reconfigured the racist portrayal of Bertha Rochester, diffusing and defusing it. This matters to the politics of the work.

Jane Eyre has had a powerful feminist impact in many contexts, such as late C19th Portugal and 1940s South America.

Abridgement can reveal what readers feel to be the core of the work; equally, censorship can indicate its moments of sharpest ideological challenge, by erasing them.

Thinking about the absence of translations from a language or culture (as of *Jane Eyre* from Swahili) is also a revealing literary historical exercise.

Aspects of the novel can grow when it is moved into a medium that has specific sensitivities and affordances, as with the vocabulary of touching in Arabic, proper nouns in Chinese, and *Sie* and *du* in German.

On the other hand, Brontë’s text can hold out challenges which translators have not yet found a way to meet — as with the Biblical and other intertextualities, and French translations of the French in the novel.

Perhaps the most complex mode of reading afforded by the linguistic plurality of a world work is when translations are found to pursue interesting departures from their sources, and in so doing give new visibility to what they are departing from — as in the handling of free indirect speech across German and Slovenian, the imagining of appearance in Russian, and the presentation of narratorial selfhood in Estonian. The prismatic texts (including the source) can be read in themselves, and in their differences from one another, together.

This case study reveals something that is true of all translation, and that entails collaborative and open-ended practices of research and writing.

All translation invites a littoral reading.

All translation is prismatic translation.