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REVIEW

## Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* in Danish: An Analysis of Translators' Practice

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ARTICLE INFO

*Article history*

Received: 29 June 2022

Revised: 8 August 2022

Accepted: 12 August 2022

Published Online: 22 August 2022

*Keywords:*

Literary translation

Translation criticism

Charlotte Brontë

*Jane Eyre*

Danish

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ABSTRACT

In this article the Danish translations of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) are discussed, focusing on the two most often reprinted Danish translations from respectively 1850 and 1944, while treating in less detail the remaining five translations of *Jane Eyre*. The approach is analytical, and the aim is to provide original research by demonstrating that all the translators except the very recent ones have severely edited and abridged their translations and taken liberties unheard of in modern literary translation. Finally, a brief comparison with Danish translations of other Victorian classics is offered.

### 1. Introduction

It is well known that many literary classics have been adapted for young readers, e.g. as easy readers. It is less known that there is also a tradition for editing classics when translating these for adult readers, not only in the 19th century and earlier, but also well into the 20th century. In this article *Jane Eyre* translations into Danish are

analyzed, and it is demonstrated that they were not only translated, but also edited in significant ways. The main part of the article will focus on two translations and try to establish what translators' and editors' choices have been made, and what the most conspicuous results of these are. The approach will be more analytical than theoretical, although some terms and ideas from translation theory are

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.55121/card.v2i2.35>

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employed.<sup>①</sup>

There are 7 Danish translations of *Jane Eyre*, the first one from 1850 and the latest two from 2015 and 2016. The focus here will be on two translations that have had a long life in the Danish libraries and bookshops. First, Aslaug Mikkelsen's 1944 translation that has been re-published at least seven times, and that can still at present be acquired in an edition from 2011. It thus remained the main translation on the market from its year of publication until very recently, when two new translations appeared. Secondly, an anonymous translation from 1905 is analysed. This translation also appears to have had a long life on the market, republished in both 1909 and 1911.<sup>②</sup>

## 2. Møller's and Horten's Translations

The other translations have been considered in less detail, but they will be characterized briefly before the main analysis. Vilhelm Møller's 1884 translation deviates substantially from the source text, but it is very clearly an adaptation for young readers. Møller gives many of the characters Danish names, and even the dog Pilot appears as "Hektor". The chapters are given names such as "Mit barndomshjem" [My childhood home] and "Ankomst til Thornfield" [Arrival at Thornfield], and 38 chapters are reduced to 18. Generally, domestication and simplification strategies like these appear, Møller also cutting out complexities such as Jane's reading matters and the novel's inclusion of French and German. There is a bit of French included in the representation of Adele's language, but it is translated in parentheses. From a modern point of view the funniest of many abridgments concerns love scenes such as the final one between Jane and Rochester, where some five pages of their love conversation are cut out, including Jane's statement that "he kissed me repeatedly".

Also Sofie Horten's 1894 translation adds chapter titles to help readers follow the progress of Jane's destiny, for instance "Det hemmelighedsfulde Væsen" [the mysterious creature] when we get to the Bertha Mason part. This is a pedagogical device, but the translation appears as less directed at young readers than Møller's. Thus Jane's reading matters before being sent to the red room are in fact partly

included in the translation. Also Adele's French is duly included and translated into Danish in parenthesis, whereas no German can be found in Horten's translation. Songs are also edited out, and there are many other abridgments, notably in Jane's reflections. Two examples of this are Jane's thoughts about Grace Poole in chapter 16 and her shamefulness about reporting the state of her poverty to the reader in chapter 28. The effect of editing out such passages is of course that we get less insight into Jane's personal feelings. Strikingly, and in the same vein, Horten also reduces Jane's finally speaking up against Mrs Reed in chapter 4 to a mere one paragraph. Horten has taken care not to miss a word in the action-packed scenes, but has seriously cut down Jane's conversation with her reader about her feelings and thoughts. This can also be seen in the translation's cutting out of the direct reader addresses, including the final chapter's famous "Reader, I married him."

## 3. The First Anonymous Translation and the Most Recent Translations by Rohde and Hemmer Pihl

The first anonymous translation from 1850 is in fact fairly loyal to the source text. The cover only gives the author name Curren Bell, which is understandable only three years after the original *Jane Eyre*, but it is strange that a republication of the translation in 1897 also does not include Charlotte Brontë's name. There are some, but not many domestication strategies, although Helen Burns appears as Helene and Adele as Adela. German is altogether and French partly cut out. Songs by Bessie and Rochester are edited out and replaced by brief summaries of their content. There are some other, but not that many abridgments, the translator having a liberal attitude to sometimes passing over a paragraph or two, notably in descriptions of nature. Apparently the translator was not fond of the St. John part of the novel, for the first time in the translation abridging more heavily. Thus in chapter 35 two whole pages are not translated.

It will appear so far that all the 19th and early 20th century translations followed a tradition of translating classics with various degrees of taking liberties, some more sensible than others. At the end of this article the question of whether the *Jane Eyre* translations were typical in this respect is answered further, but already here it can be established that there is a striking difference between this tradition and a modern one, as shown by the two most recent translations of *Jane Eyre* by Christiane Rohde and Luise Hemmer Pihl from respectively 2015 and 2016. Both can be characterized generally as full translations, and good ones at that. Charlotte Brontë's original text is

① I have elsewhere carried out analysis more directly on the basis of literary translation theory (e.g. Klitgård 2013)<sup>[1]</sup>, but for a short article like the present one, I prefer to follow the more exclusively analytical approach of such studies as J.E. Nielsen's on Dickens translations into Danish (Nielsen 2009)<sup>[2]</sup>.

② The 1911 edition has a cover illustration by well-known Danish painter Gerda Wegener (1885-1940), but it is not possible to verify that she is also the translator. In her portrait of Wegener in *Dansk kvindebiografisk leksikon* [Danish encyclopedia for women's biographies] Mona Jensen does not include translation as one of Wegener's activities, but the book cover's inscription does allow for the possibility that Wegener also translated *Jane Eyre*<sup>[3]</sup>.

clearly respected by both translators, and even songs are translated. French and German passages are kept as such, and there are no avoidance or abridgment strategies. Despite their differences and various small errors it is clear that readers now have a possibility of reading all of *Jane Eyre* in Danish.

#### 4. Analysis of Mikkelsen's 1944 Translation

However, it is now time to analyse more carefully the two most often reprinted editions that library goers and bookshoppers might accidentally still come across when picking up a Danish *Jane Eyre*. First Aslaug Mikkelsen's 1944 translation, where not all of the reprints and republications of this translation mention that Mikkelsen also edited the text. But she certainly did. It appears that Aslaug Mikkelsen and her publisher agreed to edit *Jane Eyre*, lose between 50 and 100 pages, and avoid otherwise necessary textual notes for Danish readers. At least this is what happened.

In the first three chapters some of the main abridgments concern Jane's childhood reading. Most of the books, such as Goldsmith's history of Rome, are simply not mentioned. Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* is mentioned, but Jane's reaction to reading it is cut out. Bessie's nursery rhyme and Abbot's comparison of Jane with Guy Fawkes are both cut out, as is the mention of Welsh rabbit and roast onion. In other words a domestication strategy and an attempt not to challenge the reader with foreign concepts.

Also in the first chapters we get examples of a remarkable translator's strategy of avoiding Jane's often extensive reflections, such as her thoughts on poverty in chapter three. Examples in later chapters include her thoughts on the Bible in chapter four, many of her thoughts on nature, illness and Helen Burns in chapter 9, and her speculations about Mrs Fairfax in chapter 11. Even her reflections after first meeting Mr Rochester in chapters 12-14, and her first thoughts on the subject of loving him in chapters 16-17 are seriously abridged. Thus a full page in chapter 16 (page 227) beginning "Listen, Jane Eyre..." where Jane rebukes herself for drawing Blanche Ingram is cut out. No less than four pages of a long reflection on nature in chapter 36 are cut out. The translator, it seems, wants to avoid long narratorial reflections, but the result is serious damage done to Charlotte Brontë's eminent writing art. There is much lost in translation concerning Jane's self-reflection, but one final example will have to suffice here. This is from one of the most painful episodes in the novel, chapter 26, where Jane is preparing to leave Thornfield in despair after the discovery of the truth about Bertha Mason. Many readers will have found the end of that chapter both deep in thought and almost poetic. Not so Mikkelsen,

who cuts away half of it.

Many chapters, such as chapters 5-7, 24-5, 28 and the last two chapters, have been abridged to such a small degree that one wonders why they were abridged at all. However, it is still necessary to pay attention to the few changes that occur, such as Mikkelsen leaving out Jane's statement about Adele in the final chapter: "Sound English education corrected in a great measure her French defects." Mikkelsen may share with some modern readers a belief that this is not exactly politically correct and even chauvinistic, but this - and more - is what we find in the novel, and it is of course a part of its universe.

As a translator Mikkelsen thus allows herself to be the judge of what should be translated. Another example of this appears in numerous deletions suggesting that Mikkelsen does not like Jane's emotional addresses to the reader. Thus this passage from the end of chapter 27 is not translated: "Gentle reader, may you never feel what I then felt! May your eyes never shed such stormy, scalding, heart-wrung tears as poured from mine. May you never appeal to Heaven in prayers so hopeless and so agonized as in that hour left my lips: for never may you, like me, dread to be the instrument of evil to what you wholly love." (461) This melodramatic style of writing, also known from other writers of the time, not least Dickens, fell out of fashion later. Mikkelsen made sure it could not be found in her translations.

I have elsewhere written both about Mikkelsen's four Hardy translations and her translation of George Eliot's *Adam Bede*, where domestication and simplification strategies can also be seen, and where there are some abridgments, but Mikkelsen's *Jane Eyre* goes one step further<sup>[4,5]</sup>. Mikkelsen's skills as a translator are actually good, but here she is making Danish novel readers believe they are reading a great classic when in fact they are reading an amputated classic.

In order to offer some explanation for Mikkelsen's stand, her books with introductions to classic 19th century female writers have been consulted, published in respectively 1942, 1953 and 1959<sup>[6-8]</sup>. Although ostensibly scholarly studies, the books lack precise documentation in the form of notes and references, and Mikkelsen frequently reads life into works after a now long outdated fashion. When writing about particular novels, Mikkelsen mixes plot summary with subjective evaluation of character - and little else. Her 1953 book on the Brontë sisters includes short chapters on each Brontë novel, and the seven pages on *Jane Eyre* are characteristic of her writing. Almost half of the chapter is plot summary, more or less the rest is on characters. Mikkelsen likes the novel and acknowledges its influence, but says that it has "iøjnespringende Man-

gler” [obvious mistakes] (Mikkelsen 1953: 162). Among these, according to Mikkelsen, is the novel’s use of melodrama (Mikkelsen 1953: 167) - and as we have seen in the translation analysis, this has had consequences for her editing. Besides not liking melodrama, Mikkelsen is not at all fond of Mr Rochester, and she actually accuses Charlotte Brontë of lacking the psychological insight to depict a character like Mr Rochester (Mikkelsen 1953: 170). As demonstrated in my study of the Danish George Eliot reception, this is more or less exactly what Mikkelsen also has to say about George Eliot in *Middlemarch* (Klitgård 2016: 127). In conclusion Aslaug Mikkelsen thinks she knows better about human beings and quality in writing than Charlotte Brontë and George Eliot, and with this opinion she allows herself to service the reader of her translations with abridgments.

## 5. Analysis of the Anonymous 1905 Translation

Turning now to the 1905 translation, similar explanations cannot be offered, since it is anonymous. However, this translator generally cuts out less than Mikkelsen, if not much less. And again it is possible to find subjective and active choices in the translator’s strategy. Among the least surprising changes considering the time of the translation are the domestication strategies, such as changing Bessie’s name to Betty. Also the choice of leaving out songs is understandable. And also in this translation there are simplifications in Jane’s reading matters, where the alternative would have been footnotes. However, these simplifications continue throughout and also include colourful details that the author unlike the translator must have cared about. Just a few examples: In chapter 11 Jane talks about “my black frock, which Quaker-like as it was”, and the translator just deletes this description. In the same chapter the mention of the name of French teacher Madame Pierrot is cut out, as is Adele’s mention of La Fontaine. These examples could also be seen as part of a general attitude on the part of the translator that it is not necessary to be too accurate in translating. At times this involves mistakes such as translating “dusting” in chapter 4 (40) by “rede sengene” [making the beds] (19). Often inaccuracy is in fact the main impression that my analysis has revealed.

More important, however, are the deletions and abridgments of extensive parts of the novel. A lot of the dialogue is cut out, such as Bessie’s and Abbot’s conversation about Georgina at the end of chapter 3 and some parts of Jane’s and Bessie’s dialogue in chapter 4. However, as in Mikkelsen’s translation, some more drastic cuts concern Jane’s self-reflections. In chapters 5-7 Jane’s reflections

on her fears, on punishment, on Christianity and on Helen Burns are seriously abridged. In chapter 10 six pages on Jane thoughts about leaving Lowood are abridged to only one and a half. And in chapter 12 three pages where Jane considers her new life at Thornfield are abridged to one page. The most remarkable cuts, however, appear during Jane’s stay with St. John and his sisters, where three full chapters, 30-32, and major parts of chapters 33-34 have been taken out and replaced by short linking summaries. Jane’s education alongside Diana and Mary, as well as her life as a school teacher is thus no longer part of the novel, and St. John does not stand out very clearly as a character.

Whereas these serious changes to the novel of course can be regretted, it has to be said that at least some parts of it have been well translated. This goes for the grand finale where Jane’s conversation with Mr Rochester is fully included, and where there is even a rather funny translator’s addition, “det var Hr. Rochester, min egen elskede Edward Fairfax Rochester” [it was Mr Rochester, my own beloved E.F.R.] (189) where the original only says “it was my master, Edward Fairfax Rochester, and no other.”

It appears that the translator is interested in the love story and not in St. John and his sisters, and also that the general translator’s strategy includes subjective preferences of other kinds. Perhaps somewhat surprisingly this translator, as opposed to other translators considered in this paper, has taken a keen interest in the charade games at Thornfield. This rather long scene has been translated in full, and moreover one of the rare notes in the translation explains why “Bridewell” is the appropriate answer to end a charade.

## 6. Conclusions

In general conclusion this article has demonstrated that the two most often reprinted translations of *Jane Eyre* in Denmark, as well as a number of other translations have not lived up to the requirements for literary translation. It remains to consider whether this was typical for Danish translations of British classics from the period. The hopefully comforting preliminary answer is no, by far the most of the translations do not commit literary murder. Thus my earlier investigations of George Eliot and Thomas Hardy translations proved them to be fairly accurate, with one or two exceptions, and it can now be added that the early translations of Thackeray’s *Barry Lyndon* and *Vanity Fair* are downright impressive. The same goes for most of the Dickens translations consulted by critics Dominic Rainford and Jørgen Erik Nielsen, although Nielsen in his book-length study of Dickens in Denmark does include some odd adaptations, such as one version of *Oliver Twist* that begins with Oliver walking to London, no poorhouse

scenes included (Rainsford 2013, Nielsen 2009: 41) <sup>[9]</sup>.

Although much more research is needed to characterize Danish literary translation further, this article will end by stating that also translation practice in other countries needs to be researched further, and that it would be interesting to know how many liberties have been taken elsewhere.

### **Conflict of Interest**

There is no conflict of interest.

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