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SARAH AUSTIN'S TRANSNATIONAL ADVOCACY FOR NATIONAL EDUCATION IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY EUROPE

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Abstract – This article examines the pioneering work of the British writer Sarah Austin (née Taylor, 1793-1867) who, in the nineteenth century, asserted her intellectual and political agency as a translator. A highly acclaimed interpreter of innovative philosophical and scholarly texts originally produced in French and German, Austin ascertained the high-level competence and agency crucial to producing a text for monolingual readers and the significant role that translation plays in stimulating social, political, and cultural change. Notably, translation skills were at the basis of her enduring contribution to shaping the discourse on national education in nineteenth-century Britain, which started with her translation into English of Victor Cousin's *Rapport sur l'État de l'instruction publique dans quelques pays de l'Allemagne et particulièrement en Prusse* (1833). This article reclaims her engagement with intellectual and political debates on compulsory education as a transnational, plurilingual advocate for primary education, and demonstrates how translation activism sustains archival research that recovers women's agency and revises historiographies of translation studies. It focuses on Austin's *Report on The State of Public Instruction in Prussia* (1834) together with *On National Education* (1839) and *Two Letters on Girls' Schools and on the Training of Working Women* (1857) to show how, in the nineteenth century, Austin understands that, in the words of Patricia Hill Collins, "honing skills of translation constitutes both an important intellectual challenge and a political necessity" (in Castro, Ergun 2017, p. xii). In *Women and Education, 1800-1980* (2004), Jane Martin and Joyce Goodman claim a place for Austin in the British history of education. This article asserts her innovative contribution with her distinctive act of cross-cultural literary production to widen our understanding of her transnational legacy as an advocate of primary education by examining specifically her translation theory and practice along with her writing on national education and women's education.

Keywords: activism; national education; transnationalism; Victor Cousin; William E. Gladstone.

1. Introduction

In the nineteenth century, translating afforded the British writer Sarah Austin authorship, agency, and financial independence. Most significantly, the skills she honed as a translator empowered her to contribute to intellectual and political debates on national education transnationally. From the beginning of

her long and successful career in the 1820s, she believed in the agency of the translator as a cultural mediator, and as a promoter of social and cultural change. She asserted her intellectual and political agency by disseminating literature and new thinking from France and Germany in particular. Her practice fostered an active, authoritative role for the woman translator. A highly acclaimed translator, she anticipated approaches to agency and visibility that scholars such as Sherry Simon, Luise von Flotow, and Barbara Godard have identified in feminist translators. Her status as a translator was noticeable from the beginning of the 1830s, for Austin's name appeared on the title page of her work and her initials signed prefaces that outlined her decision making. Although she fulfilled Victorian gendered expectations by identifying herself as a "mere translator" (Austin 1832, p. viii) in the prefaces, her paratexts simultaneously exhibit her acute awareness of the politics of translation, along with her intellectual knowledge. They state her agency in creating the target texts, interpreting the source texts, promoting her political views, and assessing the socio-cultural conditions of Victorian Britain. She chose translation as a tool to stimulate change and, as her translation practice demonstrates, her pioneering experiments remain relevant almost two centuries later in reconfiguring a historiography of translation studies and of translation theory that takes into account women's intellectual agency and activism. Significantly, Austin "navigated linguistic, cultural and epistemological communities that were not equal" (Hill Collins 2017, p. xiv), to shape the nineteenth-century debates on national education in her native England and in Europe.

This article reclaims her lasting engagement with intellectual and political debates on education as a transnational, plurilingual advocate for compulsory primary education. Through the lens of translation activism, it establishes how Austin's commitment to national education represents a continuous thread in her writing career, linking her translation practice with her political activities, and her theory of translation with her moral values. Moreover, it maintains that translation activism assists archival research which revises historiographies of translation studies. Austin translated into English significant new work, both on the science of education and on the implementation of national education policy, produced in France and Germany. By gathering this material, she connected major thinkers and politicians across linguistic and national borders. She also promoted national educational reform in Britain through writing reviews, articles, and editorials, as well as lobbying relevant politicians such as William Ewart Gladstone, with whom she communicated for three decades, from 1839 to at least 1864,[1]

[1] In Janet Ross's *Three Generations of English Women: Memoirs and Correspondence of John Taylor, Mrs Sarah Austin, and Lady Duff Gordon* (1888 and 1893), the first of Austin's letters to Gladstone is dated 1839, but in an earlier letter, dated 1838, she writes to Victor Cousin of

before he became the British prime minister whose government passed the first Elementary Education Act in 1870. Their correspondence exemplifies what in *The Times* obituary is defined as "[t]he power she exercised in society" (1867, p. 10). Austin's advice on the latest research on education studies and on educational texts was sought after by many in her transnational, plurilingual circles. In *Three Generations of English Women: Memoirs and Correspondence of John Taylor, Mrs Sarah Austin, and Lady Duff Gordon* (1888),[2] her granddaughter, Janet Ross (née Duff Gordon, 1842-1927), tells Austin's life story through a selection of her correspondence with some of the most influential national and international thinkers of her time. Ross emphasizes that "[t]he chief interest of her life was Popular Education" (Ross 1893, p. 99) and highlights this thread through Austin's letters to friends, intellectuals, and politicians who shared her interest in this cause, but only briefly mentions her publications. This article examines three of her works that are central to understanding Austin's transnational activism: *Report on The State of Public Instruction in Prussia* (1834), *On National Education* (1839), and *Two Letters on Girls' Schools and on the Training of Working Women* (1857). Austin's life-long advocacy for national education, it argues, is crucial to a wider study of her agency as a Victorian woman translator.

2. Shaping intellectual and political debates in nineteenth-century Europe

In *The Routledge Handbook of Translation and Activism* (2020), Rebecca Ruth Gould and Kayvan Tahmasebian reflect on the agency of "translators, activists, and academics concerned with the politics of language-labour" in our present time (2020, p. 1). It is interesting that, in the nineteenth century, Austin faces similar concerns and uses the term *labour* to describe both her work as a translator and her lobbying for primary education. In her prefaces to two 1833 publications, *Selections from the Old Testament, or the Religion, Morality, and Poetry of The Hebrew Scriptures Arranged under Heads* and *Characteristics of Goethe*, for example, she calls her publications "my humble labour" (Austin 1833a, p. iii) and "this humble attempt" (Austin 1833b, p. xlii) respectively. In a letter to the French historian and politician

Gladstone's involvement in the discussions held by young Conservative party members regarding the reform of church schools. See Ross's 1893 *Three Generations of English Women*, pp. 141-143.

[2] In 1893, a second edition was published by T. Fisher Unwin under the title, *Three Generations of English Women: Memoirs and Correspondence of Susannah Taylor, Sarah Austin, and Lady Duff Gordon*. I cite from the second edition. See Capancioni (2017) on Ross's multigenerational, matrilinear epistolary biography.

François Guizot (1787-1874), she describes her gratification in being awarded an annual pension of £100 in the 1849 Civil List and her "pride and satisfaction" in accepting it as "proof that my humble labours have been thought useful" (Ross 1893, p. 235). Writing to Gladstone, in view of the cause of public education that unites them across political differences, Austin identifies herself as "so humble a fellow-labourer" (Ross 1893, p. 144) and "the humblest of your fellow-labourers" (p. 283). Her epigraph in *On National Education* also associates her choice of the term *labour* with John Milton's *Areopagitica* (1644), a pamphlet within which he argues that those who are at the service of the British nation, such as the members of the House of Commons and the House of Lords, ought to be "wise and faithful labourers" (Austin 1839, p. 108).[3] Like Milton, Austin sees her country as a nation pursuing knowledge beyond the interests of political parties. Whilst labour used as a noun stresses the significance of her agency, her active participation in the publishing industry; the adjective *humble* resonates with the tensions between Victorian ideals of womanhood and her professional, public status as a woman writer. By qualifying her work through humility, Austin balances cautiously her authorial voice as a competent translator who disseminates new and potentially controversial European ideas, such as Victor Cousin's *Rapport sur l'État de l'instruction publique dans quelques pays de l'Allemagne et particulièrement en Prusse* (1833), with the expectations of Victorian gender norms in both standards of content and authorship. Gendering labour through feminine qualities, she softens the representation of her intellectual ingenuity but, simultaneously, claims her authorship as a visible translator. In her long, scholarly prefaces, which today give access to her translation practice and theory, Austin articulates her authorial identity and her understanding of the Victorian publishing market, within which she knows the "translator's task is, indeed, fleeting and fragile" (Bhabha 2021, p. x). The literary scholar Judith Johnston, for instance, notices Austin's "business-like and capable approach" (2013, p. 62) in her correspondence with the publisher John Murray II. Austin was experienced in suggesting projects directly to publishers, identifying profitable projects through which she could also raise the profile of the cause she sustained.

As a public education labourer, Austin disseminates relevant materials produced by European intellectuals involved in researching and writing policies on national education because she is aware of their timeliness in shaping the climate of the debate on the subject. This is an "important characteristic of activist translation" (2020, p. 4) in the opinion of Gould and Tahmasebian, who discuss how activist translators know how to motivate readers, they need to "reconfigure" their translations in the times and

[3] Milton's words are cited here directly from Austin's *On National Education* (1839).

circumstances in which they produce them (p. 4). Austin may not indisputably fit into one of the four paradigms they identify in *The Routledge Handbook of Translation and Activism* but, in advocating national education, she displays some of the characteristics of the translation activist as a pioneer of new thinking, including reconfiguring her work for a target audience under time pressure. The obituary in *The Times* summarizes her writing career by locating her authorial voice in her prefaces:

> Mrs Austin never aspired to original literary composition. Except in some of the prefaces to her translations, she disclaimed all right to address the public in her own person. She, therefore, devoted the singular power of her pen to reproduce in English many of the best contemporary works of German and French literature. (Anon. 1867, p. 10)

The exceptional quality of her translations is also praised in *The Athenaeum* obituary. In this literary magazine, which published her work, they suggest that her texts are "not so much translations as reproductions in another language of her French and German originals" (1867, p. 209). Moreover, with a definition that recalls her assessment of Goethe as *the Artist* in *Characteristics of Goethe* (Austin 1833, p. xxiii), she is hailed as a "complete, selected and distinguished literary artist" (1867, p. 209). Austin's "humble labour", this article contends, also brings to light her role as an activist translator who contributed to political change by developing the discourse of national education in the nineteenth century and connecting the most relevant contemporary minds and stakeholders to advocate national and compulsory education from an early age as the basis of equal opportunities.

Austin's advocacy for national education is central to assessing her intellectual and political agency as a pioneering translator who relied on translation as an intentional "socially-activist activity" (Flotow 2011, p. 4). In 2002, the historian Joyce Goodman studied Austin's writing on national education within the context of nineteenth-century England and comparative education; then, in *Women and Education, 1800-1980* (2004), which she co-authored with Jane Martin, she claimed a place for Austin in the British history of education. This article examines her translation theory and practice along with her writing on national education and on women's education to widen our understanding of her transnational legacy as an advocate of primary education. It examines her "translation literacy" (Bertacco, Vallorani 2021, p. 9) and how it is central to her intellectual and political agency. In *The Relocation of Culture: Translations, Migrations, Borders* (2021), Simona Bertacco and Nicoletta Vallorani propose translation literacy as a "critical literacy […] that can be established by seeing translation as an experimental and epistemological condition of human life" (p. 16). Intersecting translation and migration studies, they conceptualize translation "as a relocating act: of meanings and texts, but also people and cultures" (p. 1), emphasizing the

constant and multiple ways in which processes of translation are inherent, not only in communicating and expressing the complexities of human experience but also in seeing the nuanced intricacies of the world. They affirm translation "as a foundational epistemological and communicative mode, a condition of living, and as one of the most important processes that train us to become cultural agents" (p. 22). Austin's wide-ranging use of translation speaks of the way in which it provides her with a method of deciphering her European cultural, social, and political contexts "translingually" (Bertacco, Vallorani 2021, p. 16) and transnationally.

This study of Austin's translation activism also adds to the "European gender and translation map" Eleonora Federici and José Santaemilia propose in *New Perspectives on Gender and Translation: New Voices for Transnational Dialogues* (2022), a book that validates the diverse potential for polyphonic translational dialogues and negotiations promoted by the practice and theory of European women translators. In my contribution to this volume, I investigate Austin's legacy in the long nineteenth century by recovering her model for women translators as transnational "interpreters of cultures" (Capancioni 2022, p. 45) to her daughter, Lucie Duff Gordon (née Austin, 1821-1869), and granddaughter, Ross. Here my focus is on Austin's strategies as an advocate for primary education and the centrality of European geopolitics. Her work projects a nineteenth-century map of Europe as a multilingual transnational network to which women are active contributors. Her understanding of the diverse, multilingual theories and policies on national education is at the core of her comparative studies. It is also vital for her ability to promote, sustain, and broaden the discussion on the subject. It is through these strategic dynamics that her work attests to her active and visible agency in producing and circulating knowledge within a European geography of networks that connect across linguistic, national, cultural, and political borders.

After Ross's multigenerational family biography was published towards the end of the nineteenth century, Lotte and Joseph Hamburger reignited an interest in Austin's life with *Troubled Lives: John and Sarah Austin* in 1985 and *Contemplating Adultery: The Secret Life of a Victorian Woman* in 1992. Scholarly attention for Austin as a Victorian translator has developed from the end of twentieth century, starting with Christopher Schweitzer (1996), who appraised Austin's contribution to the studies of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe focusing on her *Characteristics of Goethe* (1833), a volume that stems from her translation of Johann Falk von Müller's reminiscences of Goethe, and comprises relevant selected resources, including memoirs, articles, and a literature review of scholarly works on

Goethe published in German.[4] Johnston (1997, 2008, 2013) has acknowledged how Austin, together with Thomas Carlyle and Samuel Coleridge, "spearheaded an industry that introduced German intellectual thought into England" (2008, p. 101) and established an excellent reputation as a successful translator. She mostly examined Austin's translation of Hermann Pückler-Muskau's German bestseller *Briefe eines Verstorbenen*, entitled *Tour in England, Ireland, and France in the Years 1828 and 1829* (1832).[5] The latter and *Characteristics of Goethe* made Austin's reputation as a leading English translator of German contemporary literature, one who was both popular and critically well received: in 1832, Pückler-Muskau "became a literary sensation, earning more from world-wide sales than any other German author of his day, except Goethe" (Hamburger, Hamburger 1994, p. 107); in 1833, *Characteristics of Goethe* secured her reputation as an excellent translator of German literature, whose "elegance of expression, […] felicitous rendering of each original phrase by its English counterpart, at once with accuracy and freedom" was praised (Merivale 1833, p. 372).

Advocating for national education characterizes Austin's life and writing, and the three texts which span her career are key to understanding the significance of this commitment and they illuminate differences and similarities in her approach to translation activism as well as those of her political views. Together with her English translation of Victor Cousin's study titled *Report on The State of Public Instruction in Prussia*, *On National Education* and *Two Letters on Girls' Schools and on the Training of Working Women* exemplify the ways in which she produced timely texts for her target audience, whom she addressed directly in her prefaces. Johnston has previously observed that, "[u]nlike most women translators in this period Austin produced lengthy explanatory prefaces to her translations" (2013, p. 73). *On National Education* and *Two Letters on Girls' Schools and on the Training of Working Women* also present explanatory prefaces that provide an insight into Austin's agency as a cultural mediator for the wider English readership, showing her capable of astute publishing decisions to reach a general English readership. In 1839, for instance, she seized the opportunity to reissue parts of an article that had appeared four years before in *Cochrane's Foreign Quarterly Review* under the title *National System of Education in France* (1835), in *On National Education*. In a letter to Gladstone, then Member of Parliament for Newark,[6] she seeks his advice on

[4] A second edition was published in 1836 under the title *Goethe and his Contemporaries*.

[5] The source text was first published anonymously and when Austin's translation was released it did so without her name, but her abilities were already recognisable because reviewers acknowledged that she was the translator. See Johnston (2008, 2013).

[6] Before serving four terms as Prime Minister, Gladstone was a member of Peele's cabinet and Chancellor of the Exchequer.

publishing *On National Education*, explaining that she approached John Murray to "reprint [the article] separately" because the review "died at its birth" and her "article was buried with it" (Ross 1893, p. 149). Only two issues of the *Cochrane's Foreign Quarterly Review*, founded by John George Cochrane in 1835 (Stephen 1887), were published and, in her letter, Austin voices her paramount interest in disseminating previously unpublished material on the implementation of national education in France, including "official documents" (Ross 1893, p. 149), and in reaching a wider readership. She points to additional notes for the forthcoming volume, and to her effort in conceiving an appealing publication that could "reach the eye of any English readers" (Ross 1893, p. 149). She effectively underlines the importance of her work to expand the readership of official documents and research.

Austin's correspondence also sheds light on her agency and long-standing commitment to promoting social change through compulsory national education. The aforementioned letters to Gladstone are an example of the importance in contextualizing her work as a translation activist. In her more private letters, she also voices her continuous attention and involvement in promoting national education, a cause that, in her later years, she still hopes will define her public legacy. In November 1866, in a letter to Elizabeth, Lady William Russell, she exposes her frustration at being increasingly ill and unable to work but finds her friend's request for a copy of her translation of Cousin's *Report on The State of Public Instruction in Prussia* uplifting because it reminds her that she "introduced that matter to the enlightened English public" (Ross 1893, p. 423). Memories of the past, such as George Cornewall Lewis's certainty that her preface to Cousin's work would have secured her legacy for future generations, are linked to her desire to receive information about the curricula in "a 'Working Women's College'" (p. 423) she read about. Her long correspondence with Gladstone presents her as a trusted linguistic and cultural mediator who circulated intellectual ideas and the latest scholarly research on education, an expert on comparative primary education who reached across political, social, and religious differences. In her letters there are examples of how she urged politicians, journals' editors, publishers, influential family members, and friends, to support her cause and circulate the results of her comparative analysis of different educational systems in Europe.

The focus of this article, however, will remain on the three works that are key in understanding Austin's involvement in promoting national education and the education of working-class women in England. *Report on The State of Public Instruction in Prussia*, *On National Education*, and *Two Letters on Girls' Schools and on the Training of Working Women* exemplify the ways in which she produced timely texts for her target audience, whom she addressed directly in her writing. Together the texts also demonstrate that, in the nineteenth century, for Austin, to use Hill Collins' words, "honing

skills of translation constitutes both an important intellectual challenge and a political necessity" (in Castro, Ergun 2017, p. xii). Alongside her commitment to being an agent of social change, their timeline also highlights how her radicalism changed. After she witnessed the violent consequences of some attempts at social reforms in France, she aligned more with the growing conservativism of her husband, John Austin (1790-1859), and his theory of a stable government based on compromise that could be achieved only through an elitist, gentlemanly political leadership that could independently apply the principle of utility (Hamburger, Hamburger 1985). This study firstly examines how Austin developed her translation literacy and established a successful, remunerative career as a visible translator in the nineteenth century. Then, it analyses the politics of her language-labour, how she contributed to shaping intellectual and political debates on compulsory national education as an active transnational advocate and a translingual cultural agent.

3. A zealous and humble labourer

Sarah Austin was the youngest daughter in a radical, forward-looking Unitarian family who were central to the literary and political life of Norwich, and promoted equality for dissenters. Her parents, John and Susannah Taylor, also sustained an egalitarian educational philosophy that fostered an excellent education for both sons and daughters, within the limitations of the period, which included the exclusion of women from higher education (Watts 2013). She received a remarkable, wide-ranging education at home: she learnt Greek and Latin, French, German, Italian, and English literature (Waterfield 1937; Ross 1893). She enjoyed what Watts recognizes as, "excellent, yet gendered, opportunities" (2013, p. 80). Unitarian educational philosophy sustained the importance of learning and intellectual activities for daughters and sons, but it also mirrored the socio-cultural values of the nineteenth century which differentiated social roles on the basis of gender. Girls' education, therefore, was meant to prepare them for the domestic sphere. Denied access to higher education, they could not aspire to public positions but were meant to apply their knowledge instead as marriage partners and mothers. However, as the correspondence between mother and daughter indicates, Susannah Taylor was also careful to encourage her daughter towards "a stronger desire, and a higher relish for intellectual food" (Ross 1893, p. 39) as a guest in London of her brothers and family friends, such as the writer Anna Barbauld (née Aikin, 1734-1825). An assured and comprehensive knowledge, Taylor reiterates, could secure access to suitable teaching and writing professions and a financial income. Unitarians envisioned a rational, well-educated woman as an ideal marriage companion,

but they also esteemed teaching and writing as suitable employment for women.

Reading Taylor's letters, we become aware of how, within this nineteenth-century network of Unitarian dissenters, Austin developed her linguistic skills together with that critical skill Bertacco and Vallorani describe as translation literacy, an ability to move across different languages and cultures, and acquire transnational and translingual perspectives (Bertacco, Vallorani 2021). From a young age, her mother insisted Austin honed those communication skills that were key to the dissemination of knowledge in multiple languages. Susannah Taylor recommended practising conversation skills by engaging with national and international guests her family and their friends hosted to debate current and developing intellectual and political thought. By reminding her daughter about the importance of exercising reading and writing, she advised Austin to read English literature classics and the works of contemporary writers, and to compare them to other European writers. In terms of contemporary English literature, it is important to notice that she directed her daughter to examine, together with Barbauld's works, those of other women writers she knew, such as Amelia Opie and Joanna Baillie. Furthermore, she wanted her daughter to consider letter writing as preparation for professional writing by focusing on its reception. In criticizing a letter dated 1812, for example, she prompts her daughter to consider the complexities of communication by reminding her that, "according to the rules of Aristotle and Longinus, the mind of the reader requires (in all important narratives) a beginning, a middle, and an end" (Ross 1893, pp. 44-45). Austin's success as an activist translator demonstrates her acute ability to negotiate the expectations of publishers and readerships. As her prefaces show, she understood her translations as new cross-cultural texts to be consumed by monolingual readers.

After her engagement to the future legal theorist John Austin in 1814, Sarah's efforts turned more to philosophical thought as she prepared to become the "thinking, feeling, high-minded woman" he wanted her to be by steering her intellectual interests towards his (Waterfield 1937, p. 29). The record of books she read between 1815 and 1821 includes the writing of Tacitus, Cicero, and Caesar in Latin; Adam Smith, John Locke, and David Hume; Niccolò Machiavelli and Cesare Beccaria in Italian; Goethe in German; and her husband's mentors, Jeremy Bentham and James Mill (Ross 1893). Despite an absence of women writers, her reading lists suggest she prepared to be the intellectual companion on whom John hoped he could "securely rely", as his proposal letter indicates (Waterfield 1937, p. 29). Despite difficulties, Sarah was the strong, sympathetic, and supportive partner John Austin noticed. She was in fact remembered by her contemporaries for her dedication to disseminating and promoting his work after his death in 1859. In 1861, she prepared the second edition of his

seminal scholarly work *The Province of Jurisprudence Determined*, which was firstly released in 1832, and then published *Lectures on Jurisprudence or the Philosophy of Positive Law* in 1863. The latter was a two-volume endeavour that, her obituary in *The Athenaeum* emphasized, "she bent herself" to achieve (1867, p. 209). These two publications, examples of her dedication to her husband, were instrumental in accessing his work, which still remains in the British jurisprudential canon.

In the twentieth century, this image of intellectual companionship between Sarah and John Austin was complicated by biographies which recovered Sarah's correspondence with one of the German authors whose work she translated, Hermann Pückler-Muskau. Whilst she destroyed her passionate letters, Pückler-Muskau did not. When Gordon Waterfield revealed for the first time that these were "'love' letters" between them (1937, p. xi) in his 1937 biography of Lucie Duff Gordon, he compared them to the "sentimental letters" (p. 52) readers of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* sent to Lord Byron and considered them escapist. In 1980, Pückler-Muskau's letters were located in Jagiellonian University Library of Cracow (Hamburger, Hamburger 1994), and used by Lotte and Joseph Hamburger in their biography *Contemplating Adultery: The Secret Life of a Victorian Woman* (1992), which reflects on Austin's psychology and sexuality. The Hamburgers stress how her correspondence with Pückler-Muskau presents an epistolary romance that never became real, but, nonetheless, echoes the gendered inequalities of the Victorian era in the professional and private lives of women writers. Ben Downing interestingly contrasts the ability she shows in these letters "to act on her more erotic yearnings" with the "great resourcefulness" she harnessed in "making the most of every place she went and knitting together a Continental network of friends" (Downing 2013, p. 21).

From the beginning of her married life in London in 1819, Austin dedicated herself to creating an energetic, intellectual network in which her husband could thrive. She hosted a salon attended by radical and prominent thinkers such as Bentham and Mills, and Mills' son John Stuart Mill, Thomas and Jane (née Welsh) Carlyle, George and Harriet (née Lewin) Grote, and Sydney Smith, as well as Risorgimento refugees, like Ugo Foscolo, Giuseppe Pecchio, and Santorre di Santa Rosa, whom she assisted in finding work, learning English, and translating their writing into English (Ross 1893; Waterfield 1937; Wicks 1968). In *The Athenaeum* obituary her salon was compared to that of Madame de Staël (1867, p. 209), a woman of letters who, like Sarah Austin, admired contemporary German literary and philosophical works and contributed to their circulation across European borders. Moreover, it is important to note that the publication of de Staël's *De L'Allemagne* in English and in French by John Murray in 1813 renewed British interest in "significant Continental books" (Butler 1981, p. 119),

which Austin enriched and broadened. Austin's salon became more international as she established her translating career and, with her husband, she spent time in Germany in the late 1820s and early 1840s, in Malta from 1836 to 1838, and in France in the 1830s and 1840s. Her Parisian salon was described by Jules Barthélemy Saint Hilaire (1805-1895) as "a centre where France, England, Germany, and Italy met, and learnt to know and appreciate each other" (Ross 1893, p. vi), underlining how the polyglot hostess could run an effective European cultural network in ways the European political leaders could not.

By 1825, Austin had started to increment the family's earnings by translating from French and German texts such as Voltaire's *History of Charles XII* (1827), and *Lays of the Minnesingers, or German Troubadours of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries* (1825), published anonymously with her cousin Edgar Taylor (1793-1839).[7] This anthology, Diego Saglia observes, "is a milestone, and an often overlooked one, in the early phase of popularization of German literature in the 1820s" (2019, p. 94) in Britain. In the same year, Austin also showed her interest in German poetry with the publication of an essay in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* entitled, *The New German School of Tragedy*, which, as Schweitzer points out, represents the first instance of her "excellent knowledge of some of Goethe's works, especially of *Dichtung und Wahrheit*" (1996, p. 148) and of her skilful criticism of Goethe. In this article, she states her "highest admiration" for Goethe's work, adding however, her assessment of his characterisation of women as limiting. She remarks that "To him, woman is either a toy, or a mere housewife" (Austin 1825, p. 296). In this observation, Schweitzer sees her sympathy with the radical views of Bentham and Stuart Mill, and describes her as "an active woman" (Schweitzer 1996, p. 148). Then, after her husband failed to maintain his career as a solicitor and then a legal scholar,[8] she secured her family's financial independence by becoming a prominent translator for French and German intellectuals and scholars she often knew personally and with whom she corresponded, such as the already mentioned Guizot, Cousin, and Saint Hilaire, along with Barthold Georg Niebuhr (1776-1831), August Wilhelm von Schlegel (1767-1845), and Leopold von Ranke (1795-1886). She also contributed essays, editorials, and reviews to British periodicals, although her reputation remained mostly associated with her linguistic skills and competence in producing translations

[7] With David Jardine, Edgar Taylor had published *German Popular Stories*, a translation of the tales of the Brothers Grimm in two volumes in 1823 and 1826. In the case of *Lays of the Minnesingers,* Austin was the translator and Taylor authored the long preface entitled *Preliminary Dissertation* on the history of the Minnesingers, which preceded the selection of the works collected by the author.

[8] John Austin became University College London's first Professor of Jurisprudence when the University was founded in 1826. He held the post from 1828 to 1833.

for her English target audience. The obituaries in both *The Times* and *The Athenaeum* remember her as a much-praised translator whose work represents a benchmark of excellence.

It was *Characteristics of Goethe* in 1833 that established her reputation as a cultural interpreter of German literature. This was the first translation that included her name on the title page and her initials at the end of an authoritative, long preface that outlines her methods regarding the exclusion, inclusion, or additions to the selected number of source texts, together with her philosophical position "on the only matter connected with this book in which I have a personal interest – the theory of translation" (Austin 1833, p. xxix). She disagrees with Samuel Johnson and John Dryden, but agrees instead with Goethe's thesis that identifies the agency of the translator as central. She argues that the mode of translation depends on its scope and principally on whether only content, or content and form, matter to the translation process. In the case of Goethe's work, she claims the scope includes the translation of content and form because his writing demands to be understood both in terms of the value of its content and its stylistic features. Hence, as the translator, she sought to experiment with the plasticity of the target language to expand her scope and "place him [Goethe] before the reader with his national and individual peculiarities of thought and of speech" (Austin 1833, p. xxxvi). She positions her translation theory and practice within a European field of translation studies and, in defining her scope, promotes a methodology that does not aim for "domesticating translation" (Venuti 2018) of the source text but, on the contrary, to make its foreignness visible.

Though admiring "the truly extraordinary manner in which she has rendered all their various contents – metaphysical reasonings, poetical declamation, and social dialogue" (Merivale 1833, p. 372), contemporary reviewers like Herman Merivale in the *Edinburgh Review, or Critical Journal* critique her distinctive approach that departs from "the dominance of the fluency in English-language translation" (Venuti 2018, p. 5). In the nineteenth century, as Austin acknowledges, readers expect a familiar, fluent translation which aims to make the foreignness of the source text and their writer invisible. Merivale in fact points out how Austin pays little attention to how Goethe would have written the text in English but interprets the distinctive style of Goethe's writing through English. Merivale explains how she employs those German philosophical terms that have no English substitute, thus effectively drawing attention to her innovative inclusion of traces of the otherness of the source texts and their writers. To her, their difference is essential to her work because it promotes diverse epistemological and communication modes. In putting forward her interpretation of Goethe's work she astutely discusses the difficulties that delineates those "glimpses of the varied beauties of the original" that her

translation approach provides (Austin 1833, p. vi). Austin may stylistically choose adjectives that dismiss the value of her intellectual input in producing a target text, but the contents of her prefaces firmly locate her as a visible translator within a transnational discourse of translation studies whose scope is to be an agent of change.

In a letter published later, in 1848, in *The Athenaeum*,[9] she affirms her "duty as an interpreter between nations" (1848, p. 86). After more than a decade, she proposes that the role of the translator is clearly located within the public political sphere and political activities, as a civil service. She compares the work to that of a diplomat who, in order to achieve compromises between different positions, must interpret socio-cultural discourses along with linguistic differences. Like a diplomat, a translator, in her opinion, takes on the complexities and risks of acting publicly and politically through language. She underlines how translation is a cross-cultural exchange as much as an interlinguistic transposition which, as Alexander Fraser Tytler explained in his 1791 *Essay on the Principle of Translation*, creates "a free intercourse of science and literature between all nations" (Tytler 1791, pp. 2-3). Austin positioned her work transnationally in a European geography of connections and intersections that moved across linguistic, religious, social, and political differences to instigate social change, which, in her opinion, depended most significantly on inclusive access to education. The "zealous translator of Cousin" (Ross 1893, p. 284), she persistently sustained the debates promoting a new legislation on education in Britain but died without witnessing the Elementary Education Act become a reality under the government of Gladstone, a politician she correctly identified in 1838, as a promising advocate for national education.

4. An advocate of national education

Instrumental to the 1833 Guizot law establishing a national educational system in France, Cousin's *Rapport sur l'État de l'instruction publique dans quelques pays de l'Allemagne et particulièrement en Prusse* was mentioned in the House of Commons since its French publication in 1833. Austin published *Report on The State of Public Instruction in Prussia*, her English translation, in 1834. She had met the French philosopher in Bonn in the late 1820s, when he was busy collecting the material for the aforementioned report commissioned by the French government. They formed a bond based on their mutual friendship with Santa Rosa that flourished into "a warm

[9] Austin wrote this piece to defend her choice of title for Ranke's *History of the Reformation in Germany* (3 vols., 1845-47), which reviewers criticized for being misleading.

friendship" (Ross 1893, p. 426),[10] which lasted forty years, strengthened by their common interest in promoting public instruction and attested by an informative and personal correspondence that depicts, in particular, matters concerning the development and implementation of legislation on compulsory national education in European countries. Since the beginning of their friendship, Austin had been certain of the importance of his work and the role its dissemination could play and, to this purpose, she obtained a contract for an affordable English translation as soon as the original was published.

Writing to Cousin on March 5 1833, she describes her enthusiasm for his report and determination in distributing the copies he sent her to politicians and promoting it to friends such as Charles Babbage (Ross 1893, pp. 99-100). She wants *The Times* to notice it and to secure a publisher "to bring out a translation – a cheap one – so that the people may see what is being done elsewhere" (Ross 1893, p. 100). A month after, in another letter, she tells Cousin of "working for [his] glory" (Ross 1893, pp. 99-100) discussing reviews of the report with the editors of the *Edinburgh Review*, *The Times*, and the *Examiner*. Her active involvement in maximizing the reception of Cousin's report in England is explicit. So is her strategic intervention in reconfiguring the materials in the report to consider only "the subject of Primary Instruction" (Austin 1834, p. vii). She does not include materials on secondary education in Prussia but focuses her translation on advocating compulsory primary education only, without possible departures from this subject, even if pertinent: a decision she bases on moral grounds stating, "that education […] is absolutely necessary to moral and intellectual well-being of the mass of the people" (Austin 1834, p. vii).

In her translator's preface, Austin openly clarifies this selective choice and affirms Cousin's approval of it signalling not only her agency as a translator but also the collaborative nature of creating the target text for the English readership timed to provide information that would suit current debates on primary education, the level of education which was at the centre of British politics. The target text is the result of her negotiations with Cousin and the publisher, Effingham Wilson. Her scope is a timely, informative text that provides comparative studies, pragmatic examples, illustrative documents, statistical data, and explanatory notes. The latter follow the preface and begin by clarifying that "National Education is the more common English expression, and therefore preferable" (Austin 1834, p. xxv) to translating *instruction publique* as public instruction; nevertheless, this

[10] Austin wrote to Cousin and Saint Hilaire in French. Ross translated the letters into English. This letter was composed in response to the news of Cousin's death sent by Saint Hilaire. It is a meditative, sorrowful letter Austin composed when she was already unwell and found writing difficult, at the end of January 1867. She died on August 8 of the same year.

distinctive mark of otherness remains visible in the volume's title. The reception of her English translation of Cousin's report demonstrates its impact in the remarks of educationists such as Leonard Horner (1785-1864), a member of a royal commission on the employment of children in factories since 1833 (Bartrip 2008); James Kay-Shuttleworth (1804-1877),[11] the future assistant secretary to the committee of the Privy Council on Education (from 1839); the Unitarian minister William Johnson Fox (1786-1864); and of the then Poet Laureate, Robert Southey (Martin, Goodman 2004; Watts 2013).

This preface is distinguished by a conversational tone that emphasizes the dialogic mode of Austin's writing, which addresses her readers directly. She points out that it is not "an amusing book" (Austin 1834, p. vii) but a difficult one that deals with legislation and legislative institutions building a national system of education and, contrary to Gladstone, she understands, at this point, how critical it is to outline the religious input in national education. She agrees with Cousin that, "the whole fabric rests on the sacred basis of the Christian love" (p. xv), because it is the all-embracing Christian teaching across theological differences that should matter not the practice of a creed; all Christians could support a national compulsory scheme for primary education. In deconstructing preconceptions against primary education as a modern invention of the Prussian government, or an outcome of the Reformation, she outlines how it is discussed in other countries and supported by more religions than just the Protestant creeds. She also insists on the importance of making education compulsory for all children, and that by being mandatory, national education would only impose attendance not the type of educational establishments from which parents could choose. In her opinion, the Prussian model is appropriate because it promotes the quality of the learning provided through the training of teachers and school inspections.

In line with utilitarianism, she states that the duty of "an enlightened government" (p. xi) is to achieve the greatest good by promoting happiness or pleasure for everyone, while arguing that national education is a moral duty as it fosters the "moral and intellectual character" of all citizens (p. x). Austin argues that children's education is a question of national duty and, as Stuart Mill later also maintained,[12] a human right, and essential to the development of ethical citizens who understand and protect their freedom by sustaining that of others. She not only identifies education as an "absolute necessity" (p. ix) for supporting progress and the development of modern nation states, but

[11] With Edward Carleton Tufnell, Kay-Shuttleworth founded St. John's College in Battersea, London, a teacher training school for boys that opened in 1840 and became "the most important of the early English teachers' colleges and a model for other colleges, including those established by churches" (Selleck 2004, p. 4).

[12] At the beginning of their married life, the Austins lived near Jeremy Bentham and James Mill. Mill's son John Stuart Mill played with their daughter Lucie and learnt German with Sarah. Janet Ross states he addressed her grandmother as "*Liebes Mutterlein*" (Ross 1893, p. 60).

also sees it as a means to promote a peaceful society. Her preoccupation with social turmoil and desire for stability influenced what her biographers define as her later conventional views on social class and gender, asserted in *Two Letters on Girls' Schools and on the Training of Working Women.* The Austins left Paris because of the civil revolts against Guizot's government which turned into the revolution of 1848. These events marked their radical beliefs in social reform and, in line with her husband's views, Sarah Austin grew more conservative. This was not the case in the 1830s when she supported equal rights to education and called for girls' rights to receive an education. In 1839, she emphasizes to Gladstone how essential it is that "*All* must be taught", and pleads with him "to think of the poor girls" and their training (Ross 1893, p. 145).

The correspondence with Gladstone provides a glimpse into her ability to disseminate materials and information to members of the two houses of Parliament who supported social reform and a legislative commitment to primary education. In his 1839 diary, Gladstone writes that he spent two hours with Austin talking about education and books he needed to buy (Foot 1968, p. 580). About a week after this meeting, Gladstone thanks her for "Mr. Horner's translation of Cousin's Report on Holland" (Ross 1893, p. 143) and includes two papers on national education, one of which he hopes she will send on to Cousin. Gladstone concludes by respectfully asking for her "continued and, if possible, active interest in furtherance of these designs" and signs, "I remain, dear Mrs Austin, Your faithful Servant" (Ross 1893, p. 143). Ross explains that her grandmother's health had been poor at the time and Gladstone's final request acknowledges her illness. He does not doubt Austin's commitment or cooperation; he relies on her ability to collect and circulate the results of international research on national education and on her translation literacy in promoting them. Their cooperation illustrates how committed Austin is as a translation activist to disseminating these resources and proves that her contribution to what she calls, after Cousin, "*la sainte cause*" (Ross 1893, p. 144) is as a transnational specialist in European educational systems. She shares concerns about the reception of her work, which is increasingly of interest to the parliamentary debates on social reform and public instruction. Her primary goal remained to reach out to a wider English readership; hence, she continued to inform and stimulate the discourse of national education and to publish in support of her cause under her name. Her translation of Cousin's *Report* did inspire other publications: sections that were reprinted in New York in 1835 influenced policy on educational provision in Massachusetts, Michigan; and, in Canada, J. Orville Taylor's 1836 American edition of Cousin's report included her introduction (Martin, Goodman 2004).

In preparation for the translation of Cousin's *Report*, Austin had collected relevant comparative material, including official documents, which,

in her opinion, were "not likely to fall in the way of many English readers" (Austin 1839, p. viii). She succeeded in making them available in 1839 in a volume entitled *On National Education*, which comprised a review of France's implementation of a new education policy which, as previously mentioned, was published in 1835. In this case, her English translation of nine selected French and German documents is the source for quotations, case studies, and statistical data used as evidence and references within an essay that she signs as, written by Mrs Austin. It was the first time she published a monograph, and her concerns regarding contributing to a public debate were heightened and articulated in her preface. Before it was published, she also sent a draft to Gladstone "appeal[ing] to his kindness" (Ross 1893, p. 151) for advice. She feared the reaction of his party to her work in support of a legislation for compulsory primary education. This was a heated point for discussion in Parliament, but her main concern was with the press and how their "coarse and disgusting hands" (p. 150) would have handled a woman's public opinion on such a central, political subject. Yet, she reassures Gladstone that, with his approval, she is ready to "bear martyrdom" (p. 150). Despite being a leading translator whose name appears as 'Sarah Austin', in this case, she prefers her name to appear more conventionally as Mrs Austin. The same happens with *Two Letters on Girls' Schools and on the Training of Working Women*. In these two publications that are based on her translation literacy but belong to forms of writings that are not categorized as translations, she calls attention to her marital status. In the context of her letter to Gladstone, this decision suggests modesty; however, it is important to consider that her marital status also associates her with her husband, a pioneering legal philosopher and his philosophical and intellectual circle.

In the preface to *On National Education*, Austin balances her awareness of a need to disseminate those materials that are essential to the British legislative political discussions with a decisive denial of an alignment with party politics:

> I must earnestly and sincerely disclaim the smallest wish or intention of the kind. On the contrary, my wishes, hopes, prayers, are all directed to that moment when the two parties now divided may unite in the great work. (Austin 1839, p. ix)

She does not want to be exposed to risks and thus contextualizes her purpose within an ethical political sphere that is beyond the discords between political parties. She uses the pronoun *we* and identifies herself as one of "the friends of education, and, therefore, of humanity" (p. 5). Indeed, she warns against popular, national prejudices because what is at stake is the "dignity" (p. 3) of human life and its protection. In her view, national education is an important measure for the future of the nation state and, as such, primary education

ought to be both available and compulsory, as France's legislation established. She reiterates three principles that are essential to an effective primary education legislation as an organized system: a national curriculum, trained teachers, and school inspectors. She also insists that the system ought to be compulsory so that all children are included with no exceptions. Although she acknowledges this is a "much-contested point" (p. 58), her argument for compulsory education highlights that the moral responsibility of the state is to act on behalf of all children's best interests by "affixing of a legal sanction to the moral obligation of parents to give education to their children" (p. 58). The future of children as citizens of a nation, she sustains, cannot depend on the temporary interests of their parents, but on those of the state.

Referring to Immanuel Kant's *Doctrine of Virtue*, Austin exhorts collaboration instead of competition between the parties to promote a legislation modelled on the French one and to achieve the distinguishing features of humankind. She states, "we must combine our forces" (p. 4). This is the central message in her essay that is most powerfully framed by quotations from Milton's *Areopagitica,* as an epigraph on the title page and in the conclusion. Milton's pamphlet in defence of press freedom was written as an address to the two Houses of Parliament. Like Milton, by means of logic, historical and comparative studies, Austin argues for a collaborative approach to achieve social change and promote, in the words of Milton, "a knowing people, a nation of prophets, of sages, and of worthies" (p. 108). To this end, she concludes with Milton's words on the country's needs for "wise and faithful labourers" (p. 108), whom she hopes the Houses of Parliament already has. Austin's arguments for new legislation on education in Britain strongly echo the same values to which Milton appeals, including charity, civil responsibility, and dignity. These essential, human qualities, Austin maintains, can be promoted by appropriate instruction through compulsory national education for all children.

In the *Report on The State of Public Instruction in Prussia* and *On National Education*, Austin aligns with Cousin in sustaining her belief in no exception to compulsory primary education, or distinctions. Primary education, she writes, is:

> equally suitable to girls and boys. There is absolutely nothing to retrench in the course prescribed for the elementary schools; and in that of the superior primary schools, it is only necessary to omit the elements of geometry, with its practical applications; all the rest ought to be preserved: we have only to add, of both degrees, certain female works which need not even be mentioned in law […]. The education of girls would thus become as universal as that of boys. (Austin 1839, p. 77)

She disapproves of gender-specific schools but states the need for gender-specific training such as needlework, in line with her belief that education should offer knowledge and skills for life, and the lives of women were different in the nineteenth century to those of men. After a gap of twenty years, in 1857, Austin defines this gender-specific need to include household work in the curricula for girls from a poorer background. *Two Letters on Girls' Schools and on the Training of Working Women* asserts the need for "useful and *suitable* instruction" (1857, p. 5) for girls whose social status determines their need to work both within and outside their households. This must be built upon "the three great and powerful instruments [of education]: Reading, writing, and casting accounts" (p. 5). It is her view that the education girls received at the time could not be applied in their adult lives, putting them at risk of not matching the limited number of roles societal systems called on them to fulfil. She is concerned they lack the skills to appreciate the value of the work they could do as women within the options offered to them.

Austin argues that young girls who need to earn a wage should not receive an education that conceives domestic work as inappropriate or diminishing but that, on the contrary, sees them as "attainments *indispensable*" (p. 5) to their future life, both as labourers and women. She writes that "the *direction*" and "the *application*" of their learning "are not less important" (p. 4) than the knowledge they gain because their material life, their morality and their wellbeing also depend upon them. She presents dissatisfied, elitist utilitarian views on working-class women's education, which she sees as an educational system that fails women because it does not secure their learning of those skills that determine "their own independence, the approbation and respect of their employers, or the love and confidence of those who will look to them as the dispensers of all the best comforts of a humble home" (p. 5). These are gendered opinions that are incapable of envisaging a woman's identity beyond a marital or domestic context. Yet, in reiterating the significance of home as a female space, Austin's argument does not limit this future for working-class women; what she affirms is the inevitability that they must contend with housekeeping and employment simultaneously. Her decade-long experience as a school visitor fuels her advocacy for national education that suits the working classes' needs.[13] The first letter in the volume, for example, narrates her visits to "a school, instituted and supported by Miss F. Martineau, of Bracondale, near Norwich" (p. 16), which she considered a model of good practice. In her opinion, it showed how working-class girls should "learn the principles and arts of

[13] Between 1836 and 1838, when she was with her husband in Malta, where he was royal commissioner, Austin also contributed to establishing new village schools (Ross 1893).

housewifery" (p. 25). Furthermore, she maintains the principle of valuable work for women to attain personal worth. Having an educational system that recognizes the needs of working girls, she suggests, would prepare them for their work both within and outside the home.

Previously published in *The Athenaeum*, she reprints her two letters "in a form convenient for distribution" (p. 3) because they include information, she hopes, could inspire others. In *Two Letters on Girls' Schools and on the Training of Working Women*, reflecting on those male intellectuals whose work she translated, she maintains that they have failed to understand the needs of girls who must earn a leaving as well as run a household. Because of privileges rooted in their class and gender, these male intellectuals have not conceived what, for professional women, is still an imperative requisite to be fulfilled: domestic virtues. Victorian womanhood was defined by idealized domestic virtues, but Austin had experienced and witnessed how middle-class women who benefitted from a suitable education could provide for their families. She knew that managing a home necessitated an understanding of the household as a business as well as containing a family for which one cared: in her own household, she was the breadwinner. For working girls, she asks what, in summary, ought to be the outcome of beneficial education, that is "careful, intelligent, conscientious labour" (p. 6). *Two Letters on Girls' Schools* recalls her concerns about publishing on education at a time when the government's agenda focuses on this and about being as a wife whose successful literary career overshadows that of her husband. Aligning with the values of her own Unitarian education, she differentiates educational curricula on the basis of gender and identifies the woman as a marriage companion. In line with utilitarianism, she argues that national education is a means to promote morality and wellbeing of all members of a society; hence, she argues, school education should not fail girls by preparing them inadequately for their future. Disappointingly, in these letters, she does not envision women in the public sphere. She considers only two options for how working-class women can contribute to society: as wives or domestic servants. It would be a "waste and improvidence" (p. 25), she writes, if the science of education did not reflect those gender and class differences that identify a woman "as a useful helpmate" (p. 26). This is a concept that includes herself as a zealous translator who aptly selects and reconfigures timely scholarly texts for the expanding British readership to promote political and social change, one who is more comfortable in claiming her authority and knowledge "under the cover of" great intellectuals (Ross 1893, p. 150).

5. Conclusion

As a Victorian English translator, Sarah Austin is an example of an activist translator who balanced her need to be an agent of change with the gendered socio-cultural expectations of the period. She valued the potential her translation literacy afforded her and seized it through translation activism. In her opinion, translation is an act of production and the result of a creative collaborative process, the product of dialogic relationships between authors and their texts. In particular, she recognized translation as an effective tool in promoting, sustaining, and widening the reception of transnational pedagogical theories and practices and diverse European policies on national education. Furthermore, she understands translation "as an interpretative transformation" (Godard 1995, p. 77), whose active possibilities she affirms as a transnational advocate of national education. Translation activism is also key in recovering Austin's experiments in pursuing translation as an effective means of interpreting and disseminating knowledge, of shaping and shifting the intellectual and political debates in Europe. In the nineteenth century, her work asserted the value of translation as a distinctive act of cross-cultural literary production and the influential value of the woman translator as a translator-activist.

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