

Projet de recherches de Corinna Onelli

The project aims at an in-depth inquiry into a 17th-century manuscript bearing the translation of Petronius' *Satyricon* into Italian. The manuscript, which has never been published or studied before, represents a unique document, since it proves the diffusion of Petronius' forbidden philosophy even within the public of popular readers¹.

The *Satyricon* (or *Satyricea*) - commonly ascribed to Petronius Arbiter (c. 27-66 AD) - is one of the earliest works classifiable as a novel and is considered a masterpiece of the Latin literature, if not of literature itself. The *Satyricon* represents a sophisticated parody of classical literary genres and, also, an ironic upturning of traditional values. Indeed, Petronius' characters display grand ideals, but, actually, all their actions are due to the most material urges such as money, food and sex². Because of its erotic and irreverent contents, the *Satyricon* was included since 1559 in the list of the books forbidden by the Roman Inquisition³. For the very same reason, in the 17th Century, Petronius enjoyed great success among French and Italian libertine *élites* (freethinkers). In fact, Petronius was then perceived as an 'Epicurean' author who had depicted common morality as convention and religion as superstition⁴. Surprisingly enough, the unpublished manuscript proves that Petronius circulated not only within aristocratic milieus, but also reached un-latinized readers.

The translation is in a 17th -century hand-copied book (114 leaves = 228 pages) showing the typical features - professional handwriting, neat and clear appearance with no erasure nor variants, use of catchwords to facilitate the bookbinding - that characterise the manuscripts that were serially copied for the clandestine book market⁵. The translation is anonymous and there are no external evidences (such as watermarks, notes of ownership) that enable us to exactly date the manuscript or to determine its provenance.

A first, unsystematic, comparison between the translation and the most popular 17th-century editions of Petronius has revealed as follows: 1) the translation is prior to 1669, since it lacks the *Satyricon* episode known as the *Cena Trimalchionis*, which was discovered only in c. 1654 and first published with the *Satyricon* in 1669 (the *Cena* covers the chapters 27-78 in Petronius' modern editions). Thus, the Italian translation is likely to be the first version of Petronius into a modern language (so far, the primacy was attributed to the French translation published in 1693 by François Nodot)⁶; 2) the translation is posterior to 1587, since its text translates readings that are unique to the *Satyricon* edition by the French philologist Pierre Pithou (1539-1596), published in that year (indeed, the Italian manuscript translation derives from Pithou's printed edition)⁷; 3) obviously, the translator knew Latin, but he was not a scholar or, in any case, a person of letters, since in several passages he completely misunderstands Petronius' text. Moreover, the Italian used by the translator shows regional elements that are typical of the Venetian area and far from the Italian literary tradition (whose core is classical Tuscan); 4) the translator too read the *Satyricon* as an

¹ The manuscript is signalled as lost in A. Rini, *Petronius in Italy: from the Thirteenth Century to the Present Time*, New York, 1937, pp. 88-89.

² Cfr. G. B. Conte, *The Hidden Author: an interpretation of Petronius' Satyricon*, Berkeley, 1996.

³ On censorship in Counter-Reformation Italy, see G. Fragnito (ed.), *Church, Censorship and Culture in Early Modern Italy*, Cambridge, 2001.

⁴ On 17th-century French libertinism, the classical reference is R. Pintard, *Libertinage érudit dans la première moitié du XVII^e siècle*, Geneva, 1983 (1st ed. 1943), to be integrated with F. Charles-Daubert, *Les libertins érudits en France au XVII^e siècle*, Paris, 1998 and J. -P. Cavaillé, *Les Deniaisés: Irréligion et libertinage au début de l'époque moderne*, Paris, 2014. On Italian libertinism the main references are G. Spini, *Ricerca dei libertini: la teoria dell'impostura delle religioni nel Seicento italiano*, Florence, 1983 (1st ed. 1950) and T. Gregory, *Etica e religione nella critica libertina*, Naples, 1986. As specifically concerns the success of Petronius within Italian libertine circles, cfr. my article C. Onelli, 'Freedom and censorship: Petronius' *Satyricon* in seventeenth-century Italy', *Classical Receptions Journal* (2014), 6, 1, pp. 104-130. A relevant evidence on the reception of the *Satyricon* as philosophical text in the 18th Century is reported in R. Darnton, *The Forbidden Best-Sellers of Pre-Revolutionary France*, New York/London, 1995.

⁵ On the practice of scribal transmission even after the invention of printing, see B. Richardson, *Manuscript Culture in Renaissance Italy*, Cambridge, 2009; specifically on clandestine manuscripts, see the monographic issue of *Lettre Clandestine* (1999, 7) intitled *L'Identification du texte clandestin aux XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles*.

⁶ Specifically on *Satyricon* textual transmission and text-criticism, see the *Satyricon* philological edition by K. Müller, *Petronii Arbitri Satyricon reliquiae*, Berlin/New York, 2009. For a comprehensive presentation, see *A Commentary on the Satyricea of Petronius* by G. Schmeling (with A. Setaioli), Oxford, 2011.

⁷ On Pithou's seminal edition, based on lost manuscripts, see W. Richardson, *Reading and variant in Petronius: Studies in the French Humanists and their Manuscript Sources*, Toronto, 1993.

Epicurean text, since he has inserted in the translation the libertine motto *Ede, bibe, lude, post mortem nulla voluptas* ('eat, drink, be merry, after death there is no pleasure'); 5) the translation was copied and read through Italy. In fact, there are numerous notes embedded in the main text, which explain single terms to the reader. What is noteworthy is that those notes display a regional substratum which is not Venetian, as in the main text, but rather from Central Italy. Clearly, they could not have been originated by the translator himself, who, in all probability, was from Veneto, that is, from Northern Italy.

The goal of the research is to develop those promising clues, in order to come to an analytical description of the translation and reconstruct its social and cultural context. The research will be conducted by the means of an interdisciplinary method, which will combine the research methods of philology, linguistics, history of the book, history of reading, history of philosophy, classical reception, social and cultural history.

The project objectives are: 1) describing, transcribing and editing the manuscript; 2) linguistic analysis of the translation (main text and notes) to determine the geographical and social provenience of the respective originators⁸; 3) comparison between the manuscript translation and the *Satyricon* editions printed between 1587 and 1668⁹; is it possible to exactly identify the edition used for the source and, therefore, to date the translation? 4) comparison between the translation and the *Satyricon* in original, to point out the translator's understanding/interpretation of the text; comparison with the contemporary translation of the *Satyricon* short extract known as *The Story of the Matron of Ephesus* made by the Venetian scholar Annibale Campeggi (1593-1630)¹⁰; 5) identification and analysis of the 'libertine' themes in the *Satyricon*; how did the translator deal with them?; is there any attempt of auto-censorship, or, on the contrary, are they emphasised?; 6) analysis of the notes embedded in the Italian translation: how do they explain the text and to what kind of reader? What could have been the translation reading public?; does the translation confirm the circular nature of the relationship between upper class culture and subordinate¹¹?

Indeed, the research will give us the opportunity to concretely grasp the emergency, in Early Modern Europe, of a new public of readers, who were not familiar to Latin, but were keen, however, to have access to a sophisticated text such as the *Satyricon*, which then was a best-seller among elites. Further, the research would generate new knowledge about the diffusion of clandestine literature in the age of Counter-Reformation and cast a new light on the Italian *Seicento* (17th Century), which is commonly perceived as a period of mere obscurantism.

⁸ The main work instruments would be: G. Rohlfs, *Grammatica storica della lingua italiana e dei suoi dialetti* (3 vols), Turin, 1966-1969; the *DELI* (*Dizionario Etimologico della Lingua Italiana*), Bologna, 1979-1988; the *GDLI* (*Grande Dizionario della Lingua Italiana*), Turin, 1961-2002.

⁹ All editions printed between 1587 and 1668 are based on Pithou's, with slight differences. Most of them are available in digital format on Google.books.

¹⁰ On which, see Onelli 2014, pp. 106-108.

¹¹ For the emergency of a new reading public, requiring literature in the vernacular, cfr. the data on the increasing printing of books in the vernacular against Latin in Italy between the 16th and 17th Century, in C. Marazzini, *Storia della Lingua Italiana. Il secondo Cinquecento e il Seicento*, Bologna, 2013; also cfr. R. A. Houdson, *Literacy in Early Modern Europe: Culture and Education 1500-1800*, New York, 2012 (1st ed. 2002). For the diffusion of translations in the vernacular in Early Modern Europe, see J. M. Pérez Fernández and E. Wilson-Lee (eds), *Translation and the Book Trade in Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge, 2014. On the appropriation of elite culture by popular readers, see R. Chartier, 'Reading Matter and 'Popular' Reading', in G. Cavallo and R. Chartier (eds), *A History of Reading in the West*, Amherst, 1999. Specifically on the diffusion of irreligiousness and libertinism among popular strata in Early Modern Italy, see C. Ginzburg, *Il formaggio e i vermi*, Torino, 2009 (1st ed. 1976) and F. Barbierato, *The Inquisition in the Hat Shop: Inquisition, Forbidden Books and Unbelief in Early Modern Venice* (foreword by J.-P. Cavaillé), Farham, 2012.