

Summary report: 'The 1429 Catalan Translation of Giovanni Boccaccio's *Decameron*: Tracing the Making of a European Classic' (DecameronTranslated)

This project investigated the complex, multidimensional (material, cultural, aesthetic and linguistic) process that made Giovanni Boccaccio's *Decameron* one of the most influential works in European literary history. Composed in the wake of the Black Death (1348) and incorporating 100 novellas – told by ten fictitious narrators over a period of ten days – the *Decameron* shaped the form and content of narrative literature in diverse western European traditions, involving not only creative works (from Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* to Cervantes' *Novelas ejemplares*) but also translation. DecameronTranslated focused on the role played by late medieval translations in the early history of the *Decameron*'s afterlife.

The Catalan *Decameron* poses distinctive problems to researchers. Its anonymous translator worked directly from the Italian text for the most part, but for the tale of Griselda (*Dec.* 10.10) he reproduced Bernart Metge's *Història de Valter i Griselda* (c.1388), a Catalan translation of Petrarch's 1374 Latin rewriting known as the *Historia Griseldis*, which also makes occasional use of a French prose translation of Petrarch's text, Philippe de Mézières' *Miroir de dames mariées* (1385-7). Moreover, the Catalan translator omitted six of the ten lyric poems present in Boccaccio's work, and replaced the others by Occitan-Catalan poems; some of these were transmitted independently of the *Decameron* translation. Hence the Catalan *Decameron* is the result of a dynamic, and particularly complex, process of sedimentation and textual reframing.

DecameronTranslated had two main objectives: to analyse the Catalan *Decameron*'s material and formal features, by producing a pilot digital edition of Day 10 (the most complex and therefore the most significant part of the translation); and to study its relationships with readings and rewritings of the *Decameron* across different countries (Catalonia, France, Italy) and languages (Catalan, French, Italian, Latin).

An initial phase of research focused on the material features of the single manuscript that transmits the Catalan *Decameron*, and of related manuscripts. The researcher sought to establish how material features of the *Decameron*'s textual tradition (e.g. layout, punctuation) related to the specific material and textual characteristics of the Catalan text and helped to explain them. A second phase of research focused on literary and linguistic analysis of the Catalan translation, establishing comparisons with both texts and manuscripts of the Italian original, of Laurent de Premierfait's first French translation (1411-14), and of Bernat Metge's version of the Griselda story in relation to Petrarch's, de Mézières' and anonymous French prose versions. This called for a complex methodology, combining manuscript studies, linguistics and literary criticism to account for the Catalan and French reception of the *Decameron* and for the development of the novella as a genre.

The stories from Day 10 of the Catalan *Decameron* were transcribed and analysed according to the standard international protocol for representing texts in digital form, the Text Encoding Initiative (TEI-XML). The digital edition's format and design were devised so as best to display the complex relationships between the Catalan and the Italian, French, and Latin versions.

Since the design and development of the TEI-XML document involved a large and multi-layered volume of data, it was necessary to undertake a separate linguistic analysis of the Catalan *Decameron* and its sources. This analysis was qualitative in nature, and focused on historical changes in syntax and stylistics. To do so, it combined elements of different areas of academic linguistics (textual, contact, and variation linguistics).

The results comprise a set of publications: a prototype digital edition of Day 10 (which will be available online in the near future), and a series of scholarly articles. A further article is about to be submitted for publication. A monograph, which addresses wider questions of authorship, genre and translation, will be completed as a follow-up study; a proposal will shortly be submitted to an appropriate publisher.

Conclusions

1) The digital edition reveals that the *Decameron*'s Catalan translator skilfully addressed the challenges posed by the original: narrative architecture, syntactic complexity, and material display of contents in the

manuscript tradition. Boccaccio worked on the *Decameron* for over twenty years (c. 1350-1375); scholars have identified two versions, the first composed by 1360 and the second c.1370. The Catalan *Decameron* does not unequivocally correspond to either version. Rather, the digital edition reveals an eclectic text that shows traces of both states of the Italian text. Though the manuscript of the translator's Italian source has not yet been identified, the edition helps to profile the textual state of the Italian *Decameron* on which the Catalan text depends. Comparisons between the Catalan *Decameron*'s single manuscript (Barcelona, Biblioteca de Catalunya, 1716) and the Italian *Decameron*'s textual tradition reveal that, thanks to the linguistic proximity between Italian and Catalan, the Catalan *Decameron* adopts the material, narrative, and linguistic (syntactic) features of the Italian textual tradition. Indeed, it is much closer to that tradition than are the witnesses of Premierfait's French version. The prototype edition opens an evident window of opportunity for further research on both the transmission and the varying textual configurations of the *Decameron*.

The researcher's articles focused on the afterlife of the *Decameron* in translation. Boccaccio's work as a book became a model for a framed gathering of novellas, in a material as well as a textual sense. The most authoritative manuscript of the first French version of the *Decameron* (Vatican City, BAV, MS Pal. Lat. 1989) shows a beautifully rich and meaningful paratext and layout, with a complex and highly hierarchized programme including 100 large miniatures, rubrics, summaries, and further textual subdivisions. This apparatus imitates Boccaccio's editorial apparatus, but adapts it to the textual configuration of the translation, and to a new audience. At the same time, retellings of the same story in early Catalan translations constitute a decisive step in establishing narrative as a canonical literary form in Catalonia. In contrast to neighbouring literatures (French, Castilian), the *Decameron* does not serve as the clear model for an original work in Catalan. However, several of its novellas were adopted as productive subtexts by major Catalan authors of narrative fiction, namely Bernat Metge, the anonymous author of the *Curial e Guelfa*, and Johanot Martorell in his *Tirant lo Blanch*. Particular attention was devoted to Bernat Metge's creative response to the novella of Gualtieri and Griselda. Comparisons between Metge's Catalan version, Petrarch's Latin version, and the first French prose translations are revealing. Petrarch's translation addresses a male audience, an elite of learned friends, who are considered the only possible interlocutors in a debate that concerns ethics as well as aesthetics. The vernacular translations are presented as an homage to Petrarch, yet they doubly transgress: they address women, and do so in the vernacular. Metge goes further in this respect than the French translators: he innovates on a micro-textual level, by adopting the narrative technique of the 'genre scene' that depicts an everyday situation. This minor textual difference attests to a larger shift in narrative technique, with implications for the possibilities offered by the novella as a genre. The researcher's findings were hence more wide-ranging than originally anticipated, as they involve the evolution of lay cultural taste and expectations in the late Middle Ages.

The project has potential for impact outside scholarly research. Target groups are a) university students interested in pre-modern translation; b) the general public, who would benefit from a fuller understanding of translation and linguistic interaction both in history and in everyday 21st-century life. Initial steps were taken to reach these target groups during the lifetime of the project. In respect of a), a round table for students and staff at Queen Mary University of London took place in November 2014. Entitled 'Pre-modern Versions and Modern Translations: Theoretical and Professional Approaches to Literary Translations', it involved four specialists: Prof Leonard Olschner (QMUL), Prof Jane Taylor (Durham University), Prof Graeme Small (Durham University), and Dr Lisa Sampson (Reading University). These colleagues shared their different perspectives on the theory and practice of translation, especially of pre-modern texts. In respect of b), a public engagement workshop entitled 'The Art of Translation – Then and Now' was held in November 2014. This introduced visitors (QMUL students and the general public) to concepts in translation studies that are exemplified in the Catalan *Decameron*, and that are also used by everyone who works across different languages or cultures for their job, in education, or within their family group.