

The Other Use of Latin: the Network of Agents in Clement Egerton's English Translation of *Jin Ping Mei*

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Latin has a long history of being used in English translations of erotic literary works, but the process of producing and incorporating the Latin into the English target texts has so far remained largely unexplored. Based mainly on my consultation of the Routledge archives, this research uncovers the sophisticated network of agents that is responsible for the use of Latin in Clement Egerton's *The Golden Lotus* (hereafter the LOTUS), which is an English translation of the 16th century Chinese novel *Jin Ping Mei*. The translation was published in 1939, and despite its claim of being a complete translation of its source text, the more graphically explicit sexual descriptions were indiscriminately rendered into Latin.

Due to the stringent literary censorship on obscenity of the early twentieth century in England, the publisher – together with its printer and proof readers, spontaneously assumed the role of pre-publication censors. While the publisher's role in censoring the works it intends to release is an area reasonably well-documented, the printer is seldom introduced into the scene as a censor. However, according to the Victorian legal documents which were still in effect in the early 20th century, the printer was put on a par with the publisher should a publication be prosecuted for obscenity reasons.

The Latin passages in the LOTUS, which have always been attributed to Egerton, are nevertheless revealed by the archives to be relayed by a Latin scholar from Egerton's initial English version. The use of Latin is imbued with implications. The concurrence of Latin and English in the 1939 version of the LOTUS is a game jointly played by the publisher, the printer and the translator(s) on the contemporary censors and the readers. To be sure, it did help the translation escape the censorial harassment, yet it is also a strong reminder of the hierarchical readership of the novel: the less educated audience is precluded from enjoying the full pleasure of reading. Effectively, they mystify the source text and reinforces its erotic nature – at a time readers are familiar with the practice of eschewing censorship by recourse to a foreign language, less accessible is synonymous with more erotic.

The Latin passages in the LOTUS have been rendered into English twice: one made anonymously shortly after its initial publication in 1939, and was only privately circulated in manuscript form; the other devised by Routledge in 1972 when the literary censorship on obscenity has bankrupted in the Anglo-American world.

The production of Latin in the LOTUS is therefore a most telling example of the complexity of the network of agents in translation and a textual reflection of the evolution of the social milieu. The research makes recourse to knowledge from such diverse areas of study such as sociology, cultural studies, book history, and translation studies.