

Irena Bratičević, *Via virtutis / Put vrline: Epigramatski opus Rajmunda Kunića*, 2 vols. Zagreb: Ex libris, 2015-2016. Pages 534 + 479.

*Venustus, numerosus, latinissimus: Rajmund Kunić (1719-1794) and His Epigrams*

It is not often that out of the musty darkness of the archive the world is suddenly given thousands of poems composed by one of the foremost Latinists of the eighteenth century. Prompted by specific situations or addressing actual people, celebrating society and criticising it, commemorating friends and fostering friendships, commenting on an incredibly wide range of events and topics, the majority of Rajmund Kunić's poems lay forgotten for almost two full centuries after his friends and admirers had published posthumous selections of them in Parma (1803) and Dubrovnik (1827). Irena Bratičević's impressive two-volume work is at once the most comprehensive study of Kunić's literary output and the most complete edition of his epigrammatic oeuvre. It is a landmark publication that shows how much can be learnt from the manuscript archive if the researcher is skilled, diligent, patient, and unwilling to take anything on trust. The second volume, containing an edition of Kunić's epigrams, will be of great interest and value to the international community of Neo-Latin scholarship; the first volume, containing an exceptionally well-informed discussion of Kunić's literary career and, especially, of his thematically varied collection of epigrams, will for those who can read Croatian constitute a major resource not just in the field of Ragusan Neo-Latin studies, but also in the larger, transnational field of eighteenth-century literature and culture. Thanks to its erudition combined with precision and its judiciousness combined with the novelty of its insights, Bratičević's work has set a new standard for Croatian literary scholarship. This is the kind of work that is to be imitated and not simply read: it is exciting and inspirational while being deeply scholarly and unafraid of detail. It is, in short, a truly daunting performance.

Even a summary description of Bratičević's study will plainly show the great wealth of the material included. She first surveys the extent of Kunić's reputation as a printed poet, from his first publications to the most recent editions. Partly because of the way in which we have compartmentalised and nationalised literary history, Kunić has gradually been reduced to the status of an outstanding Croatian Latinist instead of being valued for what he was in both the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, namely a truly international figure writing in a language that still made it possible to think literature in terms larger than those of one's own village—be that village English, French, Italian, or Ragusan. Bratičević then turns to the complex manuscript transmission, crucial as much for the establishing of the text as it is for an accurate understanding of Kunić's habits of composition. This is followed by a fresh account of Kunić's life and literary career, which features a great deal of new information. A discussion of the epigrammatic tradition from which Kunić emerges, partly poetic and partly rhetorical in orientation, serves, in the ensuing chapters, as a productive framework for an analysis of his own literary production. Different genres of his epigrammatic oeuvre are described and contextualised, whereas a separate chapter is devoted to his satirical epigrams, which in Bratičević's view best capture Kunić's distinctive qualities as a poet (the other groups are *sacra*, *votiva*, *moralia*, *encomiastica*, *ludicra*, *sepulchralia et lugubria*, and *varia*). The study closes with a suggestive discussion of the problems of interpretation that the complex manuscript situation of Kunić's verse raises, urging the reader not to leave even this particular book thinking that Kunić's manuscripts can now be safely forgotten. As Bratičević shows, the extraordinary life of Kunić's epigrams is often best illustrated by the occasional nature of the manuscripts in which they have been preserved.

Kunić's own life appears, at first sight, unremarkable. Like other smart and industrious Ragusans, he left his native city early, at the age of fifteen (he was born in 1719 and died in 1794). His path

out of what, however dear to one's heart, must have appeared a rather unexciting artistic and intellectual environment led through the Jesuit College. It was there that he received his initial education and decided to become a Jesuit himself. Having left Dubrovnik in 1734, he never returned, not even for a short visit, although he had both family and friends in the city with whom he exchanged letters throughout his life. Once in Rome, he was taught by, among others, Ruđer Bošković (1711-1787), a famous Ragusan polymath and himself a prolific poet. If one is to believe the anecdotes surviving from Kunić's student days, Bošković sometimes got carried away in his lectures, forgetting that he actually had an audience. At such moments, Kunić apparently interrupted him (in Croatian, to avoid embarrassment), asking him to come back down to earth so that his students can understand him (I, 161).

After his ordination in 1750, Kunić taught rhetoric in the Jesuit novitiate in Rome until 1765. During this period he became a member of the *Accademia degli Arcadi*, and his early poetry was featured in its publications. He was also a member of the *Accademia degli Infecondi*; *Prose e versi degli Accademici Infecondi* from 1764 includes a handful of his poems. From 1765 onward Kunić taught in the Roman College, the most important Jesuit educational institution. He continued as a professor of rhetoric and Greek in the College even after the Jesuit order was suppressed in 1773. In this respect, he had a very stable intellectual career despite the social and political upheavals through which he lived. He clearly enjoyed living in Rome, which is probably why he declined to move to Pisa when an attractive professorship was offered to him by that city's university.

The life of a Jesuit professor of rhetoric in eighteenth-century Rome had a surprisingly strong performative dimension. Kunić recited speeches and poetry alongside his students during various events organised in Rome in the course of an ordinary academic year. There is no doubt that his involvement in the social life of the city made it easier for him to make connections with important people and to learn the art of being liked. His charming manners and his great erudition made him popular among the aristocracy and he became a favoured guest in several prestigious Roman salons.

While Kunić's poetry owes a great deal both to his intellectual formation in the Jesuit College and his extensive training in rhetoric, his poetic reputation among his contemporaries had as much to do with the culture of the salons and the opportunities for patronage that the salons provided. Two such patrons are discussed by Bratičević at length, and each, in his or her own way, has become inseparable from Kunić's greatest poetic achievements. Kunić's most important benefactor was Baldassare III Odescalchi, Duca di Ceri (1748-1810). It is to him that Kunić dedicated the first edition of his Latin translations of the epigrams from the *Greek Anthology*, published in 1771. Five years later, Kunić published his widely admired translation of Homer's *Iliad* into Latin with Odescalchi's help. The young Odescalchi did not simply encourage Kunić to pursue this ambitious project and to bring it to completion; he in fact funded its publication. The *Iliad* was a great success, with several reprints appearing in Italy and abroad.

Kunić's other major patron was Maria Pizzelli (1735-1807), a Roman lady who hosted a famous salon and with whom Kunić forged a deeply meaningful friendship. As Cornelia Knight (1757-1837), an English writer and translator living in Rome, puts it in her brief account of Kunić, "[h]is affections, being by his profession confined to friendships, were, in their warmth and sincerity, more like those of ancient than of modern times" (I, 183). There was clearly a great deal of warmth in Kunić's affections for Pizzelli, but whether that warmth was ancient or modern in nature remains something of a mystery. Kunić probably started appearing in her salon in the early 1770s, and continued to do so as a regular *abate* after the Jesuit order was abolished. It is not inconceivable that his decision to remain in Rome had something to do with his devotion to Pizzelli. Kunić gave her the poetic pseudonym Lyda and composed hundreds of epigrams dedicated to her and her family, including

at least two about her dog Janette. In one of these Janette is made to speak after her death, and Kunić's poem is to serve as her memorial: "Salve, Lyda, tibi quod vixi cara; poeta / Mi tuus hunc moerens constituit tumulum" (II, 339; *Liber carminum ad Lydam*, 414). Bratičević mentions a young Danish visitor who during his time in Rome met Kunić at Pizzelli's house. He described him as a famous poet who loves chess and who comes to Pizzelli's salon every evening, but also as someone who never laughs and whose thoughts it is impossible to guess (I, 173). It is this accidental, occasional sketch that perhaps best captures Kunić's fundamentally enigmatic character.

It is hardly surprising that someone so enigmatic should choose to write so much. While Bratičević primarily focuses on Kunić's epigrams, she provides an authoritative survey of his entire poetic production, both published and unpublished. For all future students of Kunić, her survey will be the essential reference point. In this kind of work every detail matters. For instance, in her discussion of Kunić's *carmina*, fourteen narrative hexametric poems often didactic in nature, Bratičević notes that the shortest among them, entitled *Ad Clementem XIII*, is erroneously called *Ad Clementem XIII* in some manuscript witnesses. With the help of Kunić's autograph, Bratičević is able not just to identify the correct addressee but to comment on the evident irony in the poem: Kunić writes about Pope Clement XIV with great enthusiasm, and then lives to see him suppress the Society of Jesus, something that Clement XIII successfully avoided (I, 200). In addition to *carmina*, Bratičević discusses Kunić's elegies (46 in number, of which 25 have remained unpublished); his verse epistles (13 in number); his hendecasyllabic poems (46 in number, amounting to 562 lines); his poetic paraphrases from Catullus (4 in number) and Horace (20 in number); his Latin translations from the Italian (the sonnets of Durante Duranti and Francesco Maria Zanotti, Giulio Cesare Cordara's humorous poem about Bošković's wig, and the beginning of Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata*); his celebrated Latin translations from the Greek (the most frequently published segment of his poetic output); his orations (14 in number, of which only one has so far been published); and, finally, his epigrams, of which Bratičević counts over 3500, amounting to almost 21000 lines.

The first larger selection of Kunić's epigrams (585 of them) was published in Parma in 1803 by Giuseppe Marotti, Kunić's friend and literary executor. Interestingly, this edition remained unknown to modern Croatian scholarship until the 1960s, when Josip Torbarina drew attention to it. The edition that defined Kunić as an epigrammatist for succeeding generations was the 1827 Ragusan edition, prepared by Rafo Radelja (*Raymundi Cunichii Ragusini epigrammata nunc primum in lucem edita*). It contains 967 epigrams. As Bratičević shows, Radelja knew about the Parma edition even though he never mentions it in his publication. In fact, Radelja decided not to include in his edition any of the epigrams already published in Parma, which enabled him to claim on the title page that Kunić's epigrams "are now published for the first time". Whereas Radelja included 967 epigrams, the manuscript he compiled in the course of his research is much more comprehensive, containing almost everything Kunić had written in this genre. So much so that Bratičević felt compelled to use Radelja's manuscript as the basis for her own edition of Kunić's epigrams.

However, Bratičević does not rely on Radelja uncritically. On the contrary, her principal contribution is the careful reconstruction of the manuscript transmission of Kunić's epigrams after his death and of the work of several Ragusans who either directly helped Radelja in his work or who preceded him. Radelja's chief helper was Antun Krša (1779-1838), while his great predecessor was Ivan Luka Volantić (1749-1808). Bratičević masterfully describes the extent of Volantić's editorial work as she identifies his hand in various manuscript witnesses and corrects long-standing misattributions, most of which credited Radelja with everything that had to do with the manuscript afterlife of Kunić's epigrams. As Bratičević shows, it was Volantić who, in 1804, received Kunić's manuscript papers from Marotti and worked hard to produce the first Ragusan edition of Kunić's

epigrams. His death in 1808 was probably the reason why the edition on which he worked so devotedly failed to see the light of day. Volantić was an exemplary scholar. Not content with the manuscripts he received from Marotti, he contacted other people who he thought might have manuscripts of Kunić's unpublished work. These were Baldassare Odescalchi, Abbondio Rezzonico, Maria Pizzelli, and Francesco Cancellieri. Thanks to Volantić, Dubrovnik is today home to the greatest number of manuscripts containing Kunić's poetry, including his surviving autographs. As with other Ragusan poets, however, there are manuscripts of Kunić's work outside of Dubrovnik, and indeed outside of Croatia. All of these are listed and described in Bratičević's study.

Because they have only partially survived, Kunić's autographs cannot serve as the basis for a modern edition of his poetry. Had they survived in their entirety, they would still not furnish a clean and unproblematic text. Kunić often revised without noting which variant is to be preferred; he sometimes included the same epigrams in different thematic groups; he occasionally addressed the same epigram to different people. In most cases, he wrote epigrams on small pieces of paper, sometimes on the back of his students' papers or even across their own writing. These are fascinating documents to which no edition can do full justice. When we encounter Kunić in a printed edition, he is neat, disciplined, and always finished. He is the perfect classicist; impeccably trained and fully in control. He is, as Francesco Maria Appendini aptly put it, *venustus, numerosus, latinissimus*. When we look at Kunić's autographs, we meet a somewhat different poet. Not always sure of himself, not always disciplined, and not always finished. In other words, we meet a poet at work, afraid that his best thought or turn of phrase might escape him and therefore eager to write it down wherever he happens to be. According to Gioacchino Tosi, Kunić's first biographer, he composed effortlessly, on the spur of the moment, the most ornate and extraordinary verses. Because he often did so while walking, he had to make frequent recourse to Roman taverns or shops to write his poems down lest he lose them. In all of Kunić's epigrams, Tosi comments, one hears the purity and correctness of the Latin tongue, but also melodies that slip into the soul and caress the senses without ever bruising them. Over three thousand melodies is a lot, and no single soul is likely to find enough room for them, especially when they come within the covers of a single book. Kunić's own manuscripts, however, as well as those of his early admirers, remind us that each of these poems came into being on a different occasion and under variable circumstances; each has a place in the life of a poet to whom the writing of poetry was clearly a condition of being in the world. That world is brought to life in Bratičević's illuminating study, and it will, one hopes, ensure that the epigrams she has edited find admirers in the future. If such admirers prove not to be very numerous or not as well-versed in Latin as she would like them to be, let them at least be ready to be caressed, and perhaps, under the wonderful weight of her learning, occasionally bruised.

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