



## Ernest Koliqi, Translator of the Great Italian Poets

Elda TALKA

Aleksander Xhuvani" University, Elbasan, Albania

## ABSTRACT

*Translation, as a dynamic element of interchange among diverse cultures, is one of the privileged domains of the comparative literature. Translation has been entailed to both as a cultural work and an act within the phenomenon of transition from one literature and culture to the other and as such, it should actually be considered in terms of its global character. Volume I and II of "The Great Italian Poets", have been translated by the masterful hand of Ernest Koliqi who, as it will be revealed in this article, has managed to preserve the works' original metrics, the fidelity with the original works and their style as well as to abide by Dante's terza rima and Ariosto's ottava rima. In his translations, Koliqi made use of the lexicon from the diverse Albanian language dialects, a mastery which served to evince the geniality of the Italian poets as well as to press for a unified Albanian literary language. As a translator, Koliqi managed to miraculously translate the Italian writers with a masterful hand, preserving the finesse of the verse, the refined poetical elegance and the interplay of rhymes in the original text.*

KEYWORDS : culture, interchange, rescript, literature, translation

This article reviews Ernest Koliqi's work as a translator. He was born in Shkoder in 1903 and was educated at the Jesuit College "Arici" in Brescia, Italy. His rigorous Jesuit education made possible for Koliqi to serve as a cultural mediator between Italy and Albania. (Elsie E, 2001). His family, the liberal mentality and the Italian culture nurtured even by newspapers like 'Corriere della Sera' (Guzzetta A., 1968), had a great impact in Koliqi's general formation which took shape in a difficult period for Albania and its conditions, (Gradilone G., 1974). First he published the dramatic poem "Scanderbeg's battle cry" to be followed by a volume with novelettes entitled "The shadow of mountains", published in Zara, Croatia, in 1929, a work which baptized him as the founder of the Albanian novelette.

In 1932 Koliqi translated the first volume of "The Great Italian Poets", from Italian to the Albanian language, a volume with poetry by Dante, Petrarca, Tasso and Ariosto, prefaced by Father Gjergj Fishta. In 1936 he translated the second volume of "The Great Italian Poets", prefaced by the Italian linguist Carlo Tagliavini. The author kept on publishing poetry books, suchlike "Seasons' Trails" and the "Banisters of the Renaissance". The collection of novelettes entitled "Merchants of Flags" came out in 1935 to be followed by "The Narcissist's Mirrors". Koliqi graduated at the University of Padova, Italy, by defending his dissertation, "Epica popolare albanese" under the direction of the Italian Linguist Tagliavini. From 1957-1973 he presides the Albanian Language and Literature Chair in "La Sapienza", Rome. Also, in 1957 he writes the novel "Taste of the Sour Bread" and from then, until 1973, Koliqi publishes the renowned literary periodical "Shejzat/Le Pleiadi", an unreplaceable achievement of the Albanian literature. Died in Rome in 1975.

All the literary works and the cultural creations in the past as well as the contemporary ones would not have the chance to exist if it wasn't for the translators and their works.

On the other way, the translation of the present-day literary works is immensely supported by the great variety of the languages, cultures and traditions (Ceserani R., 1999).

Studies about translations are the most important campaigns of the supranational visions over literature, which, in the intercultural context of the actual "mixed" world play a first-hand role to the translation contexts from one culture to the other and occurring in the present "metis"<sup>2</sup> world of emigration.

There are few of our writers whose names are as well-known in the Albanian literary strata as that of Koliqi's: even fewer are those whose works have been spread in every corner of Albania, bearing the author's name in cultural events of any kind, in publications to various leaflets and magazines, some of which have been founded and maintained by the author per se, in his publications which were, nolens volens, anticipated to take an outstanding place in the history of our literature. (Gurakuqi K., 1963)

Translation is, in its essential, a genuinely intellectual and erudite work if judged by the translations realized by Koliqi. He managed to bring the Italian authors into the Albanian language, those who dovetailed to the nature of his interests and the Italian language he knew, since this corresponded to Italy, the country he had been graduated to. The Jesuits' classical school prepared a high intellectual calibre Koliqi, deign in any point of view, (Begeja H., 1975).

Due to the fact that he had studied in Italy, Koliqi was a keen connoisseur of the classical poets. He maintained a great admiration for the Italian literature and civilisation. He firstly commenced his literary creativity in Italian language and his intellectual skills gave him the possibility to enrich his native language by means of the Great Italian Poets.

The Italian literature, as important part of the Koliqi's general formation and his passion made him capable of conveying its values to the prolific literature he managed to create, (Pazzaglia M. 1992).

Koliqi commenced his work as a translator, with "The Manual of the Albanian Language" written by Father Cordignano. There are also some other translations from Italian made by Koliqi in this work such as "Confronting Saint Guido and Giosue Carducci" Here is what Tagliavini wrote in the preface of the "The Great Italian Poets", second volume: "I admired the way the author was translating our difficult classics, doing it not only with a perfect certainty but also with a style that was so conformable to the original" (Koliqi E., 1936). In the first volume of "The Great Italian Poets", published in 1932 by the Publishing House 'Nikaj' in Tirana, he masterly translates Dante, Petrarca, Ariosto and Tasso. In the second volume published in 1936, by the same Publishing House 'Nikaj' in Tirana, with the same masterfulness he translates Parini, Monti, Foscolo e Manzoni. In the preface At Fishta wrote for the first volume, he compares the translation with the tune of the musical instruments, which is result of the melodic sounds of each musical instrument:

*...translation of a classical work, according to my opinion, presents a greater analogy to the musical tunes emitted by diverse musical instruments. The musical instruments are dissimilar, firstly because of the sounds which differ due to the nature of the source as well as to the length and width of each musical instrument: secondly, because of the diverse means through which the musical instrument performs the musical notes in proper time and shapes the tunes'.*

Another critic and translator, Karl Gurakuqi, considers Ernest Koliqi as an important figure due to his successful translations: "For Ernest time is appreciation and priceless, neither is it wasted or spent vainly" (Gurakuqi K., 1963)

Translation as an act per se requires specialists to reach inherent values. It is the most difficult literary genre of those poets, which he brought in our language in full conformity with their original and style. Tagliavini, who wrote the preface of the second volume remarks "the abidance

with the original metrics” In his translations, Dante has been translated in ‘terza rima’ and the eleven-syllable verse. Ariosto has been translated in ‘ottava rima’ whereas Foscolo, who is the most difficult, has been translated with the same number of syllables:

The following is a sample of verse in Italian

Dante: Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita, mi ritrovai per una selva oscura che la diritta via era smarrita

In Albanian

Në gjymësën e shtegtimt së jetës s’onë, mbassi/ qi humba udhën e drejtë, u gjeta në një pyll t’errshëm/ Ah sa vishtir asht me tregue se ç’pyll i egër

Foscolo,

A Luigia Palavicini caduta, da cavallo,

*In Albanian:* Luigia Palavicini fell off his horse

I balsami beati

Per te le Grazie apprestino

Per te i lini odorati

Che a Citera porgeano

Quando profano spino

Le punse il piè divino

In Albanian

Balçmat e mrekullueshme

për ty t’gatisin Gracjet

për ty ndrizat erandshme

qi Çiteres i a siellshin

kur n’kamb’ të perendishme

nji ferr’ trushkyese e theri.

By means of his translations Koliqi testified to be capable of using the Italian poetic language masterly. By being a very good connoisseur of the language, he manages to express it with all its modulations and the musical tuning, beginning from the origin to the present (Capizzi C., 1969),

Critics appreciated both the volumes of “The Great Italian Poets”, firstly considering as very courageous and later on as a great achievement. The following reveals his masterfulness into aspiring a unified Albanian literary language, since, to express his geniality; the poet makes use of lexicon from the fund of the diverse Albanian language dialects.

Ernest Koliqi had the features of an elaborated writer: he entered into the merrow of the Albanian language using a middle folk language, knowing how to choose words he used and he displayed harmony and a musical ear.

It is widely-known that it is difficult to translate Dante or Petrarka. The refined style and the authors’ thoughts have forced the translator to extend his expression and nomenclature in the Albanian language. (Muzaka Gj., 1932)

There are cases when single sentences, the symbol’s meaning and the meaning of the other words have been removed or there are discordances between the original and the translated work. Koliqi per se’ makes self-criticism and says:

I am certain that three-fourth of the work’s splendor remains with the original. The greatest fault lies with the translator although, it slightly lies with the Albanian language as well, a language which has not been evolved decently and couldn’t manage to ensure the proper translation of the classic authors which maintain so much poetical substance that couldn’t be reflected in all its entirety, leaving something even in the

cruelest treason of its form, showing to be embarrassed when confronting a decadent poet for whom the form is everything. As I said I was enticed and couldn’t hold. This is what my translations resulted to be like. (Koliqi E., 1933)

By means of his translations Koliqi intended to provide the Albanians with the poetic values of the Italian literature, so making possible even the communication of the translated works from one language and culture to the other. Chevrel (2002) asserts: Translating is needed to make communication between individuals possible, since they are divided in terms of the diverse forms of the world’s cognition and concept.

Koliqi’s translated poetry which is the most difficult and often transformed into a challenge the translator might have been faced with. This is what, scholar Kodra (2004) says about Koliqi to this regard: “Translation of poetry is a challenge by means of which what seems to be impossible becomes possible, while the poets are the most suitable to face this challenge” At Fishta, while prefacing the first volume, highlights Koliqi’s values as a translator:

“It’s really a good-omened destiny for the Albanian literature that this young literary author, supplied with all the desired features for a good translator, has commenced the translation of selected works by the very first-rank authors of Italy”

Moreover, in the preface of the second volume of “The great Italian Poets”, the Italian linguist Tagliavini appreciates the masterly translation of the *Graves (Sepolcri)* and the poetry *The Fifth of May (Cinque maggio)*, speaking with admiration for the translated poetry flying over the passages of the Italian poets. The Albanian language poetical text conforms that of the Italian language, and Koliqi, with the wisdom which characterized him, managed to reproduce the so-much-different style of Dante, Petrarca, Ariosto, Tasso, Foscolo and Manzoni. In his translations Koliqi manages to create and rewrite very refined verses in the Albanian language while perserving the absolute fidelity to the original. The fine elegance and the strict conformity with the original texts is seen in the *Fifth Song* of the *Inferno*,

Francesca

Io cominciai: Poeta volentieri

Parlerei a que’ due che insieme vanno

E paion sì al vento esser leggeri

In Albanian:

Un fillova: Poet, kisha me dashtë

t’iu flas njatyre t’dyve qi aq’letë

duken s’bashku tue shkue n’ketë duhi të vrazhdtë.

He also reveals pure Albanian language words as in the Francesca episode, Fifth Song of the *Inferno*

“O anime affannate

In Albanian: o shpirtin të ngashruem!

Pipa (2006), while intending to reveal Koliqi’s values as a translator says:

“A good poet cannot provide bad translations: the sense of art leads him to find the suitable expressions: It’s in vain to criticize such poets about their techniques: if one is a poet it possesses the right ones”

As a conclusion, we can say that Koliqi was featured by a soul which was supplied with natural poetical feelings, which knew to understand the poetry of the great Italian poets and as translator, he managed to miraculously translate, with his masterful hand, the Italian authors, while preserving the splendor of their verse, the refined poetical elegance and the interplay of rhymes in the original text.

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