

Fishta And Sacred Hymns By Manzoni

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Abstract

Gjergj Fishta's translations are a priceless contribution for the time when they were produced and an argument of great interest that deserves to be expanded and analyzed these days. Alessandro Manzoni, an Italian romantic novelist and poet, was one of the greatest writers that Fishta studied and translated at a young age. The selection and youthful passion to translate Manzoni, his poetics and psychology, as well, was not fortuitous. Inside this Italian classic writer, our national poet found a worthy representative of romanticism, a writer with a strong religious faith and a poetic philosophy that would leave a sign and would inspire him not infrequently during his poetic creativity. The translation of the *Inni sacri* (Sacred hymns) shows that Fishta belongs to those translators who remain faithful to the content and style of the author preserving without any compromise the soul of the poem and the poet. Even though at a young age, Fishta already had the passion of a great poet, the deep sensitivity to capture even the smallest shades of meaning, which often derive from stylistic techniques or sound combinations between words or verses.

Introduction

Gjergj Fishta's translations are a very valuable contribution for the time when they were made and an argument of great interest that today deserves to be expanded and analyzed, in the same way it is processed with the entire work of this extraordinary colossus of Albanian literature. Translation is a tempting activity for every writer and philologist, an activity that all times and all nations need.

Albania of post 1900 had an urgent need for translations, for literature and for good writers, although there was no a real school of translation. But it must be affirmed that there were some translators endowed with a high intellectual consciousness. They gave value and professionalism to the translation, becoming the starting and reference point for translations in the Albanian language. The well-known translator Shpëtim Çuçka would say in an interview that the work of a translator should be evaluated not so much by the frame of time when he worked, but by the stability of the translation principles he followed and the values he achieved.

One of these names, who knew to appreciate the importance of translation and its

necessity, was the Franciscan father Gjergj Fishta. He thought that the nations' great spiritual wealth should be translated and should be studied in schools in order to refine the aesthetic taste and the language, both from words and periods of writing and discourse. In one of his writings about Koliqi's translations by the great Italian poets, Fishta would write: "Only we, the Albanian nation, at this point of view, have lagged behind everyone else, as usual - and not always due to the fault of foreigners because we don't have our classic authors or the foreign ones translated into Albanian. So, one of our students, even after finishing the Matura exams, will not be good at discussing about the literary classics of other nations among intellectuals; because he has never read any of those authors translated into Albanian". So, translation was seen by Fishta as a necessity for the time, a great national service that was especially related to the education of the generations'.

The Franciscan father first became acquainted with the classic Italian writers during his studies in Bosnia, where he received ecclesiastical and literary education. Alessandro Manzoni, the Italian romantic

novelist and poet, was one of the great writers that Fishta studied and translated at a young age. The selection and youthful passion to translate Manzoni's poetics and psychology were not accidental. Our national poet found in this Italian classic a worthy representative of romanticism, a writer with a strong religious faith and a poetic philosophy that would leave a sign and would often inspire him during his poetic creativity. In an article entitled "Manzoni and Fishta's poetics", the researcher Blerina Suta writes: "Analyzing the language of the translations of *Inni sacri* (Sacred hymns), we can say that Manzoni's subject will also be conveyed to that part of Fishta's lyrical poetry that gives value to religion as morality and as poetry: *Këshndellat* (Christmas); *Të psuemit* (Psalms); *Të ngjallunt* (Resurrection); *Rrëshajët* (Pentecost) have left their marks on Fishta's lyrical creativity with the new Christian inspiration that they reflect"¹.

The translations from Manzoni will be summarized first in the work *Vjerrsha t'pershpirteshme* (Soulful rhymes) translated into Albanian (Shkodër, *Shtypshkronja e së Paperlyemes*, 1905) and then again in *Vallja e Parrizit* (Paradise Dance) (Shkodër, *Shtypshkronja "A.Gj.Fishta"* 1941)².

Himnet e shenjta (Sacred hymns) selected by Fishta are the product of a period that coincides with Manzoni's religious conversion and spiritual resurrection. This would constitute one of the most important elements of the Italian writer's poetics which would lead him to a new way of reflecting and

understanding concepts and phenomena. His vision of the world already owned a new element: God. This is how his concept of literature and his way of writing would change, and the Sacred hymns would be a clear reflection of his deeply Christian commitment, especially of a fundamentally reformed poetry. This is where the translation of the Franciscan father comes from, starting not only from the religious inspiration, but also from the philosophy carried by Manzoni's poetry. The writer's intention was to create twelve hymns, which would commemorate the greatest feasts of the liturgical calendar, but, which in fact, he created only five: Resurrection (*Të Ngjallunt/La Risurrezione*), Holy Name of the Blessed Virgin Mary (*Emni i Zojës/Il nome di Maria*), Christmas (*Këshndellat /Il Natale*), Psalms (*Të Psuemit /La Passione*) and Pentecost (*Rrëshajët/La Pentecoste*).

The poem "Il Natale" (Christmas) translated into the Gege variant "Kshnellat" is listed the first in the final edition of the hymns (although if we refer to the time of its creation (1813), it appears the third). The first lines of this poem are characterized by a very long sentence which is extended to three seven-syllable stanzas in the original version, while in the translation this sentence goes up to two seven-syllable stanzas. The first stanza carries the greatest value of that literary figure that extends to the other two stanzas and coincides with the similitude.

Si curr, qi nalt prej kulmit	Qual masso che dal vertice	What boulder that from the top
T'nji rrpis s'termale s'grisme,	di lunga erta montana,	of long mountain steepness,
Shkepun andej mbas hovit	abbandonato all'impeto	abandoned to impetues
T'njaj rreshmje shâmë me krisme,	di rumorosa frana	of noisy landslide,
Turr neper drum t'thepisun	per lo scheggiato calle	for the chipped street
Teposhtë tu' u rrokullisun,	precipitando a valle,	plummeting downstream,
Plandoset e n'fund e jet;	batte sul fondo e sta;	beats on the bottom and stays;

¹ B. Suta, "Manzoni dhe poetika e Fishtës", *Exlibris*, nr. 153, Viti i IV i botimit, 23 tetor 2021.

² A. Benedikt Dema O.F.M., "Veprimi letrar i A.Gjergj Fishtës O.F.M.", *Shtypshkroja „A.Gjergj Fishta“*, Shkodër, 1943.

This literary figure is neatly recreated by Fishta, with a high stylistic capacity and conceptual precision. The translation aims to preserve the Manzonian image that is created by the rolling of the rock and its immobility, not only on a semantic level, but also on a phonetic level, more precisely, the static position at the moment the rock stops conveying through this image the man's rolling, after the great burden the weight of guilt caused. The word that closes the seven-syllable verse is a verb with a strong final accent, which is also conveyed in the Albanian variant, causing the same stylistic and semantic effect. It must be said that the play with sound effects stands out, mainly with rough and dark sounds, which together with the alliteration on the sound r manage to create the

harsh noise of the landslide (vertice, erta, rumorosa frana) (summit, steep, noisy landslide). We note that even in the Albanian variant, Fishta skillfully preserves and adapts the same combination of sounds, causing the same effect of the sound of the rock rolling from above. In the Albanian language, alliteration is created very carefully through the repetition of the letter rr and r in the same verses and specifically in the words: curr, rrpis s'termale grisme, reshme, krisme, turr, rrokulisun, thus creating an internal rhythm. In the fourth stanza, a series of rhetorical questions is well-preserved in the Albanian language very faithfully, which carry a meaningful and emotional load for this poem, preserving the same expressive power in the Albanian language:

Kush nder sa janë t'lem mnijet
Kush ishte njai bir robit,
quale era mai persona
Qi t'Naltit Shejt t'paqasun
Mund t'thote: pshtona kobit?
Besë t're me lidhë t'amshueme?
Me nxierrë njatë pre t'pushtueme
Qi ferri e mbate n'thonj?

Qual mai tra i nati all'odio,
quale era mai persona
che al Santo inaccessibile
potesse dir: perdona?
far novo patto eterno?
al vincitore inferno
la preda sua strappar?

Who ever among those born to hate,
who was that person,
which is inaccessible to the Holy
he could say: forgive?
make a new eternal covenant?
to the conquering hell
the prey of him tear?

Starting not only from these verses, but also from the entirety of this creation we perceive a great wealth of images, sensitivities and emotional states which essentially refer to the possibility of turning to God and asking for his forgiveness, a necessity that exceeds even the laws of nature. The language used, the Gege dialect, would allow the translator to use not only certain lexical forms, but also the use of some key words which are explained only through the customary code of the north. The word besa (faith), chosen to translate the word patto, is a rather intelligent finding of the translator. The word patto, in biblical discourse, means a new alliance between God and all people, created with the advent of Christianity through the sacrifice of God's son. In the

Albanian translation, Fishta chooses exactly one word, which carries an extraordinary load of meaning, the explanation of which requires to refer to a long-standing tradition inherited from the ancestors for centuries. No other word better than the faith (besa) could express a divine relationship, even to the point of sacrifice, such as that of men and God. Fishta deeply feels and knows the lexicon of God along with the lexicon of the people, and this is what distinguishes him "among the writers of our literary, as a faithful Servant of Religion and burning the flames of the Motherland. It's pointless: neither Fishta can be denied the veladon, nor Albania can be denied Fishta"³.

Fishta pays attention to every word so that it could get the clearest and the most

³ Gj. Duka, "Proza fishtjane", në revistën *Shejzat*, viti V, Nr.11-12, A.Urbinsti, Roma, f. 454.

complete meaning in the Albanian language, therefore it is not rare that the translation of the words content and their explanation comes naturally, more than finding another equivalent word in the language of arrival. Thus we have bir robi (that person) for persona, pshtona kobit (forgive) for perdona, or the t'njaj rreshmje shâmë me krisme (of noisy landslide) for

Me nxierrë njetë pre t'pushtueme	al vincitore inferno	to the conquering hell
Qi ferri e mbate n'thonj?	la preda sua strappar?	the prey of him tear?

In this poem, the translator also pays due attention to the verses stylistic aspect, as an element related to the writer's style, to his way of writing. Fishta very carefully highlights some

rumorosa fran, anmiqt (enemies) for le adverse forze, or even these two verses where a translation of the content and idea that the poetry words are meant to convey in the Italian language is clearly visible by skipping a literal translation and even going to an inversion of the order of these verses :

of the rhetorical figures, bringing them intact both in form and content. He preserves the anaphora in the fourth stanza, between the first and second lines:

Kush nder sa janë t'lem mnijet,	Qual mai tra i nati all'odio	Who ever among those born to hate,
Kush ishte njai bir robjt,	quale era mai persona	who was that person,

Or even in the case when he does not manage to reach the full form of the anaphora (in the Italian variant the anaphora is found between the fourth and fifth verse, Tu...Tu (You...You), in the Albanian language he realizes with the same elements the figure of repetition, or of anadiplosis, without affecting

any of the meaningful nuances of the original and conveying it with the same naturalness in the translated variant. For this, we refer to the seventh stanza where we see that even in the Albanian variant the same forms Ti (you) and ty (you) are preserved and they are repeated in all verses although not in the same positions:

O Figlio , o Tu cui genera	O Bir , o Ti , qi i Amshuemi	O Son , or You to whom it generates
L'Eterno, eterno seco;	T' lindë t'amëshuem si vetë	The Eternal, eternal with you ;
qual ti può dir de' secoli:	Kush ty mund t'thotë i kohvet:	who can tell you about the centuries:
Tu cominciasti meco?	Me mue ke dalë Ti n'jetë?	Did you start with me?
Tu sei: del vasto epiro	Ti je: 'i terthore qiellet	You are: of the vast epiros

We notice again the preservation of the apostrophe, which comes in the first verse of this same stanza, and the same is conveyed in the Albanian language, that is, **O Figlio** and **O Bir (O Son)**, at the beginning of the verse. With the same force comes also the beautiful antithesis of the sixth stanza created between

the two lines in contrast with each other, among the thorns and bushes that have covered everything on the one hand and on the other hand the flowers and colors that are happily blooming in the same place, maintaining the same image and the same Manzonian atmosphere:

dove copriano i bronchi	Kû para mblote cunga	Where the land was covered with logs
ivi germoglia il fior	Tah lulja atje shperthen	Now the flower there blossoms

In the preface of Ernest Koliq's translations "The Greatest Poets of Italy", Gjergj Fishta would write: "... the word that is the voice of the language and the means through which the poetic and classical elocution is treated and composed, in other words, the genes of any language can even change in the translation of classical works so that the word does not always correspond to the word, the measure to the rhyme measure, the phraseology to the phraseology, etc. because these belong to the gene or nature of the language into which it is translated, ... while the idea, the style, the nobility and the liveliness of the expression, since they originate from the author's soul, they must be preserved, as long as possible, unbroken and the same as they are in the original version"⁴.

So, Fishta belongs to those translators who remain faithful to the content and style of the author, by preserving without any compromise the poem and poet's soul. Some elements of the Manzoni style come very naturally through Fishta's pen. Although at a young age, Fishta already had the passion of a great poet, the deep sensitivity to capture even the smallest shades of meaning, which often originate from the stylistic techniques or sound combinations between words or verses, as well.

In Manzoni's next hymn, *Te Njallunt* (Resurrection), we will see a revival of faith in the poet's soul, a strong burst of joy for the sublime miracle that has already conquered him. Resurrection is the main word of the Easter liturgy, therefore this hymn has a strong liturgical tone. The Franciscan father and the

poet come together, by bringing a rather elaborate translation into the Albanian language, both on a poetic and theological level. Fishta's genius believed in Fë (Religion) and Atdhë (Motherland). According to Lasgush Poradeci "All the poetic and social work of Father Gjergj Fishta was developed around the religious and national postulate. Truly, there is no such a greater idea and feeling, a more worthy to be poured out and sung in art, than the idea of God, the idea of the Motherland! Fishta glorified these themes both as an artist and as a man by realizing these two eternal attributes, the fighting spirit and the thoughtfulness of the religious faith to which he was devoted and which he always surrounded with the mystically adored face of the Motherland;"⁵. Therefore, these hymns come not only from the passion for a great poet like Manzoni, but also from the strong religious faith that stems from them.

In this poem, we note that the translator keeps the same meter that of the stanza of seven octasyllables, since this hymn compared to the others is more joyful and requires a more regular and flowing rhythm in order to fit and be in complete harmony with the content of the poem. This poem is characterized by a feverish need to communicate with others, a strong inner feeling that pushes you towards an emotional explosion and which finds expression in the first lines of the poem. The segmentation of the verses through punctuation is carried out in the same way in the Albanian language which our great poet knows wonderfully and knows how to use in all forms and in all registers.

⁴ Gj. Fishta, "Parathâne", Ernest Koliqi, *Poetët e mëdhej t'Italis, Nikaj*, Tirana, 1932, f. XIII.

⁵ L. Poradeci, "Gjergj Fishta lirik, shkëmb i tokës dhe shkëmb i shpirtit shqiptar", në

Gjergj Fishta, nën kujdesin e revistës „Shkëndija“, Shtëpia Botonjëse Luarasi, Tiranë, 1941, f.22.

È risorto: or come a morte
La sua preda fu ritolta?
Come ha vinto l'atre porte,
come è salvo un'altra volta
...

È risorto: il capo santo
più non posa nel sudario:
è risorto: dall'un canto
dell'avello solitario

U ngjallë s'deknit: or' prej
dore Preja mordes si i ka
pshtue?
Si i ka mujtun dyerët mizore,
Si ka pshtue Njai, qi pushtue
...

U ngjallë s'deknit: ftyra e
gzueshme
nën pëlhurë nuk rrin mâ ngrit;
U ngjallë s'deknit: e
randueshme
m'njanë ânë t'vorrit kaperdit

He has risen: now as in death
How has he escaped from death?
How has he conquered the atrocious
doors,
How has He escaped from death while it
had invaded him

He has risen: the joyful face
no longer stays up under the fabric:
he has risen: wighing on the one side of
the solitary avel

The Manzonian call for revived faith, is equally emotional and shocking in the Albanian version. The punctuation marks are meticulously preserved, taking all the weight they have in the poem, as an important part of the content. The liturgical tonality, as an essential part of this hymn, adds to the great enthusiasm of the resurrection the appropriate solemnity of the Catholic prayer. As a result, the key word is *è risorto* is pronounced in the variant *u njajalja s deknit* (I have risen..), clearly giving the content of the word and the liturgical message it conveys. This variant would better explain, for the Albanian reader, the religious phenomenon that represents the resurrection of

Christ from the dead, conveying it with the same surprise that causes a rare discovery.

U njjallë s'deknit (He has risen) comes as an announcement that is repeated three times at the beginning of the verses, through the technique of anaphora, which is also carefully preserved in the Albanian language. In these verses, another anaphora stands out between the third and fourth verse of the above stanza, with the repetition of the word *si* (how) ...*si..* (how) (come...come) at the beginning of the verse. Or even the anaphora of the last stanza, between the fifth and sixth verses, between *por..por*, (but... but), (*ma... ma*):

ma pacata in suo contegno
ma celeste, come segno
della gioia che verrà.

Por i paqët e mbrenda vendit,
Por qielluer, si shêj gazmendit,
Qi nder valle t'qiellës ushton.

But peaceful and in his demeanor
But heavenly, as a sign of joy,
That among dances of the heavens echoes

Referring to the lexical aspect, the translator follows the same theory of loyalty to the author's message and the content of the verse, as with the above poem *Il Natale* (Christmas). **Il capo santo** is translated **the joyful face**, avoiding the ad literam translation because in the context of the poem he would not be able to convey all the internal and external enthusiasm for the phenomenon that was happening. Therefore, it had to be reflected and conveyed in clear and concrete words that **il capo santo** was **the joyful face of Christ who**

rose from death by highlighting the divine victory over death.

Likewise, in the verse *ma celeste, come segno / della gioia che verrà*, we note the same method of translation at the content level, bringing it to the following form: *But heavenly, as a sign of joy/That among dances of the heavens echoes*. We notice that for the translator, the Albanian pronunciation must be as understandable as possible for the level of the Albanian reader of the time. We must also take into consideration the fact that the translation was made by Fishta in 1906, a period when the Albanian

people were in total darkness of knowledge and culture. "The Albanian population was largely illiterate, about 90%. The cultural orientation was mainly Eastern and the world masterpieces, either from the East or the West, were less likely to be embraced by a wide mass of readers...The Western culture and the Italian culture in particular, used to have a go initially through the Albanian North, Shkodra culture, finding a not very wide geographical extent in Albania". So Albanians knew Manzoni very little. He was read only by those who were familiar with the Italian culture and this reader obviously spoke and wrote in Gege accent as well as many other Italian classic authors who would be later translated by Ernest Koliqi.

plima-plima	tuba-tuba	Tufted
curr	shkam, shkrep	Rock, cliff
jeten preku	zgjohet	wakes up
dyndi	çoi perpjetw, largoi	raised up, drove away
tu' i rrekun	tue i mundue	by forcing
t'kobitshem	të mjerë	miserable
s'irnueme	së nxime	blackened
në ravë t'shemtueme	në rrugë të mjerë të gabimit	on the miserable path of error
ruba	cloth	in the same sense it is called headscarf.

Also, at the bottom of the page we find not only explanations related to the meanings of dialect words, but also some explanations and data that

complete the reader's knowledge about many characters or religious phenomena that appear in the hymns verses, such as:

Zemer-ngrimes -Heart-warming – Marie Magdalene.

Vashës s'pabesë – To the unfaithful girl - Delilah, who betrayed Sampson, exemplifies the Synagogue that saved Christ.

T'mikut qi besës i bân lak- To the friend who made a loop - of Judas the Apostle, who betrayed Christ.

Porsi i fort- just like the strong, etc... - Et excitatus est tamquam dormiens Dominua, tamquam potens crapulatus a vino. Psalm., LXXVII, 65.

In conclusion, we can say that the translations of Manzoni's hymns from the Italian language should be seen as an added value to the totality of translations of Italian classics and as another dimension of the polyhedral figure of our national poet Gjergj Fishta. The mastery of the linguist and poet makes these translations be read with interest even today, not only to get to know the poetry

of the classic Italian writer, but also to enrich today's lexicon with the rare folk words and expressions which the Franciscan Father looked for with the persistence of a hard-working researcher and the passion of an ardent patriot.

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