

Erotic, Sexual Words and Meanings in Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet" in Albanian translation

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Abstract

The Albanian reading public had to wait for three hundred years to be introduced to the works of one of the greatest writers of English literature, William Shakespeare, in their mother tongue. The translation of Shakespeare's works into Albanian started in the second decade of the 20th century. We distinguish three periods of the Albanian translation of Shakespeare's plays. The first phase, from 1915 to 1928, is known for the translation of Bishop Fan Noli, the head of Albanian Autocephalous Orthodox Church in Boston, USA. The second phase from 1955 until 1982, during the totalitarian regime world literature was strictly censored by communist propaganda, with only three official translators of Shakespeare's works, Skënder Luarasi, Vedat Kokona, and Alqi Kristo. Third period, from 1990 to the present, with an increasing number of translators of Shakespeare's works, such as Refik Kadija, Perikli Jorgoni, Qezar Kurti, Mihal Hanxhari, Napolon Tasi, Pashko Gjeçi, Kristaq Traja etc. William Shakespeare has made frequent use of erotic and sexual words, meanings and connotations in his tragedy *Romeo and Juliet*. Most of them are missing in the first Albanian translation. But the second translator has noted all of them in the footnotes of his translation. In this paper I will focus on these sexual and erotic words and references in the "Romeo and Juliet" and their translation in Albanian language by two translators, the first translation of Alqi Kristo some 70 years ago, and the second translation by Refik Kadija in 2014. Political influences, evolution of Albanian language over the last decades, are some of the main reasons to suggest that Refik Kadija's translation should be used as more complete and better translation of Shakespeare's tragedy in Albanian language.

Keywords: *William Shakespeare, translation, Albania, erotic.*

Introduction

The translation of Shakespeare's works into Albanian started in the second decade of the 20th century. The Albanian reading public had to wait for three hundred years to be introduced to the works of one of the greatest writers of English literature, William Shakespeare, in their mother tongue. Since the very beginning politics seems to have guided and determined the translation of Shakespeare's works into Albanian. "The first Albanian translator of Shakespeare's plays, Bishop Fan S. Noli, the head of the Albanian Autocephalous Orthodox Church in Boston, USA, was politically motivated to translate the four tragedies *Othello*, *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, and *Julius Caesar*." (Kadija, R., (2009) "*William Shakespeare in Albania*", LCPJ, p. 37).

There are already two translations of *Romeo and Juliet*. The first translation was done almost 70 years ago by Alqi Kristo. The second was done in 2014 by Refik Kadija. Until October 2014 it was the only translation of "*Romeo and Juliet*" that existed in

Albanian. Although A. Kristo was not an English graduate and was basically self-taught in English, this first translation has certainly undeniable merits. The Albanian text was used for reading by the university students for several decades. It was used as the basic text for the production of this tragedy on stage.

Erotic and sexual words

William Shakespeare has made frequent use of erotic and sexual words, meanings and connotations in his tragedy *Romeo and Juliet*. Most of them are missing in the first Albanian translation. But the second translator has noted all of them in the footnotes of his translation.

Based on authorized editions of the 21st century, the second translator R. Kadija has provided a lot of explanatory notes of erotic or sexual connotations and meanings, which exist in the English text but were missing in the first Albanian translation of this tragedy. They are mostly evident in the speeches of Mercutio and the Nurse, particularly in the dialogue between them (II, iv) as well as in the conversation between Mercutio and Benvolio (II, i), but also Nurse's words in Juliet's chamber ((IV, v), in the dialogue between the servants Gregory and Sampson (I, i), in the conversation among Mercutio, Benvolio and Romeo with frequent word-play, puns suggesting male and female privates and sexual acts (II, iii), etc.

Kadija: Nga ogurzezat gjenitale të dy familjeve rivale
Lindi një çift fatqek me dashuri pakufi. (Prologu, I)

Kadija: (Samson): Unë godas shpejt po të më ngacmojnë. [alludes to "make quick sex"] (I, i)

Kadija: (Samson): ... gratë e tij do t'i ngjesh pas murit. (for sex) (I, i)

Kadija: (Samson): Po, kokat e vajzave ose cipën e virgjërisë së tyre; merre me cilin kuptim të duash. (I, i). In the conversation between Gregory and Samson there is a world play for maidenheads and heads of the maids, referring to sex.

Kadija: (Samson): Mua do të më ndjejnë, sa të jem në gjendje të qëndroj në këmbë. Dhe dihet se unë jam një goxha copë mishi. (I, i) (Alluding to sexual activity; and the underlined words suggest 'a man with a big sexual organ')

Kadija: (Gregor): ... merluc i thatë meaning 'a man with a small sexual organ'. (I, i)

Kadija: (Gregor) ...Nxirre veglën. (It is a wordplay suggesting to take out the sword and the penis. (I, i) In the dialogue between Samson and Gregor (I, i) there is repeated wordplay for penis.

Kadija: (Romeo): Brengat e mia më rëndojnë thellë në shpirt
Të cilat do t'i shtosh duke i ngjeshur fort
Pas tuajave... (I, i)

[Romeo's words 't'i shtosh' (wilt propagate) mean "will multiply" (probably

with the suggestion of sexual reproduction)

Kadija: (Benvolio): Mor vëlla, një shenjë e bukur gjuhët më lehtë. [Here in the dialogue between Romeo and Benvolio “shenjë e bukur” (“fair mark”) refers to an “unobstructed target”, “attractive vagina”.] (I, i)

Kadija: (Romeo): . . . ajo nuk mund të gjuhët
Me shigjet’ të Kupidit, ka trutë e Dianës;
S’e fut dot në lak me fjalë dashurie,
As nuk e mbërthen dot me sy sulmues,
Nuk ia hap shalët arit që mposhtë shënjtoret. (I, i)

[Here “shigjet’ të Kupidit” (Cupid’s arrow) is a wordplay for fallacism. And “trutë e Dianës” (Diane’s wit) probably is a wordplay for genital organs. Whereas Romeo’s words “Nuk ia hap shalët arit” shows clearly that the woman he loves does not sell herself for gold].

Kadija: (Taja): Kur të kuptosh më shumë, do të biesh në shpinë. (I, iii)
Here Nurse’s words “do të biesh në shpinë” (“Thou wilt fall backward”) refers clearly to lying on one’s back for sex.] The Nurse also links love and sex throughout the play. This is more marked when she finds out Juliet is to marry Romeo. We can see how excited she is about the physical opportunity for Juliet because she comments immediately on Romeo’s physical traits. “...His face be better than any man’s”. This has links with Mercutio when he talks about Rosaline. Although both Mercutio and the Nurse refer to the sexual act, the Nurse’s language is crude and lacks the refinement of Mercutio’s wit. Here Shakespeare presents to us a member of the lower classes, deprived from a formal education.

Mercutio: *I conjure thee by Rosaline’s bright eyes,
By her high forehead, and her scarlet lip,
By her fine foot, straight leg, and quivering thigh,
And the demesnes that there adjacent lie.* (II, I, 19 – 22)

Kadija: *Të lutem për syt’e ndritshëm t’Rozalinës,
Për ballin e lartë, buzën si qershia,
Për këmbën e hijshme, kërcikun e drejtë,
Për kofshët fërgëlluese dhe për pronat
E bukura që ajo fsheh aty afër.*

[Here the word “pronat” (“demesnes”) alludes to the vaginal zone.]

Mercutio: *And, to sink in it, should you burden love;
Too great oppression for a tender thing.*

Romeo: *Is love a tender thing? It is too rough,
Too rude, too boist’rous; and it prickis like thorn.*

Mercutio: *If love be rough with you, be rough with love;
Prick love for pricking, and you beat love down.* (I, iv, 21 – 26)

Kadija: (Merkuti): Duhet të biesh mbi të për t'u zhytur aty;
Shtypje e madhe për një gjë aq të butë.

(Romeo): Gjë e butë qenka dashuria? E ashpër
Është, e dhunshme, gjë e gjallë, ngulet si gjëmb.

(Merkuti): Po qe e ashpër me ty dashuria, bëhu dhe ti i ashpër,
Çpoje dashurinë, po të çpoi, dhe ti e mund atë.

Here in the dialogue between Romeo and Mercutio there are frequent references to sexual intercourse. In his expression “Duhet të biesh mbi të. . . gjë aq e butë” (“And to sink . . . tender thing”) Mercutio alludes to the idea that by “sinking” sexually in his lover, he must burden her with his body and if he loses his erection during the intercourse, he will disappoint her. And to be rude (“Është e dhunshme”) means ‘to cause pain, to be painful. The words “ngulet si gjëmb” (“it prick like thorn”) is a wordplay for the sense of penetration, for pricking like the vulgar word for “penis”. When Mercutio says to Romeo that he should “prick love for pricking” (“Çpoje dashurinë, po të çpoi”), that he should be rough, penetrate sexually, stimulate sexually, i.e. masturbate. And finally, his last words “ti e mund atë” (“and you beat love down”) suggest that he finally triumphs over love and is relieved from erection. Romeo’s emotional expression in Shakespeare’s work is another wordplay when, he feels ‘bound’ to make affected gestures which show how sorry for himself he is; he cannot eat for his lovesickness (‘kept without my food’) and is desperate for some resolution to his ‘misery’(Cash, P. (2013) “*Romeo and Juliet*”, English Association Shakespeare bookmarks, no.6, pg.6).

Kadija: (Romeo): Ta gudulisim me thembra parketin e pandjeshëm. (I, iv)
[The word “gudulis” (“Tickle”) is a wordplay suggesting “sexual stimulation”.]

Kadija: (Romeo): Pusho, pusho, Merkut, pusho!
Ti flet për asgjë. (I, iv)
[Here the word “asgjë” (“nothing”) is a wordplay for ‘vagina’.]

Kadija: (Merkuti): Po t'i ngre një xhind në rrethin e dashnores
Të një lloji të rrallë: aty të qëndrojë
Gjersa ajo si me magji ta ketë ulur. (II, i)

Here Mercutio’s words “t’i ngre një xhind në rrethin e dashnores” (“raise a spirit in his mistress’s circle”) refers to the erection of the penis and the word “rreth” (“circle”) is the magic circle of vagina.

Kadija: (Merkuti): Po qe e verbër dashuria, nuk qëllon
Në shenjë. Tani ajo rri nën një mushmollë,
Dhe lutet ta ket’ dashnores si frut i saj,
Siç i thonë vashat frutit kur qeshin vetëm. —
Q, Romeo, sikur t’ish, Q, t’ishte ajo
Një bythë e hapur, e ti një dardhë e gjatë! (II, i)

Mercutio: For this drivelling love is like a great natural, That runs lolling up and down to hide his bauble In a hole (2.iv.79-81) In this example, the word bauble has two meanings. One is a short stick and the other meaning is penis. (Ghanoni, A. R, (2012) "*Sexual Pun: A case study of Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet*", Cross-cultural Communication, Vol.8, no.2, pg.95).

Mercutio's words "qëllon në shenjë" ("hit the mark") mean "enter inside vagina". The fruit of "mushmollë" (medlar tree) is a slang term for 'vagina'. The letter "O" is a wordplay for the word 'vagina', whereas "bythë e hapur" (an open arse) refers to the medlar fruit with an obvious sexual sense. The word "dardhë e gjatë", which in the English original is used "a pop'rin pear," is an elongated kind of pear from Poperinge in Flanders, northern Belgium. It is also known as "dardhë mjekërprifti" ('priest-beard pear'). Here it is used as a slang term for penis.

Kadija: (Merkuti): *I shtrydhur fare, si saragë e thatë. O mish, mish njeriu, si qenke bërë si peshk!* (II, iii)

Mercutio continues using vulgar words. The words "saragë e thatë" ("dried herring") means 'withered penis'; "mish njeriu" (flesh) plays on sense of the terms 'penis' and 'erection'; and the comparison "si peshk" (like a fish, fishified) sexually consumed, impotent, cannot leave the vagina of his lover. Mercutio continues to refer to Romeo as being sexually exhausted.

Conclusions

Although Albanian reading public had to wait for three hundred years to be introduced to Shakespeare's works in mother tongue and involvement of several translators in this undertaking, they have undeniable merits for presentation of the bard's work to Albanian reading public. In this paper I was focused in brining and comparing the use of sexual and erotic words in Shakespeare's "*Romeo and Juliet*" and how they were rendered in Albanian language. The tragedy was initially translated by Alqi Kristo some seventy years ago, and with evolution of Albanian language, appeared the need for retranslation of the tragedy, identifying and correcting many aspects of the first translation. The second translator, Refik Kadija has provided a lot of explanatory notes of erotic or sexual connotations and meanings, which exist in the English text but were missing in the first Albanian translation of this tragedy. They are mostly evident in the speeches of Mercutio and the Nurse, particularly in the dialogue between them (II, iv) as well as in the conversation between Mercutio and Benvolio (II, i), but also Nurse's words in Juliet's chamber ((IV, v), in the dialogue between the servants Gregory and Sampson (I, i), in the conversation among Mercutio, Benvolio and Romeo with frequent word-play, puns suggesting male and female privates and sexual acts (II, iii), etc. The Nurse also links love and sex throughout the play. This is more marked when she finds out Juliet is to marry Romeo. We can see how excited she is about the physical opportunity for Juliet because she comments immediately on Romeo's physical traits. "...His face be better than any man's". This has links with Mercutio when he talks about Rosaline. Although both Mercutio and the Nurse refer to the sexual act, the Nurse's language is crude and lacks the refinement of Mercutio's

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