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William Shakespeare's Sonnets

for the First Time Globally Reprinted
A Quatercentenary Anthology
(with a DVD)

Edited by
Manfred Pfister and Jürgen Gutsch

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~~Semuanya ini kita sedari: tapi kita hanya manusia,
Tak daya mengelak syurga yang membawa ke neraka.~~

130

~~Sinar mata kekasihku tidak seperti bintang timur;
Delima merkah jauh lebih merah dari merah bibirnya;
Rasa pipinya tidak sehalus pauh dilayang;
Bentuk mukanya tidak seindah bujur sirih;
Urai rambutnya tidak secantik ikal mayang;
Harum minyak wangi jauh lebih mempersona
Dari harum tubuh si adik yang kucinta.
Suka kudengar suaranya, walaupun kutahu
Bunyi buluh perindu jauh lebih merdu.
Aku tak pernah melihat bidadari menari;
Kaki kekasihku sentiasa bertapak di bumi.
Walaupun begitu, demi Tuhan, kekasihku luar biasa;
Tak kurang dari mereka yang dipalsui kata-kata.~~

Source

~~Salleh, Ben Joned. Sajak Sajak Saleh: Poems Sacred and Profane. (Kuala Lumpur: Teks Publishing, 1987), pp. 43-44.~~

~~(Editors' note: The usual script of Malay is in Latin characters nowadays, though the orthography is not absolutely standardized. The old Malay script, a variant of Arabic script, is no longer in use.)~~



A Maltese Translation of Twelve Sonnets by William Shakespeare

by Oliver Friggieri

In the absence of a tradition of translations of *Shakespeare's Sonnets* into Maltese I myself embarked on the task and am here presenting a collection of twelve. I have translated them in 2008, following the invitation to participate in this commemorative project. It is therefore appropriate on my part to briefly describe the method and criteria characterizing such an exercise.

A major consideration has been made as a starting point. *Shakespeare's Sonnets* have survived the test of time not only because they have great thematic and technical merits but also because they are essentially simple, clear and easily understandable by all. His genius lies mainly in his unique ability to express profound existential concepts in a language which, however distinct, is basically a sublime reconstruction of popular discourse. In spite of historically belonging to the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the sonnets are written in a sort of English which to date is equally ancient and fresh, as if produced only a few decades ago. The average reader may enjoy all the hundred and fifty-four sonnets with rarely having to delve into a dictionary to search for meaning and clarity. The literary character of the era is also a secure point of reference no translator can miss or somehow underestimate.

These Maltese versions therefore seek to retain such simplicity in terms of both syntactic structure and essential phraseology. Words have been chosen not only to convey the right significance or shade of meaning, but also to retain the original stylistic context, namely a sort of atmosphere midway between transcendence and intimacy. Efforts have been made to reproduce in Maltese a sense of historical distance between Shakespeare's and modern English, so as to make the translations sound like an original work written in the language four centuries ago. The relationship between the metaphorical and the literal levels of diction is also fully respected, and so is punctuation.

Maltese, an ancient language of Arabic origin and written in the Latin script, is quite rich in the field of elementary nouns, verbs and adjectives. It has been quite intriguing for me to exploit such resourcefulness without risking being obscure or even ambiguous. Maltese words of Semitic origin have been commonly preferred, and whenever necessary Romance words have perfectly fitted into the whole texture. I have also sought to remain faithful to the subtle sense of continuity unifying all the sonnets into a sort of cycle or sequence. Such cohesion is both the-

matic and stylistic, thus involving the choice of words as well as their grammatical integration.

The Maltese versions are conveyed through the hendecasyllabic line, which is the Maltese equivalent of the English iambic pentameter. Whereas rhyme has been eliminated to be able to render as closely as possible the semantic nuances of the original text, great efforts have been made to guarantee that the original syntactical progression is adhered to, including the relationship between the various parts, the quatrains and the couplet, of each sonnet.

Maltese culture in general, and Maltese literature in particular, can be best described as eminently romantic, pertaining to the more intensely sentimental dimension of Mediterraneanity. This interpretation has somehow naturally proposed to me which twelve sonnets to choose for this exceptional celebration of the quartercentenary of *Shakespeare's Sonnets*.

As a dramatist Shakespeare is already prominent in the field of translations into Maltese. These are the plays published and the name of their translator: *The Merchant of Venice* (1951) by Edgar Dominic Busuttil, *Julius Caesar* (1970) by Valentin V. Barbara, *Hamlet* (1971) by Joseph Bartolo, and *Romeo and Juliet* (1994), *The Merchant of Venice* (1995), *The Taming of the Shrew* (1996), *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1996), *King Lear* (1996), *Macbeth* (1996), *The Comedy of Errors* (1996), *The Tempest* (1996), *As You Like It* (1997), *Hamlet* (1997), *Julius Caesar* (1997), by Alfred Palma. Great attention has always been given exclusively to his plays, which are frequently staged and are set for detailed study at the higher secondary schools and the university.

Anthology

17

Lil vrusi min għad jemmen fil-gejjieni,
Li kieku mlejthom bl-oghla mertu tiegħek?
Għalkemm, is-Sema jaf, qishom biss qabar
Li jostor hajtek, bla ma juri nofsok.
Li kieku l-gmiel t'għajnejk jien nista' nikteb,
U b'ritmi friski nghodd il-grazzji tiegħek,
Zmien gdid għad jgħid, dan il-poeta jigdeb,
Xejriet bħal dawn tas-sema qatt ma messu
Ucuħ il-bniedem. Hekk safran bi zmienu,
Jitmaqdar kliemi, xiħ ta' lsien bla reqqa;
U kulma int jitqies genn ta' poeta,
U metru mgebbed ta' xi għanja antika:

'Mma jekk xi tifel tiegħek jgħix f'dil-ħabta,
Int għandek tgħix darbtejn; - fiħ, u fi vrusi.

27

Għajjen bix-xogħol, lejn soddti mmur bil-heffa,
Is-serħ għaziż għal gisem mifni jterraq;
Madanakollu mbagħad jibda vjaġġ f'rasi,
Biex jaħdem mohħi, la sar xogħol il-gisem:
Għax ħsbijieti mbagħad (mill-bogħod fejn nghanmar)
Pellegrinaġġ imħegġeg lejki jixxennqu,
U jzommu miftuħin tebqiet għajnejja,
Imħeddla, jilmħu d-dlam li jaraw l-għomja:
Id-dehra li tisthajjel ir-ruħ tiegħi
'L għajnejja mingħajr dawl troddilhom dellek,
Li, qisu gawhra mdendla f'lejl iwahħax,
Isebbah lejli sewdien, wiċċ xiħ igedded.
U hekk, gisemi bin-nhar, u bil-lejl mohħi,
Għalik, għalija wkoll, xejn serħ ma jsibu.

28

Kif nista' nerġa' lura lejn il-hena,
La jien mill-fejda tal-mistrieħ imcaħħad?
Jekk swat il-jum bil-lejl m'huwiex imtaffi,
U n-nhar mil-lejl u l-lejl min-nhar imsawwat?
U t-tnejn, għalkemm huma saltniet għedewwa,
Miftieħma, jieħdu b'id xulxin, biex lili
Jaħqruni, min bix-xogħol, min billi ngerger
Kemmi jien imbiegħed naħdem, bogħod wisq minnek.
Jien ngħid lill-jum, biex nogħgħbu, inti dawli,
U rroddlu l-ħajr jekk shab itabba' s-sema:
Hekk jien lil-lejl ta' lewn samrani nfahħar;
Jekk swiedu l-kwiekeb, int l-għaxija ddehebha.
'Mma l-jum kuljum lid-dwejjaq itawwalli,
U l-lejl bil-lejl saħħet id-diqa jsahħah.

29

Meta fl-għajb t'għajn in-nies u ta' xortija,
Waħdien, imkeċċi, nibki l-qagħda tiegħi,
U 's-Sema trux indejjaq b'biki fieragħ,
U nħares lejja, u nishet lil xortija,
Xewqan li kont xi ħadd oghna fit-tama,
Imlibbes bħalu, bħalu bil-ħbieb miegħi,
Nixxennaq sengħet dak, u l-ghan ta' l-iehor,

B'dak kollu li nħobb l-aktar kuntent l-inqas;
F'dal-ħsbijiet sa nkasbar lili nnifsi,
Jiftilli naħseb fik - u mbaħhad din ruhi
(bħalma l-alwetta meta jżernaq titla'
mill-art imnikkta) tġħanni f'bieb il-ġenna;
għax ġid bħal dan iġġibli mħabbtek ħelwa,
tant li nistmerr li nasal ngħix bħas-slaten.

57

Bħala lsir tiegħek, dmiri xiex ħlief ngħasses
Fuq is-siġhat u ż-żminijiet ta' xewqtek?
Xejn m'għandi ħin prezzjuż li nista' nonfoq,
U lanqas ħidmiet oħra, ħlief ħtiġietek.
Is-sieġha mingħajr tmiem lanqas se ncanfar,
Waqt li għalik ngħasses l-arloġġ, ja sidti,
U le nqis morra l-qrusa ta' nuqqasek,
Met'inti l-qaddej tiegħek tajt l-addiġo;
Lanqas bi ħsieb għajjur nissogra nsaqsi
Fejn tista' tkun, jew nobsor x'inti tagħmel,
Mma, lsir imnikket, nibqa' w f'xejn ma naħseb,
Ĥlief, fejn tinsab, kemm tferrah lil madwarek:
L-imħabba tassew belha, biex fi ħsiebek
(Minkejja x'tagħmel int) xejn għelt ma tara.

71

La mmut la titnikkitx aktar għalija
Meta se tisma' ddoqq qanpiena mqita
Li tħabbar li jien ħrabt mid-dinja vili,
Biex ma' dud vili jiena nibqa' ngħammar:
Jekk taqra dan il-vers, xejn la tiftakar
Fl-id li kitbitu; għax jien tant inhobbok,
Li fil-ħsieb tiegħek ħelu rrid nintesa,
Jekk int titnikket meta taħseb fija.
Oh, jiena ngħid, jekk tara dawn il-versi,
Kif jien aktarx inkun magħqud mat-tafal,
La tliessen lanqas biss lil ismi msejken;
U halli mħabbtek tnin ukoll ma' ħajti:
Inkella d-dinja tagħraf il-krib tiegħek,
U la nkun tlaqt tiddieħak bik għalija.

72

Oh, li ma jkunx li d-dinja tqabbdek tfakkar
Liem' mertu għammar fija, biex int thobbni

Sa wara l-mewt - ħanina, mel'insieni,
Għaliex xejn siewi m'int se ssib go fija;
Jekk ma tasalx biex tfassal gidba twajba,
Li ttini aktar milli qatt jisthoqqli,
U tixhet tiffhir iżjed fuqi mejjet
Minn kemm il-verita' xħiha trid troddli:
Oh, biex imħabbtek f'dan ma tkunx qarrieqa,
Li int tfahħarni bla ma tġhid is-sewwa,
Jindifen l-isem tiegħi fejn hemm ġismi,
Biex aktar ma jkunx t'għajb għalik w għalija.
Għaliex mistħija nħoss b'kulma jien jiena,
U hekk inti wkoll, biex thobb fejn m'hemm xejn siewi.

76

Għaliex ħawlin minn kull kburiya vrusi?
Imbiegħda mit-tiżwiq u bdil ħarkieni?
Għaliex, maż-żmien, jien ma ngħarrixx kull naħa
Ĥa nsib modi oħrajn u forom godda?
Għax nikteb ħaġa biss u dejjem waħda,
U nżomm l-għajxien f'zerriegħa l'hi magħrufa,
Tant li kull kelma kwazi ssemmi ismi,
Turi t-twelid tagħha, u minn fejn gejjja?
Kun af, ħaninti, nikteb dejjem fuqek,
U inti u l-imħabba bqajtu ħsiebi;
Lill-kliem qadim inlibbes libsa ġdida,
Nonfoq mill-ġdid dak kollu li ġa' ntefaq;
Għax bħalma x-xemx kuljum ġdida w qadima,
Hekk għadha mħabbti tġhid kulma ġa' ntqal.

79

Kif waħdi jiena tlabt l-għajnuna tiegħek,
Flew witek kollha l-versi tiegħi kellhom;
Iżd'issa r-ritmi sbieħ li kelli tħassru,
U l-muża tiegħi mardet, trodd ħaġ' oħra.
Nistqarr, ħanina, il-hlewwa tal-ħsieb tiegħek
Tisthoqq li ssib il-ħidma ta' pinna aqwa;
Biss kulma joħloq bik poeta tiegħek,
Hu jkun seraqlek, u jkun ħallsek lura.
Virtu' jisilfek, dik il-kelma seraq
Minn ħajtek stess; sbuħija qiegħed jagħti,
U sabha fuq ħaddej; ma jista' jħallsek
B'ebda tiffhir ħlief kulma fik qed jgħammar.

Troddlux il-ħajr ġħal kulma qiegħed jġħidlek,
Ġħax inti nnifsek tħallas dejnu miegħek.

81

Jew jien se ngħix, niktiblek l-epitaffju,
Jew inti tibqa' kif jien fl-art nitmermer;
Minn hemm il-mewt tifikirtek le ma tieħu,
Ġħalkemm kull parti fija tkun minsija.
Minn dak in-nhar ismek se jġħix ġħal dejjem,
Ġħalkemm, la mort, ikolli mmut ġħad-dinja;
L-art tista' troddli biss qabar komuni,
Met'int, midfuna, f'ħars in-nies se toqġħod.
Ikun il-mafkar tiegħek vrusi ħelwa,
Li ġħad jaqraw ġħajnejn li mhux mitwielda;
Se jġħixu ħajtek ilsna li ġħad jġġu,
Meta l-maħluqa ta' din l-art imutu;
Int xorta tġħix (f'saħħitha l-pinna tiegħi)
Fejn nifs iniffes, - anki f'ħalq in-nies.

93

Hekk se ngħix jien, nistħajjel li int vera,
Bħal raġel ittradut; hekk wiċċ l-imħabba
Jista' jidhirli mħabba, ġħad li mbiddel;
Ĥarsietek miegħi, qalbek xi mkien ieħor:
Ġħaliex f'ġħajnejk ma tġħix ebda mibegħda,
Ġħalhekk f'dil-ħaġa ma narakx mibdula.
Ġrajjet il-qalb qarrieqa f'kemm -il ħarsa
Tinkiteb, f'tikmixiet ta' wiċċ imqarras,
F'burdati; iżda s-sema ried x'ħin ħalqek
Li mħabba ħelwa tġħammar f'wiċċek dejjem;
Ikun xi jkun il-ħsieb jew ħidmet qalbek,
Xejn ħarstek qatt ma kellha tġħid ħlief ħlewwa.
Kif bħal tuffieħa t'Eva jikber ġmielek,
Jekk din ħlewwitek ma twegħibx lil surtek?

97

Kemm kont bħalkieku qiegħed ngħix xi xitwa
Imbiegħed minnek, gost tas-sena mġħaġġlal!
X'rezħa ħassejt, kemm rajt ġranet mudlama!
Kull naħa l-ġħera ta' Diċembru xwejjah!
U żmien is-sajf did-darba kien imbiegħed,
Ĥarifa ġħammiela, kbira b'żieda ġħanja,
Iġġorr toqġħa kotrana taż-żmien bikri,

Bħal ġuf ir-romol wara l-mewt ta' żwieġhom;
Madanakollu dal-ħsad mimli deherli
Tama ta' ltiema, frott mingħajr missieru;
Ġħax jistennewk is-sajf u l-gosti tiegħu,
U, ġħad li 'l bogħod, anki l-ġħasafar siku;
Jew, meta jġħannu, tant ikollhom dwejjaja,
Jisfar il-weraq ġħax ix-xitwa riesqa.

Source

The twelve sonnets are published here for the first time.