

# “Heart” novel of Edmondo De Amicis in the Albanian language

Dr. Manjola SULAJ

Department of Foreign Languages  
“Eqrem Çabej” University of Gjirokastra  
Gjirokastra, Albania

sulaj\_manjola@yahoo.it

Dr. Olieta POLO

Department of Greek Language, Literature and Greek Civilization  
“Eqrem Çabej” University of Gjirokastra  
Gjirokastra, Albania

poliouolga@yahoo.gr



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## ABSTRACT

The novel “Heart” (“Zemër” in the Albanian language) of the Italian author Edmondo De Amicis, published in Tirana in 1923 is the first book of the Italian literature for children translated into the Albanian language. Ever since the novel was published 13 more times by various translators. For two decades until the beginning of the First World War the novel was part of the schools’ didactic schedule. In Italy the novel conveyed secular values as nationalists, liberals and intended to renew Italian culture, which was backward and extremely subordinate to the Catholic Church. While in Albania, during the Communist dictatorship (1945-1990), the novel continued to be preferred in schools due to the ideals included which matched with the communist ones as well as the morals that offered the children a pattern to imitate in terms of feelings and behaviours. The “Zemër” (“Heart”) popularity began to vanish in Albania when the democratic system was established.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Edmondo De Amicis has been, for at least two decades, one of the most active bourgeois novelists that represented the contemporary Italian literature, reflecting the cultural and the moral aspirations of the middle class.

He melted in his pedagogical works the whole severity of the moral he was taught during his military education. In addition to being an illuminative author and a patriot, he remains closely related to the problems of the period he lived.

## II. DEVELOPMENT

De Amicis is mainly well known with the novel “Zemër” (“Heart”), which represents an important reference in the education of the young readers in the early 1900s.

Despite the criticism of the Catholics for lack of religious content, his masterpiece was an indisputable success. Starting from the 50s of the last century, this novel has been criticized and its values are resized due to time changes.

The novel “Heart” was conceived by the author as the first book of a series that

would include a variety of psychologically depicted characters and would reflect the traditions of the time, but this project remained unrealized.

The idea of writing the novel "Heart" had matured in Edmondo De Amicis's mentality since 1878, but the odyssey of its publication has been prolonged, as the book was published after eight years from the publishing house "Treves" on October 15th, 1886. In the late 80s, the publishing house "Treves" was one of the most important in Italy. The owners, the two brothers Emilio and Giuseppe Treves, being sensitive towards the changes in the modern society, aimed at renewing the Italian culture, which in their view was backward and extremely subordinate to the Catholic Church.

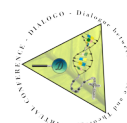
They enthusiastically welcomed De Amicis's proposal because they recognized in his work a good lucrative job, yet, because it was in line with the cultural direction they aspired. He proposed a new education model suitable for the united Italy after the Renaissance. At the same time, the novel conveyed secular values to the nationalists and the liberals.

The forecasts of the publishing house that welcomed "Heart" were accurate. It became the first best seller Italian book. In less than three months "Treves" published the book forty one times; with a circulation of 1,000 copies meanwhile the number of children that were able to read was too small. In 1890, after only four years from the first edition, the book was published for the hundredth time and in 1923 the number of copies published amounted to one million. Meanwhile, the work was published in all European languages, including Albanian, as well as in the Arabic and the Japanese languages.

#### *A. The attitude of the Albanian criticism towards the novel "Zemër" ("Heart")*

The novel "Heart" of Edmondo De Amicis was published for the first time in the Albanian language in 1923 in Tirana (Albania's capital) including a preamble of the author Terenc Toçi. By means of this article we learn that about 41 pages of this translation were published earlier in the 1st edition of the newspaper "Shtypi" ("The press") of Tirana. Also, Terenc Toçi proves that he himself pushed Karl Gurakuqi to translate the novel into the Albanian language, which was translated into all the languages of the civilized world, citing: "The preamble is like the baptism, and I am honoured to have realized the translation of this great novel into the Albanian language, I think I may have the approval to write even its preamble" later on he assumes: "I begged my dear friend Mr. Karl Gurakuqi to translate this work".

The author of the preamble assesses positively both about the writer, to whom the novel "Zemra" added value and made him memorable, and also to the translation into the Albanian language. Terenc Toçi thinks that thanks to the novel "Heart" of Edmondo De Amicis the young generations in Italy are educated and have wept over it, and have continued to elevate their soul reading his other books about the military life, the travels and the philology. According to him, De Amicis in his youth wanted to dedicate his life to the army, and he did so during 1866 to 1970 by fighting bravely, anyhow his inclinations about the artistic literature pursued him to leave the army and replace it with devotion in writing many books that conveyed great moral. Edmondo De Amicis devoted himself to the socialist ideas driven by the compassion, rather than the convictions, for the poor people who grew up and died in poverty. Such was the great writer who would have obtained the fame only with the book "Heart", even if



he wouldn't have written other books. In a nutshell, Terenc Toçi expresses his conviction that the novel "Heart" is a work that "will be part of the national Renaissance history" as a powerful tool to form worthy Albanian men for the family, the society, the nation and the state who would elevate the name of the small Albania.

Regarding the publication of the novel "Heart", in 1923, Astrit Bishqemi a scholar of the Albanian children's literature, attaches importance to the fact that under the title of the book was written "Children's book", which according to him is an indication that children's literature began to take on independence even though there were only a few original works.

The novel "Heart" is part of those books in Italy that changed over time the way the children read it. Earlier, education did not foresee reading as a free element of pleasure. Reading books would primarily mean forming a social and national conscience. With the works proposed by Kolodi, De Amicis or other contemporary writers, not only the little Italians, but also the children of the other countries where were published these books, had soon fallen in love.

Undoubtedly, this happened in Albania as well. The success that this novel had on young readers in our country is naturally evidenced by the three editions of the period between the two world wars, but this conviction adds to a great testimony from the teacher, Mati Logoreci, who is the author of the preamble in the second edition of the book. He describes the love with which the pupil received the second edition of the novel at that time:

"I remember very well in the reading lesson, as if you were predicting the time, you asked the pupils to draw the book ZEMRA, and you could notice the pleasure on their faces, they were so fond of that book; of every piece they knew it by heart,

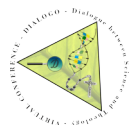
so often they had read it."

We see the importance of the translation into Albanian and the publication of the novel "Heart" in the fact that it was the only one, at least for a decade, that served as a reading book in schools. This is what we learned also in the preamble written by the teacher Mati Logoreci in the second publication of the novel "Heart" with a difference of about 10 years from the first one:

"I am glad that it is being reprinted, especially at this time of the beginning of our cultural development, when we are - almost - without any book that can serve the young age of elementary schools. They will embrace it with great joy, as I have witnessed during my long experience as a teacher."

Mati Logoreci expresses his joy about the second edition of this novel, because in addition to the moral values, the book "establishes the foundations of our national literature that has remained so far too poor and weak."

In 1957, in the preamble of the novel "Heart" written by Myzafer Xhaxhiu, we found some critical judgments about the novel in question and his author in terms of the principles of the communist dictatorship, established in Albania after 1944. Regarding the author Edmondo De Amicis he writes that the progressive ideas of the labor movement, which had grown a lot, especially in the North Italy where the author used to live, influenced his work, but he still remained a philanthropic humanist. Further Myzafer Xhaxhiu expresses: "In all the works of De Amicis, whether in the ones dedicated to the children's life at school or at home, or in the works concerning the travels in different parts of the world, or in those devoted to the lives of the workers, is evident the author's tendency to preach philanthropic humanism, love, and "universal harmony" among the different



categories". This trend of De Amicis, according to the author of the article, is also evident in the articles where the desire to convince the ruling classes to show compassion and love for the poor families, which remained a utopia. Although De Amicis work is permeated by a mere-religious spirit, it is characterized by optimism, love for life, high civic virtues, and social equality.

De Amicis, full of contradictions in his outlook, remains to Myzafer Xhaxhiu, a great humanist, a friend of the common people and a patriotic and precious citizen to his country. Regarding the novel "Heart" Xhaxhiu expresses that in the book "...the author...has given us unforgettable pages, vivid, touching, and warm scenes, where is evident the great love for the mankind, a profound respect for the working, virtuous and honest people. He seeks to educate the children with the beautiful feelings of truth, equality, simplicity, love for work and people; to equip them with the highest virtues against the impact and the savage selfishness of the bourgeois society". The book reflects events from school and everyday life, there is also treated the topic of patriotism, and love for the homeland, and are criticized - even though in a closed form - the vices and the wounds of the capitalist society. Yet, De Amicis strikes the social reality of the time, which forced people to emigrate to seek work. Myzafer Xhaxhiu calls the emigration a wound that showed that the capitalism in Italy, and even in other countries, was in crisis. The author concludes his writing by evaluating the language of the novel as fluent, with warm feelings and a cheerful, simple style that makes the novel "Heart" a beloved book for the toddlers and the adults, too.

The author Tasim Gjokutaj described the novel "Heart" as one of the most accomplished works of the Italian children's literature during the 19th century. He calls the novel a "mosaic" with many colorful

pieces, stating as follows:

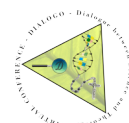
"The structuring in the form of a mosaic has many good sides, firstly: it gives the author the opportunity to handle a wide variety of themes, secondly: to reflect diverse environments at school and at home, in town and in the village, in war and in peace, thirdly: to include short poetic sketches that look independent of the subject line, but are nevertheless a mosaic fragment of the whole."

Mosaic structuring brings the "risk" of fragmentation, but De Amicis has avoided "crumbling" the work by using "seven powerful pillars that are the seven monthly stories". These stories, besides giving unity to the work, are even the most "realistic and interesting". With regard to the theme, the monthly stories, aim at educating children with paternal goodwill and with high moral virtues. De Amicis enriches the diversity of the book events with the letters that the relatives send to Enrico. They are short, but filled with feeling, "resemble beautiful poetic designs, and are very concise, that you can hardly remove any sentence."

In 2005, in the short introduction of the translation made by Klara Kodra to the novel "Heart", she describes it as the greatest work written after "Pinocchio", which succeeded not only in the Italian time and context, but remains current even nowadays.

#### *B. Translation modalities of the novel "Zemër" ("Heart")*

The novel "Heart" had many publications and republications in the Albanian language. It was firstly published in 1923 and was reprinted two more times in 1932 and 1938 with the same title, with the translation of Karl Gurakuqi; in 1957 the novel was published with the translation of Halit Selfo, entitled "Heart"; in 1964 it was published with the translation of Filip Ndocaj, still under the title "Heart"; in 1977 it was published



with abbreviations with the title “Heart” but for the first time without containing the name of the translator; in 1997 it was published twice, with the translation of Halit Selfo and Vali Xhixha, with the title “Heart”; in 2004 it was published with the translation of Agim Doksani, titled “Heart”; in 2005 it was published with the translation of Klara Kodra, titled “Heart”; in 2007 it was published with the translation of Edlira Llukaçaj, entitled “Zemra e fëmijës” “The heart of the boy”; in 2011 it was republished with the translation of Klara Kodra, with the title “Heart” and the same year was published with the translation of Joni Buzi, translated from the English language, with the title “Zemra: ditari i një nxënësi italian” “Heart: diary of an Italian student”.

It is clear above that Edmondo De Amicis’s novel has been brought to the Albanian language with different titles, which undoubtedly owns “Zemra” (“The heart”) and later on “Zemër” (“Heart”). Regarding the title issue Tasim Gjokutaj states as follows: “The title of the novel is “Zemër” (heart) rather than “Zemra” (the heart). This word “Zemër” answers the content and clearly states the idea of this work. Heart! – is used in the sense of Courage! Dare! in the sense of endurance, will, and disregard before the difficulties and the dangers. The author sees the student as a small soldier of a large army and his call “Heart, courage, little soldier!” sounds like a call to move forward.”

All three publications of the novel “Heart” translated by Karl Gurakuqi are without illustrations. His translation is faithful to the meaning and the spirit of the original novel, but at the same time it is apparent that the Albanian text shows the cognitive abilities of the Albanian language.

### III. CONCLUSIONS

Regarding the modalities of the Albanian translation of the novel “Heart” by different translators we are summarizing the following:

1. The names of the characters and the places are generally adapted according to the laws of phonetics and the morphology of the Albanian language. The name Carlo is brought to Albanian: Karlo, Enrico is brought: Enriku, Delcati is brought: Delkati, Derossi is brought: Derosi, Precossi is brought: Prekosi, Pietro is brought: Pjetër, Coretti is brought: Koreti, Crossi is brought: Krosi etc; course Vittorio Emanuele was brought: rruga e Viktor Emanuelit / the road of Victor Emmanuel, Trentino was brought: Trentini, Palermo was brought: Palermi, etc. Regarding the names of the countries in the novel, some of them are left in the original and have not been subject to the laws of morphological phonetics and morphology of the Albanian language such as: corso Valdocco is brought: rruga Valdocco Valdocco street, corso Dora Grossa is brought: rruga Dora Grossa / the road Dora Grossa, nella caserma della Cernaia, is brought në kazermën e Cernaia-s / to the Cernaia barracks etc.

2. The cases of literally inconsistent translation characterize all the translations of this novel. The examples when the translators add words, which are not found in the original text, are usual.

3. From the comparison of the two texts, both in the Italian and the Albanian languages, we have also noticed that in many cases the Albanian translation is missing a few words of the original, which has resulted in shorter sentences, but in no case violation of the meaning of the text in the Italian language.

4. The talent as interpreter and the deep knowledge of the Albanian language by most Albanian translators is also evident when the order of the sentence in the Italian language is changed in order to adapt it to the Albanian language.

5. Generally, the translators avoid repetitions in the original, making the text in the Albanian language the most beautiful and fluent.

6. In many cases, the translators have preferred to replace simple words in the original with expressions of the Albanian language.

7. In all the extent of the translation into the Albanian language, the punctuation does not match with the original. This has best served the accurate transmission of the meaning to the young Albanian readers.

8. The vocabulary used in the translated versions is very rich and does not lack the beautiful expressions of the Albanian language.

9. In the translated versions are used even the explanatory notes at the bottom of the pages that explain a few of the Albanian words used by the translators in the text.

Regardless the exquisite language in the options translated there is also found any word or structure of the Italian language.

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