

“I HATE YOU, ROMEO.” A HERETIC RE-WRITING OF *ROMEO AND JULIET*

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Abstract

In the nineteen twenties last century a young poet and diplomat from Warsaw, Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, was taking part in an international congress of intellectuals in Heidelberg. During his stay in Germany he wrote *The Lovers of Verona* (the title in Polish reads *Kochankowie z Werony*), a play that offers a radical reinterpretation of the main message of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. Iwaszkiewicz's vision of the young lovers, who are infected by insurmountable enmity, was determined by his pessimistic views on the nature of love and desire, expressed also in his other plays, prose and poetry. This article discusses the circumstances behind Iwaszkiewicz's adaptation that shed light on the reasons for this unorthodox re-writing of Shakespeare's famous tragedy. This is done to highlight the complex interrelations between authorial writing and translation activity which in case of writer-translators are determined by a net of political, social and personal factors.

Keywords: *Romeo and Juliet*; *The Lovers of Verona*; *Kochankowie z Werony*; Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz; translation; adaptation.

IWASZKIEWICZ AS WRITER AND TRANSLATOR

Although Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz was one of the major Polish writers of the previous century, he is not widely known abroad.¹ As a controversial figure in the history of Polish culture he is generally acclaimed for his literary

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¹ A reliable source of information about Polish literature is Czesław Miłosz's *The History of Polish Literature* (first published in 1969), written for his American students. Another, more recent, source is Culture.pl, a website of the Adam Mickiewicz Institute, founded to promote the Polish culture abroad.

achievements, but also severely criticised for his long-term opportunistic mindset during the communist period. Openly bisexual, outstandingly talented, and full inexhaustible energy, he is treated by some as an iconic artistic figure, while others would not have his works on high school reading lists. He was poet, playwright, novelist, essayist, and translator. Born in 1894 in a Polish family settled in the Podolia region of the Ukraine, he was educated in Kiev, where he studied law and music. After the First World War he moved to Warsaw where he co-founded the influential group of experimental poets, Skamander. In the following years he published a lot, wrote for the most important Polish literary magazine of that time, *Wiadomości Literackie*, and became member of the Trade Union of Polish Writers. Between 1927-1932 he worked in the Foreign Ministry's Press Department as head of the art promotion section and as secretary of the Polish diplomatic mission in Copenhagen and Brussels. During the Second World War, Iwaszkiewicz was actively involved in the underground cultural life. His home in Stawisko near Warsaw became a refuge for numerous artists and intellectuals and turned into a clandestine centre of artistic life where concerts, meetings and discussions were organised. For his war-time activity he was awarded, posthumously, the Righteous Among the Nations medal. The most heatedly discussed period of Iwaszkiewicz's life starts with the communist period, when—still very active as a writer—he became member of the Parliament of Polish People's Republic, held influential positions in the regime-controlled cultural institutions and received numerous state awards and distinctions.

It would be difficult to describe Iwaszkiewicz's prolific and varied literary output in a few words. His poetics range from studied aestheticism to expressionism. His volumes encompass both privacy and intimacy and the discursive tones in which he undertakes issues of historiosophy, poems that reflect internal anxieties and metaphysical fears, but also poetry of culture, classicism, as well as rejection of traditional restrictions. Iwaszkiewicz's dramatic works focus mainly on artistic motifs taken from literature and biographies of great artists (Chopin, Pushkin, Balzac). As essayist and columnist, he wrote about literary themes, music and theatre, about his young years, and about his travels. Among the most characteristic qualities of his writing most critics mention sensuality reflected in the intensity of expression, the cult of art, and his conviction about the elusive nature of happiness and fulfilment. They underline Iwaszkiewicz's „many-sidedness” and „the hunger of life and an ecstatic immersion in its current so typical for him as a man and as a writer” (Miłosz 392-93). In the further sections of this article some of these features will be discussed in relation to *The Lovers of Verona*, but, to begin with, it is necessary to inspect the circumstances of Iwaszkiewicz's first artistic contact with *Romeo and Juliet*. This happened in the years 1925-1926 when he first translated this play into Polish.

Romeo and Juliet and *Hamlet* are the only texts Iwaszkiewicz translated from English. He translated also works by Rimbaud, Claudel, Gide and Giraudoux, several short stories by Tolstoy and Chekhov, and Hans Christian Andersen’s fairy tales from Danish. In his writings he called literary translation “an everyday necessity” (Balcerzan, Rajewska 489), but never theorised about it, nor formulated any consistent set of translation strategies. In the preface to the 1954 edition of both plays in his rendering, Iwaszkiewicz emphasised his fascination with theatre. As a playwright he was aware of the necessity to make any dramatic text theatrically functional and cared for what drama translation scholars call speakability: “With the actors on my mind I tried to furnish them with words that would be common and easy when spoken (...) I made a great effort to render in clear sentences certain Shakespearean irregularities² that decide about his poetic charm.” (Iwaszkiewicz, *Mój przekład* 11) The features of Shakespeare’s dramatic language that Iwaszkiewicz strived to retain were what he described as vividness and realism. The effects of such considerations, together with Iwaszkiewicz’s special attention paid to the musical quality of poetry, resulted in his translations being often classified by critics and literary historians as poetic, but simplified.

The time when Iwaszkiewicz translated the plays, i.e. the inter-war period, was a specific moment in the Polish reception of Shakespeare. The nineteenth century versions were still popular in the theatres, although they were increasingly difficult for actors and audiences, hard to speak and harder still to understand. The general attitude was, nevertheless, conservative: with many receivers used to the canonical translations, a version too modernised would not be accepted. Such distrust towards attempts to overcome the dominance of the canonical translations being very characteristic of the interwar phase of the Polish reception of Shakespeare (Żurowski 42), Iwaszkiewicz’s position among Polish translators of Shakespeare must be seen as ground-breaking. He was the first who attempted to produce a translation targeted at his contemporaries, one that would replace the nineteenth century renderings. Such was his *Hamlet*. He translated the play in the nineteen-thirties and the rendering was very well received by the theatre audiences. Very important in this success was Iwaszkiewicz’s exceptionally strong and influential position in the literary and theatrical circles, especially after the end of the Second World War. As a popular novelist, poet and playwright, he was commissioned the translation of *Hamlet* by Teatr Polski in the 1930s, invited to cooperate on the premiere production of 1939 and, after the war, was able to promote his translation in the most important literary magazines of the time. Ten years earlier, however, when Iwaszkiewicz translated *Romeo and Juliet*, he was a less experienced writer who

² Iwaszkiewicz uses here a phrase that literally means “what in Shakespeare is ruffled.” All translations from Polish mine (A.R.).

had limited knowledge about Shakespeare's original and whose English was insufficient. His translation of the tragedy, although commissioned by the theatre, was never staged for at least two reasons. One was an inappropriate choice of meter (the whole play was translated in regular rhymed thirteen-syllable verse) and the other—numerous cuts and text shifts introduced by the translator whose playwrighting temperament prompted him to revise what he saw as Shakespeare's structural "faults".

Iwazskiewicz's translation-cum-stage adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* turned out to be a failure. The writer must have been well aware of this because thirty years later, when he was asked to publish his version, he translated the play again, having rejected the previous version altogether. What is worth noticing, however, is that from the very beginning he assumed a creative, even polemical, approach to the tragedy. As a translator, he left a playwright's mark on the text, while, at the same time, as a playwright, he was reading and interpreting the original in a way that went beyond the translation task. It was through the act of translation-interpretation that Iwazskiewicz developed his polemical attitude towards Shakespeare's version of the story. While working on the translation in 1926, he was asking himself if a modern writer might supply the characters with some more convincing psychological motivations and substitute the resolution that depends on a knot of tragic misunderstandings and coincidences with an ending which would question the possibility that the representatives of the two fighting families become united through love (Shakespeare 8). These reflections became quite unexpectedly refuelled only a year later, during Iwazskiewicz's stay in Germany.

THE ORIGINS OF *THE LOVERS OF VERONA*

The tragedy *Rome and Juliet* was translated by Iwazskiewicz in a period when his poetry and poetic prose were intensively developing and changing. The dominating tone of his writings from this period is that of inner anxiety and an intensity of feeling that steer his diction towards expressionism (Kwiatkowski 393-421). These years were also important because of the first longer stays abroad, which had initiated Iwazskiewicz's European journeys that turned out to be crucial for his further development as a writer. The motif of love that cannot be fulfilled and of love that is streaked with undertones of hatred, an important element of his writing, developed and intensified as a result of his travels in western Europe. Iwazskiewicz's biographers and critics agree that, apart from his stays in Italy, with Sicily and Venice being the "two mythical centres for his imagination" (Miłosz 390), the most influential among these travels was his experience of Germany.

As a state official working in the Foreign Ministry’s press department, Iwaszkiewicz became a delegate for the yearly congress of Kulturbund (Intellectual Union), which, in autumn 1927, was organised in Heidelberg. Kulturbund was an international organisation that merged the promotion of peace among the former enemies from the times of the First World War with cultural life and political game (its cultural diplomacy is believed to have prepared ground for the Munich Pact of 1938 that sanctioned the territorial claims of Germany). Even if the political aims of this organisation were not clear at that time, the Polish ministry of Foreign Affairs decided to maintain its Polish branch as a stronghold of national interests and this is how Iwaszkiewicz became one of the delegates. In Heidelberg Iwaszkiewicz got acquainted with Karl Schefold, a young student of archaeology, avid reader of Stefan George and idealistic propagator of the new German Empire. During a short period of intensive contacts, they became friends whose stormy relationship is perhaps best described as an inseparable entanglement of the erotic and the spiritual (Ritz 32). It was Schefold’s enthusiasm for music and poetry and Iwaszkiewicz’s fascination with Schefold that—as the poet self-critically admitted during the Second World War—had blunted in him the awareness of “what Germany was at that time.” (Iwaszkiewicz, *Notatki* 34) Although on the surface of it, the Polish delegation was treated with due honours, Iwaszkiewicz reported in a letter to his wife that “enmity of the organisers was felt in every detail” (qtd. in Romaniuk 359).

The romantic atmosphere of the city with the oldest German university made an impression on the writer, while at the same time he was aware of his young friend’s fascination with Germanic mythology and the idea of Great Germany (the University in Heidelberg being at that time the centre for studies on the medieval Holy Roman Empire), reflected in Schefold’s cult of Stefan George—Der Dichter, as he was called by his admirers. If Iwaszkiewicz got attracted to George’s poetry aesthetically, Schefold affirmed him also ideologically, sharing the dreams about a new strong Germany led by a super-human leader founded on the myths of the historical imperial greatness. As Iwaszkiewicz’s biographer aptly describes it, intellectual empathy mixed with a surge of sudden passion and a sense that he had found the true love of his life, brought Iwaszkiewicz to the verge of schizophrenia (Romaniuk 361). A reflection came only at the tombs of German emperors in the Speyer cathedral, where Schefold took Iwaszkiewicz on a “pilgrimage of brotherhood.” In his memoirs Iwaszkiewicz would describe his stay in Heidelberg and his friendship with Schefold as “the strangest and the most dangerous adventure of my life”; “This was, after all, six years before Hitler, and Hitler was in the air.” (Iwaszkiewicz, *Dzienniki 1956-63* 441)

Soon after Schefold broke the relationship and left Heidelberg, while Iwaszkiewicz, in his room in Schlosshotel, in a frenzy of contrastive feelings

aroused by this doubly unbecoming affection, composed a play which reflected a mixture of simultaneous attraction and repulsion, fascination and distrust. *The Lovers of Verona* is a text in which two young people are drawn to one another by powers they do not quite comprehend, and despite acute awareness that their relation is not going to end well. Many years later Iwaszkiewicz would say in an interview that “contemplating Polish-German friendship produced a thought about love that connects two hostile environments like an electric spark” (Rohoziński 124). Elsewhere he explained the origins of his play in the following way:

In Shakespeare the role of coincident is too big while a true tragedy consists not in outer circumstances leading to the fatal ending, but in the inner impossibility of overcoming a moral law. (...) The mighty power dividing the two families is a machine much stronger than the particular individuals and Romeo and Juliet, in spite of all their efforts, even if joined by happy love, must feel that their happiness is hopeless, untimely, anachronistic, and must commit the deeds they commit in the play due to a misunderstanding. (...) This friendship [i.e. with Schefold] made me aware that overcoming certain traumas in human relations is impossible. (Iwaszkiewicz, *Książka* 303)

The Lovers of Verona. Romantic Tragedy in 3 Acts was composed in Heidelberg between 20 and 29 October 1927. The first edition, published in Warsaw in 1929, had a dedication in German: “Meinem Freund Karl Schefold gewidmet.” The play, first shown on stage in Teatr Nowy in 1930, was on only for a few evenings.

Another text directly linked to *The Lovers of Verona* and inspired by the emotional turmoil caused by the doubly unsettling affair with Karl Schefold is the poem *Do przyjaciela wroga* [*To my Friend Enemy*], written in the same year as the play and included in Iwaszkiewicz’s 1931 volume *Powrót do Europy* [*Return to Europe*]. Excerpts from this poem in verbatim translation from Polish read:

We are sitting today together at the table,
Sharing bread and wine,
And speaking the names of the great ones
With silent, emotional voices.

There comes between us the peace
Of the great and sacred belief,
We are humans, friends,
We are poets.

(...)

But if in future we stand
Facing each other, armed,
Remember that we will be
Both you and me, warriors.

And that behind us there will stand
The great legends and the kings,
And our great nations,
And our great pains.

The deadly stream of life
Will darken our feelings
And our not our eyes
Will look up to each other limply.

In a thunder strike manner
Will our love be fulfilled –
Remember – a greater power
Is always in the hatred.

From the following plot overview of Iwaszkiewicz’s play, it is clear that some of the most important tensions experienced in the relationship with Schefold, and expressed in this poem, were given a dramatic shape in the playwright’s rebellious retelling of Shakespeare’s story of the young lovers from Verona.

PLOT OVERVIEW AND CHARACTER CONSTRUCTION

The dramatis personae are limited to four characters, the two young lovers being accompanied by Ojciec Merkury (the Friar) and Orszula, Julia’s nurse. The setting is described as “Verona, in our times” (6).³ The first act begins just after sunset in Capulet’s garden, where Juliet hides from her father, after having refused to marry the man of his choice. While Orszula scolds Juliet for indifference towards the many young suitors she has rejected, Capulet’s daughter vows to give her heart to any man other than the old Foskari. Orszula notices behind the garden’s wall a pale figure in dark clothes and, before leaving for the house, sarcastically complains about Juliet having led yet another young man to a state in which he looks like a murderer. Thus the word “murderer” opens the play with a foreshadowing of its bloody ending.

In spite of Orszula’s warnings, Juliet decides to spend the night in the garden, finding comfort in the beauty of nature and dreaming about a happy

³ The text of *Kochankowie z Werony* is quoted from Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, *Dramaty*, Warszawa 1980, pp. 5-70. The numbers in brackets refer to the pages in this edition.

love: "I wish to love. Orszula stupidly says that I don't love, but I do want to love, and this is almost enough; I'm going to love very very much. I already love" (11). Upon these words the figure they saw before enters holding a dagger and introduces himself as "Murder". Romeo's first words are: "I'm not coming as a guest. I want to kill" (11). In the ensuing dialogue Romeo and Juliet compete in finding the strongest words of hatred and the most terrifying visions of murder they would gladly commit on the members of the hated families. Juliet provokes Romeo by directing his dagger towards her heart, and when he throws the weapon on the ground she threatens to kill him with her gun. None of them kills, however, as they get involved in an exchange that develops into a mixture of threats, mutual provocations and mockery, all underlined by a fascination which suddenly turns into an urge that becomes hard to control. All this reads like a perverse flirting, with Juliet obsessively imagining all sorts of violence they should do to one another in the name of the inherited enmity.

Both Romeo and Juliet are ambiguous characters, prone to abrupt changes, cherishing mixed feelings and torn with conflicting emotions. The reasons for Romeo's appearing in the Capulet garden are far from clear. He admits that he has been reared in hatred against the Capulets and trained to kill them in due time, but when the occasion presents itself it is he who says: "The bloodshed committed ages ago cannot continue forever. Hatred must stop one day—to turn into a different feeling. (...) We are new, young, different, fresh in our devotion for the beauty of the world, able to change these old rules" (19-20). Juliet soon succumbs to his visions of their being together. They hug and kiss while Romeo is imagining his house, in which everybody is waiting for him to come back triumphantly after having killed the old Capulet. Juliet, on the other hand, is prone to destructive thinking and has an overwhelming sense of pointlessness. She urges Romeo to kiss her in order to "erase the long years that used to divide" (25) them, but when Romeo declares his love she expects Verona to collapse. When no catastrophe follows, she sceptically assesses their love as too weak to transform the world. Her reactions to what is happening are strikingly unstable. When Romeo plans their marriage at the Friar's cell, she has no regrets to leave her house forever, but at the same time she predicts bleak future for them: "Escapes, cowardice, fear; hiding in holes. This is before us"; "Don't speak about tomorrow. The next day is going to wake up grey and tired" (28). Even the physical effects of love on her body are described in negative terms: "Your lips have changed the silken time into a burden which is pulling me down (...). Because of love my hands got heavy and they are falling to the ground like withered flowers" (28). To all this Romeo has an optimistic answer: "We are rich in ourselves (...) Give me your hand, Juliet. We are approaching victory" (27-29). The truth is, however, that from the very beginning of the play it is difficult to believe in any kind of happy ending.

The second act opens with a heavily sentimentalised monologue of the Friar on the power of love. His bright vision is instantly undermined when the two lovers run into his cell, short of breath and with fear in their eyes. Juliet is anxious that they are followed and terrified by visions of dead ancestors of both houses, murdered in the course of the long vendetta, who—demanding revenge—are trying to stop them on the streets of Verona. The instability of the young people's reactions and declarations are perhaps best illustrated when, while recollecting the beginning of the feud which divides their families, they virtually quarrel about which family is to blame for striking the first blow. Knowing that both families pray eagerly for the ruin of their enemies, both Romeo and Juliet blame God for supporting hatred, but Romeo boldly declares that they are not afraid of punishment as love is stronger than enmity: "We are building a bridge of our arms over the river of blood" (38). The Friar, in his naïve enthusiasm for the ultimate power of love and his apparent faith in God's mercy, gets persuaded that through the sacrament of marriage they are going to redeem the sins of both houses. And they get married although there are no real wedding vows. Romeo refuses to swear, claiming that his union with Juliet is perfect enough to prevent unfaithfulness. Juliet declares she has "turned into a vow herself" (43) and refuses to use imperfect words. This leaves the reader even more sceptical about their relationship, which is only underscored by their grim decision to spend their wedding night in the vault of the Montague family in the ruins of an old castle outside Verona.

Act three opens with a long monologue spoken by Romeo, to whom the early morning after their wedding night seems frightful and hopeless. Looking at Juliet who is sleeping on the stones of a tomb, he realises that the fulfilment of his dreams, the perfection of love ecstasy, has brought nothing but disappointment and longing for the past state of imperfection and incompleteness: "Our frenzy has turned a grave into a marriage bed. But frenzy passes away, and the grave remains"; "I went to sleep in ecstasy, and now I'm terrified" (50); "What was in us a hope for love has turned into marriage. I think I'm longing now for the enmity that used to divide us before" (52). Juliet wakes up from her sleep full of nightmares only to be terrified by Romeo negating all the hopeful words with which he has deluded both of them so far. She desperately tries to convince him that, having spent their wedding night in a grave, they should not be afraid of death, but he concludes that their love is treason, not redemption. Walking towards Verona, they are torn between a feeble hope that the demonstration of their love will move their fathers and the certainty that they are going to be killed. They grow more and more frustrated with every word and their dialogue very soon turns into mutual accusations. Their roles get exchanged—if in act two Juliet was distrustful and Romeo enthusiastic, he now grows desperate and she tries to retain hope and trust. Romeo says: "My love is shaken. I've understood the tragedy of happiness and

satisfaction. I don't love you as I did love you yesterday" (60); "We don't understand one another" (61); "I think that everything we used to dream about has fulfilled. That nothing else I is going to happen in our lives. That this crazy night in the ruins (...) is the end of our lives anyway. And that ultimately we are going to feel the blood of our ancestors in us and get against one another, armed" (61). Juliet responds to his despair with frustration. She feels betrayed and she demands that Romeo should be faithful so that they won't be separated by their families when the punishment is implemented: "Let's hold ourselves by the hands and die together" (64). He refuses to be comforted: "Our hands will grow cold, our families will separate us and bury far from one another. And I don't know if our souls will be able to find themselves in the afterlife darkness" (65); "Our love and hatred is going to grow from hour to hour. No, only hatred. The terrified love will abandon us and escape. O, what a pain!" (66) Romeo grabs his dagger and Juliet immediately returns to the language of hatred from the initial moments of the play.

The finale is full of bitterness. "We have not overcome with our love things greater than ourselves that divided us. We have not overcome with our life the many many deaths" (67), says she. "We are less and less two people who love one another. We are more and more two families that hate one another," (68) says he. In the final act of rekindled hatred, Juliet shoots Romeo with her gun and he stabs her. "Juliet, I hate you!" and "I hate you, Romeo" (70) are their dying words as, in their last effort, they crawl away to die as far from one another as possible.

The play was roundly criticised for its unbearable sentimentalism, pomposity and verbosity, and was deemed unstageable (in fact it was on only for several evenings after its premiere). Indeed, the text is overloaded with heavy speeches full of imagery that leaves an impression of a forced, artificially dramatized language. Character construction is tangled in unrealistic psychologising and inconsistencies, and the dialogues are repetitive and overdone. While not much may be said to defend the play's artistic features, one thing is clear: the author's uncompromising rejection of the myth of Romeo and Juliet in its shape fossilised by Shakespeare.

IWASZKIEWICZ'S PHILOSOPHY OF RESIGNATION

In *The Lovers of Verona* Iwaszkiewicz's philosophy of resignation leads to a conclusion that enmity is stronger than love. The tragic end of his Romeo and Juliet does not result from any unlucky coincidence, but from their inability to free themselves from the constraints of their backgrounds. By focusing on love that becomes degraded through fulfilment Iwaszkiewicz expresses his conviction

that because a fulfilled desire is always accompanied by disappointment, the essence of human life is aspiration, the desire itself, and not its satisfaction.

The central themes of the play, the passion for life linked to the fascination with death, as well as the tension between a dream/projection/desire and the inability to realise it, are joined in the motif of an ambivalent relation between love and death, one that consistently recurs in Iwaszkiewicz's work, notwithstanding the genre. His mature prose, for example, is governed by the principle of juxtaposing opposites (life-death, love-hatred, etc.) that acquire a philosophical dimension by generalizing the fates of characters with rich mental life and sensitive awareness and set in a precisely studied world full of sensual charm. Characters entangled in such antinomies acquire a sense of tragedy because of the cruelty of natural laws or weakness of individual rights in the face of historical processes.

In *The Lovers of Verona* love is doomed to fail because it brings disappointment. In this play it is clear that

happiness can remain happiness only if it is unfulfilled, as only ideals remain valuable. (...) Eroticism is a value only as longing, even as recollection (...), but never as reality (...). In Iwaszkiewicz's writing we always deal with eroticism sublimated into an aesthetic value, with the avoidance of physicality and preference given to desire, anxieties, ambiguous impulses and dreams that fuel the protagonist's activity. (Maciąg 102)

Much of the critics' attention has been drawn to the fierceness of Iwaszkiewicz's response to Shakespeare, in which one of the liveliest love myths in our cultural tradition is turned into a drama of mutual disappointment, concluded with mutual murder. Although some commentators find in the play traces of revenge tragedy in which the lovers are executors of the decrees procured by blind fate (Zengel 99), more convincing is the reading that sees it as a play about a failure of ideals brought about by their fulfilment. Such an interpretation agrees with the assumption consistently presented in Iwaszkiewicz's texts that the main component of love is biological desire mixed with metaphysical longing, which burns out as easily as the physical passion. Numerous examples from Iwaszkiewicz's works can be given in which motifs of longing for fulfilled love coexist with motifs of bleak fate of the seemingly fulfilled love relationships. According to a critic,

Iwaszkiewicz chose this story about the most beautiful and permanent love in order to perform on it his own "heretic" revision. He treated *Romeo and Juliet* in a similar way that Shakespeare treated the stories known to his contemporaries: he used the tragedy for presenting his own polemical thesis about tragic fragility of love relations. He retained the main thread of the plot (...). The rest he filled with his own psychological motivation and created his

own drama that relates to Shakespeare's only polemically. (...) [In his version] closeness was turned into alienation, happiness into disappointment, love into hatred which can only be quenched by an act of mutual killing. (Czamerle 7)

CONCLUSION

Iwaszkiewicz's polemical adaptation constitutes an interesting case set against the mainstream reception of Shakespeare's classic love story. *Romeo and Juliet* and *The Lovers of Verona* are two plays linked by a playwright turned translator and a translator turned playwright. This case proves that the reception of a Shakespearean classic as a text translated into another language is determined by a complex web of interrelated contexts, not only aesthetic, but also biographical, social and political. The perspective of cultural history, which welcomes studying the translated text against a wide background of time-specific circumstances, artistic choices and reception conditions, sheds light on the relations between authorial writing and translation, as well as on the range of translator's creativity. The story of Iwaszkiewicz's involvement in translating Shakespeare, related to the particular phases of his literary career and to specific works, in this case a play inspired by Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, reveals interconnections between his authorial literary production and translation activity. When the translated play is read and interpreted as an integral element of the poet-translator's *oeuvre*, it is possible to discover links between the meanings of the translated work and the translator's authorial production, even if they manifest themselves as a rebellious adaptation. Thus the original text, reworked and interwoven into the tissue of the target culture via the cultural negotiations entailed in the process of translation and adaptation, reveals new senses that enrich its reception.

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