



NAZIM HIKMET'S INFLUENCE ON THE ITALIAN LITERATURE

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Nazım Hikmet, considered one of the greatest poets of the twentieth century, is an emblematic figure in world literature for his political commitment and formal innovation. His poetry has crossed geographical and ideological boundaries. In Italy, his work has been enthusiastically received by readers, writers, and translators who recognised in his voice a rare combination of civic passion and artistic refinement.

Hikmet's poems reflect a profound love of freedom, social justice, solidarity among peoples and humanity as a whole. His verses alternate portraits of workers, appeals against war, poignant elegies for a distant homeland, and declarations of universal love. His voice is both personal and collective: he speaks as a man, but also as part of a people and an era in struggle.

Hikmet was one of the first Turkish poets to write in free verse, breaking with classical meter and introducing a language closer to everyday speech. His style blends powerful imagery, narrative rhythm, and a musicality that remains alive even in translation. His ability to blend the lyrical with the political has profoundly influenced modern poetry worldwide.

Nazım Hikmet's poetry reached Italy after World War II, in a cultural context marked by reconstruction, reflections on the war, and the spread of progressive ideologies. It was primarily thanks to Joyce Lussu, writer, partisan, and translator, that Hikmet became known to the Italian public. Lussu did not simply transpose his texts, but transmitted them with political passion, preserving their revolutionary and human character. Her translations began to circulate in the 1950s and 1960s, at a time when the Italian cultural left was seeking international poetic models that combined militancy and art. Hikmet quickly became one of these models, read not only as a poet, but as a symbol of resistance and human dignity.

Postwar Italy was fertile ground for Hikmet's voice. Intellectuals such as Elio Vittorini, Italo Calvino, Franco Fortini, and Pier Paolo Pasolini were committed to the pursuit of an ethically grounded literature. Hikmet's poetry, far removed from aestheticism and deeply rooted in historical and social reality, offered a concrete alternative to literary disengagement.

Furthermore, progressive publishing culture—through magazines, poetry collections, and publishing houses close to the Italian Communist Party—helped disseminate his works. In a climate of debate between aesthetics and politics, Hikmet represented a successful and powerful synthesis.

Hikmet's influence on Italian literature is particularly evident in the civic poetry of the late twentieth century. Poets such as Fortini, Sanguineti, as well as later voices such as Erri De Luca, have expressed an affinity with Hikmet's humane, direct, and political approach. His narrative style and ability to describe social reality have found echoes in many Italian works, especially in the poetry of Marxist or neorealist inspiration. Some of his works, such as *The Poet Is a Fire Thief* or *Letters from Prison*, have become almost proverbial among the most committed Italian poets.



During the 1960s and 1970s, Hikmet became a point of reference for many young Italian intellectuals. His poems were read in circles, occupied universities, and political theatres. His name was associated not only with literature but also with the fight against injustice, the dignity of political imprisonment, and the hope for a more just world. In particular, student movements and cultural organisations promoted public readings and performances inspired by his works. Even poets with a strong social commitment, such as Gianni Toti and Volponi, shared Hikmet's conception of poetry as an ethical act.

Hikmet spoke of the human condition, of prison, freedom, war, love, and homeland. These themes are also recurrent in post-World War II Italian poetry. His ability to address universal issues with accessible yet poetic language showed Italian authors a possible way to keep poetry close to the people without sacrificing artistic quality.

The central figure in the transposition of Hikmet's work into Italian is Joyce Lussu, whose firsthand experience allowed her to create poetic versions that retain the original intensity and energy of the texts. Lussu explicitly stated that she did not translate word for word, but sense for sense, seeking to maintain the ethical and emotional power of Hikmet's poetry. This approach made her translations authentic in tone, even at the cost of some formal liberties.

The collections translated by Lussu, such as *Poesie d'amore e di lotta* (Poems of Love and Struggle), published by Editori Riuniti, were widely distributed in Italy and played a crucial role in shaping Hikmet's perception in our country. Many Italian readers, even today, know Hikmet through the voice filtered through Lussu.

Linguistic and Stylistic Issues

Hikmet's poetic language is simple, direct, and often colloquial. This simplicity can be deceptive, as it conceals a highly precise elaboration of rhythm, structure, and tone. Italian translations have had to address these aspects, seeking to preserve the balance between orality and lyricism.

Besides Lussu, other translators have worked on Hikmet, including Tiziano Terzani, who has written about him with great respect, and various academic scholars who have approached the translations with a philological perspective. The debate has always been open: translating Hikmet means restoring not only the text, but the political and human context in which it was born.

Even today, Hikmet's poems are frequently read at international poetry festivals, in school settings, and at events commemorating historical memory. His words continue to resonate in Italy on April 25th, on Holocaust Remembrance Days, and in anti-war poetry readings. Italian theatres have staged performances based on his letters and poems. He has become an icon of the poet-prisoner, the dissident who writes to survive, to resist. In this sense, the parallels with Italian poets of prison and resistance, such as Sandro Penna, Cesare Pavese, and Aldo Braibanti, are significant.

In recent years, new editions of Hikmet's works have appeared on the Italian market. Publishing houses such as Castelvichi, Rizzoli, Mondadori, Einaudi, and Editori Riuniti have helped maintain his editorial presence. In the academic field, Hikmet is the subject of research that studies his poetry in relation to theatre, cinema, and human rights.



Italian universities include it in courses in comparative literature and postcolonial studies, emphasising its relevance and transnational position. Over the decades, multiple Italian editions of Hikmet's poetry appeared, expanding accessibility to students, poets, and general readers. Hikmet's emphasis on social justice, labour, and anti-war themes resonated with Italian leftist movements and intellectuals, especially during the postwar period and the various waves of political struggle in Italy.

His experimental approach to verse and rhythm inspired Italian poets to experiment beyond conventional forms. Hikmet's life and work also influenced Italian theatre and cinema, where themes of emancipation, exile, and human dignity found sympathetic audiences. His persona as a dissident poet found echoes in Italian cultural productions that celebrated freedom of expression and human rights. Italian universities and literary journals have hosted conferences, seminars, and studies focused on Hikmet, situating him within global modernism and the socialist realism debate. Critical discussions often explore how Hikmet's internationalism and cosmopolitan stance intersect with Italian leftist intellectual traditions.

Poems frequently translated include themes of love, labour, nature, and anti-totalitarianism. Some translations aim to preserve his musicality and free-verse cadence, while others emphasise political clarity for broader audiences.

Nazım Hikmet's poetry has transcended cultural, temporal, and ideological boundaries, resonating with different generations through a clear and profound language. In Italy, his voice has been welcomed with empathy and respect, especially by that part of the engaged culture that has always sought literature as a means to change the world. Hikmet is not just a Turkish poet translated into Italian: he is a bridge between peoples, classes, and ideals. His influence on Italian literature is evident not only in his lyrics but also in the consciousness of those who have read him and felt close to him. Today, in a world once again marked by wars, exiles, imprisonments, and democratic crises, his poetry continues to be a beacon of resistance, beauty, and humanity.

Considered among the most important voices of twentieth-century literature and the first Turkish writer to have used free verse, Nazım Hikmet is perhaps the most beloved and translated Oriental poet in Europe and the world. Pablo Neruda considers him the voice of the world. But it is impossible to understand the scope and breadth of Hikmet's poetry without considering his political conviction, for which he spent more than 17 years in prison. The desire to write for everyone, even the illiterate, is at the basis of the linguistic revolution brought about by Hikmet.

The language he chooses is not the language taught in schools, which is incomprehensible to most of the population, but the daily speech of the Anatolian peasants. Hikmet goes beyond the conventional themes of traditional Turkish lyric poetry, dealing mainly with the social and political aspect of man, as in what is still considered his masterpiece,

Human Panoramas.

The Turkish situation, however, is only the pretext to reach a general vision that embraces all of existence. The result is that politics and current affairs become poetic material, and the author's own story becomes part of the story.

Nazım Hikmet's works (1902–1963) and the Italian journalist and author Erri De Luca's (1950–), highlighting two distinct expressions of twentieth-century and contemporary civic poetry, though

rooted in profoundly different cultural and political contexts, are united by a shared ethical tension and a vision of literature as a tool of resistance and testimony.

Hikmet is universally recognised as the founder of modern Turkish poetry, a poet who blended lyrical forms with powerful political content. His language reflects a clear communicative intent: to speak to the people, to be the voice of the voiceless. For Hikmet, poetry becomes a form of activism.

Erri De Luca shares a similar conception of the poetic word as responsibility. Coming from the extra-parliamentary far-left of the 1970s, De Luca has developed a lean, essential style of writing, where the moral dimension prevails over the aesthetic. His poetry—like his prose—often addresses those living on the margins, the least fortunate, the forgotten. For De Luca, the poetic word has an almost sacred value: it is an act of justice, a form of symbolic reparation.

Despite their differences in style—Hikmet is more lyrical and imaginative, De Luca more essential and prosaic—both authors agree on the idea that poetry should not simply describe the world, but must also change it. In this sense, they both reject any form of neutrality: writing is, ultimately, a political gesture.

In conclusion, Hikmet and De Luca represent two emblematic examples of how poetry can combine formal beauty and ethical commitment.

Bionote:



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