

Fan Noli as a National and International Albanian Figure

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In one of his writings on *Tolstoy*, *Noli* calls him "one of the most enigmatic figures in the 19th century"¹). *Noli* may well be the most enigmatic figure in modern Albanian history.

This essay approaches his multilateral personality by looking at him as a national as well as international figure. A long time ago I called him a "Shepherd of the People" ("*Bariu i popullit*")²). The name suits him well, but it must be understood in the fullest sense. He was, no doubt, a shepherd of the Albanian people. But he was more than that. As the enlightened Primate of a church professing a universal religion, he was bound to see the problems of his country in a perspective larger than merely nationalistic. His internationalism, however, includes a purely political component, which has been either passed in silence or misinterpreted.

My objective is to sketch an intellectual biography of *Noli* through a critical analysis of his writings and speeches³). Because of the nature of the essay, I shall only touch on his period of life in his native village Ibrik-Tepe (Qytezë in Albanian), a locality south of Adrianople in the Turkish part of Europe, no longer existing today.

Let us begin by considering the implications of this last phrase. Unlike any other Albanian of the diaspora, *Noli* is an Albanian without a homeland, his village having "disappeared from the map as an Albanian settlement" in 1923, after the defeat of the Greeks by the Turks (FA, 77). A man without a homeland is by definition a citizen of the world.

¹) Antologji e mendimit estetik shqiptar: 1504—1944, ed. Nasho Jorgaqi. Tirana; Naim Frashëri 1979.

²) *Kritika*, June 1944.

³) The essay is based on *Noli's* autobiography in Fiftieth Anniversary of the Albanian Orthodox Church in America: 1908—1958. Boston; AOCA 1960 (henceforth FA); a selection of his articles, speeches and letters; *Topi i lidhur*, ed. Anton Pashku. Prishtinë: Rilindja 1977 (henceforth TL); *Noli's* translations, preceded by introductions, of the volumes constituting "Literary Library" (*Libraria letrare*) edited by him, and *Albumi II* by Qerim Panariti (Boston 1966).

Noli's geographically rooted cosmopolitanism has a Levantine stamp. Born and reared in a village of old Thracia, he was a Turkish citizen speaking Albanian at home and Greek at church and at school. He attended the Greek grammar school in his village (Albanian schools were prohibited by the government) and graduated from the Greek Gymnasium in Adrianople. His knowledge of Greek matched his knowledge of Albanian. And of course he knew Turkish too (Turcisms, gratuitous at times, abound in his writings). His first literary work was a Greek translation of *Ibsens's* "An Enemy of the People" while he was working as a prompter and occasional actor for several Greek theater companies. During his three-year stay in Greece with those companies (1900—03), he visited Athens, Corinth, Constantinople, Ponto-Iraklia on the Black Sea and Alexandria. In Egypt, where he spent the next three years as a grammar school teacher and church cantor, he translated into Greek *Sami Frashëri's* "Albania: Past, Present and Future" (1906). In Egypt he learned "a good deal of Arabic" (FA, 92). And he had studied French at the Greek Gymnasium (FA, 50). When *Noli*, at twenty-four, left Europe for the United States, he knew well two Balkan languages and was conversant with Turkish, Arabic and French. And he had travelled over the larger part of the eastern Mediterranean.

I. From a Prompter and a Cantor to a Preacher and a Diplomat

"As a prompter and as an actor, he had acquired an excellent training in the technique of public speaking. This was to help him enormously in his preaching later" (FA, 91). And about his experience as a cantor: "His job as a school teacher consisted primarily in chanting, not only on Sundays, but every week day" (ibid.). His teacher was a monk, *Fr. Nilos*, an expert in Byzantine chanting. "Under him Fan Noli received a more advanced education in Byzantine music during his two years stay in Shubin-el-Kom from 1903 to 1905" (FA, 91—92). These two experiences had some bearing in *Noli's* determination to become a priest. The main reason was patriotic, as made clear by his correspondence. Especially important in this regard are *Noli's* letters to his Albanian friends in Egypt, *Thanas Tashko* and *Jani Vruho*, on whose suggestion he translated *Sami Frashëri's* treatise. These patriots understood that a dynamic and intelligent young man such as *Noli* could put to better use his potential by working for the Albanian cause in the United States. They convinced him to join the Albanian emigrants there. Another patriot, the folklorist *Spiro Dine*, paid for a second class boat fare.

The letters *Noli* wrote to *Tashko* can be taken at face value. Being not meant for publication, they contain precious information for our knowledge of *Noli's* frame of mind during his first American years.

Noli's first letter to *Tashko* (June 1, 1906), describes his trip from Naples to New York. The passengers first: "1,800 animals in the third class; 149 pigs and one man in the second class; and 110 golden packsaddles in the first class" (TL, 171). The one man in the second class holds a book by *Nietzsche* in his hand. He befriends only one person during his trip, an Italian, to whom he tells he is "an Albanian revolutionist". He becomes the object of general curiosity. "I could answer their questions in all the languages in which they were addressed to me — they were dumbfounded." Their ignorance about Albania ("Where is this Albania located?") provokes his anger: "Don't you see, o God, how others vilify us who are the strongest? And if you have become deaf, we shall come to your throne and shake it, shouting: It is high time!" (ibid.). *Fishta* questions his God in a like manner.

From New York he travels to Buffalo, his destination. He stays there three months, working in a lumber mill, and then goes to Boston, where *Sotir Peci* was publishing *Kombi* (The Nation), the first Albanian newspaper in America. *Noli* becomes his assistant. In his autobiography, he tells us that he soon resigned, because *Peci* "could not pay for his [*Noli's*] living expenses" (FA, 103). In his July 23, 1906 letter to *Tashko*, he writes that he could not go along with *Peci* ("We are dissimilar" — TL, 176). At the time about "2,000 Macedonian Aromunians (Vlachs)" were collecting money to build a church in Boston. "Aren't you ashamed to collect money for a church?", he rebukes them. "Why don't you buy dynamite and bombs to blow up those who have made us blind?" (TL, 177). The next letter to his friend (August 17, 1906) is more specific: "I don't like America. My heart is ailing, my vision of life has darkened. This is not a New World, this is an Dirty World (*Botë e Fëlliqur*)" (TL, 180).

He was at the time running a machine that stamped labels on cans. A night job. He complains to his friend (December 25, 1906): "Today I weighed myself: I've lost 17 lbs." (TL, 182). In his letter of March 2, 1906, he solicits *Tashko* to find him a bride — he refers to her as his "priestess". But the priest is poor; therefore, the priestess must bring a dowry: "hundred [sterlings]": "They will be the *untouchable* capital of the priesthood" (TL, 183). He has plans to go to Bucharest with his future wife to be ordained there. He will collect money for the Boston church, and he will also learn Romanian. This, however, he will do, depending on the generosity of his mother-in-law. "I'll have to keep not only a beard — no small burden in truth — but also a wife! And may God save me from shipwreck⁴)! ... What a terrible thing this marrying a girl without ever having seen her! Now you'll understand the enormity of my sacrifice for our cause!" (TL, 184).

⁴) A note in TL, 185 mentions that the word 'God' is followed by two question marks in the text.

The letter to *Tashko* of March 23, 1906 strikes a forceful note: "If you won't send them [the hundred sterlings], I'll leave either for Panama or for Albania" (TL, 186). The letter of July 16, 1906 makes a last appeal: "I've decided to be both a priest and a priestess ... I'm bored of waiting for Egyptian priestesses ... Sanctify me, o giaours, with a few sterlings, and you'll see what I'm going to do ... As soon as the Russian bishop arrives, I'll go to New York and I'll cling to him like a mushroom until he sanctifies me" (TL, 187).

Noli was ordained as a deacon by the Russian Archbishop *Platon* in New York on March 8, 1908. In July of that year the Young Turks came to power in Turkey. *Noli's* letter of May 5, 1909 to *Tashko* announces his resolution to go to Albania to join the fight against the Young Turks. He won't mind if they hang him, "a Nietzschean" (TL, 189) — this will be his "service" to Albania. His service to the Church will be to translate "two or three books" of liturgy into Albanian (ibid.).

Noli had to postpone his trip to Albania. From a subsequent letter to his friend (August 8, 1909), it appears that he was deep in debt for having subsidized *Dielli*: "If it has survived, this is because I've paid for it" (TL, 191). And he asks for a loan, to be payed back together with his old debt as soon as possible.

In 1911, *Noli* visited the Albanian settlements in Bulgaria, Romania and Ukraine (in Sophia he saw his parents). To buy the fare — he writes to *Tashko* (July 20, 1911) — he sold for £ 20 his books that had cost him \$ 800 (TL, 192). He had already published at the time his "dramatic sketch", "Israelitë dhe Filistinë" (1907), and three liturgical books: "Shërbesat e Javës së Madhe" (Services of Holy Week, 1908), "Libra e Shërbesave të Shënta" (Service Book, 1909) and "Libra e të Kremtave të Mëdha" (Holiday Book, 1911). Translations of French literary works (*Stendhal*, *Maupassant*, *Molière*) had appeared in installments in *Dielli*. And he had written many political articles in that journal. The proclamation of the independence of Albania (1912) found *Noli* an already established Albanian writer and journalist as well as the recognized leader of the Orthodox Albanians in America.

The proclamation of independence made it possible for *Noli* to visit the country of his ancestors for the first time. The opportunity was provided by the British blockade of Albania, after Turkey's defeat by the Balkan allies. *Noli* was delegated by his church to reinforce the Albanian delegation headed by *Mehmed Konitza* in London for the purpose of lifting the blockade. *Faik Konitza* was the delegate of *Vatra*.

This marks the beginning of *Noli's* diplomatic career. After the London meeting, he attended the Albanian Congress of Trieste (March 1913), presided over by *Faik Konitza*. Subsequently *Noli* visited Vlorë, the seat of the provisional Albanian government, and there he was warmly received by the population. He revisited Bucharest where he conducted religious services

for the Albanians. The Romanian government published his "Triodi i vogël" (Small Triod, 1913). When the Albanian capital was moved to Durrës, *Noli* celebrated a mass in the city's main square (March 10, 1914). In a speech on that occasion, he talked about curbing monarchic power (Prince *Wied* was then King of Albania). During his second European trip, most of *Noli's* time was spent in various European countries. He was in Vienna when World War I broke out.

Noli returned to the United States in the spring of 1915, enriched by his European experience. He was elected President of *Vatra* (July 18, 1915) for two consecutive one-year terms. "This was the most important period in the history of the Federation" (FA, 115). *Dielli* became a daily with *Noli* as editor (December 21, 1915 to July 6, 1916). In May 1917, *Vatra* launched a money-raising campaign to defray costs for various political activities (\$150,000 was collected). At a time when the Albanian government had dissolved as a result of the country's occupation by foreign armies, *Vatra's* executive committee "acted as a government in exile" (FA, 116). On March 24, 1918 *Noli* was made Administrator of the Albanian Orthodox Mission in America. On July 4, 1918, he attended the Congress of the Oppressed Nations in Washington as the delegate of *Vatra*. He availed himself of that opportunity to speak to President *Wilson* on Albania's precarious situation. He probably influenced the President. The page in Fiftieth Anniversary in memory of President *Wilson* extolls him as "a great American and a great friend of small nations who saved Albania from partition" by denouncing the 1915 Secret Treaty of London. In September 1918, *Vatra* began publishing *The Adriatic Review*, a political and to some extent literary journal, mostly in English. *Noli* edited it for six months, after which the editorship went to *Constantine Chekrezi*, who continued it for the rest of 1919. The journal, the best ever published by Albanian-Americans, addressed itself to the public opinion of the Western world, championing the cause of Albania.

Noli's achievements in literature, journalism, religious leadership and diplomacy during World War I made him the natural choice for heading the Albanian delegation at the League of Nations in Geneva. He succeeded in having Albania admitted to the League. In its editorial of June 23, 1920, *The Manchester Guardian* described *Noli* as "a man who would have been remarkable in any country. An accomplished diplomat, an expert in international politics, a skillful debater, from the outset he made a deep impression in Geneva. He knocked down his Balkan opponents in a masterly fashion, but always with a broad smile" (FA, 119).

The speech he gave at the League of Nations contains a paragraph which can be taken to illustrate his conception of internationalism at the time.

"Peace won't come from treaties which are eventually destined for waste-paper baskets. Peace has to come from schools. We must teach our children that wholesale murder is as criminal as the murder of an

individual. We must teach them that our tribal gods are the source of all evils that have plagued the world for centuries. We must teach them that there is only one real God to be served: the God of humanity, the God of all tribes (TL, 84).”

While “tribe” here is a derogatory term for “nation”, used to downgrade the concept of the so-called “historical nations”, the European powers that won the war, “tribal gods” is a sarcastic reference to the nationalism of these as well as other colonial powers, a pack of wolves pretending to be the guardians of peace. Another paragraph conveys *Noli’s* desire to see the League of Nations develop into a League beyond Nations, in the spirit of true internationalism, the only real guarantee for peace.

“And yet, even though the League of Nations is a dream, a utopia that makes skeptics smile or laugh, the League must stand as an ideal representing the noblest aspirations of mankind, in defiance of grotesque military glory. It must stand as a solemn reaffirmation of the world’s longing for peace (TL, 183).”

II. The Albanian Interlude: the Statesman

Noli’s performance at the League of Nations established him as an international figure prior to his reaching the stature of a national figure, something rather exceptional in a politician’s career. At the time, his name was known only to some sectors of the Albanian people, politicians and intellectuals for the most part. During his Albanian quadrennium (1921—24), *Noli* emerged as the chief contender of the then strong man of Albania, later King of Albania, *Ahmet Zogu*.

In recognition of the patriotic activity of *Vatra* during World War I and its aftermath, the Albanian government invited the Federation to send a delegate to the Albanian Parliament. *Noli* was the choice.

As *Vatra’s* representative for a first biennium (1921—22) and then as a representative of Korçë for the next (1923—24), *Noli* distinguished himself as a consummate politician and a masterful debater. “The nightingale of the Parliament” could deliver a speech on any subject, alternating humor with sarcasm, according to circumstances. His interventions were timely, his repartees sharp-pointed. His experience as a diplomat, head of his church and leader of *Vatra* provided him with an array of arguments for an intelligent handling of social and political problems. His familiarity with American democratic procedures gave him an edge in a parliament that was in many respects a caricature of democracy. He was in a position to lecture on democracy, availing himself of a cultural background matched by that of very few colleagues. He could adorn his speeches with quotations from great authors, or spice them with anecdotes that sent his colleagues

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into roaring laughter. For example, in criticizing the then Premier *Ahmet Zogu* for his attempt to cover with empty verbiage the failure of his allegedly progressive programe, *Noli* compares him to *Eulenspiegel*. This “German Nastradin” (TL, 73) had once promised to decorate an earl’s castle for a fat amount of money which he squandered without ever touching his brush. When the earl with his retainers came to admire the paintings, *Eulenspiegel* stated that only bastards would not be able to see them. Not to be called bastards, everyone found the paintings beautiful. Only a maid servant said: “God have mercy on my poor mother who bore me a bastard so that I see nothing!” The moral is that *Zogu*’s partisans, who praise him for his do-nothing rhetoric, are bastardly hypocrites. And their leader? *Kristo Floqi* had composed a song about *Zogu* who had foiled an armed attempt to overthrow *Zogu*’s government. The refrain goes as follows:

Rroftë Ahmet Zogu, rroftë
shpëtimtari i atdheut!
Brez pas brezi u trashëgoftë
si stërnip i Skënderbeut!

Long live Ahmet Zogu,
the savior of the country!
Be he remembered for ages
as the grandchild of Scanderbeg!

Noli recited the refrain, making a few changes:

Long live Ahmet Zogu,
the joker of progress!
May he be remembered for ages
as the grandchild of Nastradin!

When *Noli* gave this speech (September 23, 1923), he was the recognized leader of the Opposition in the Albanian Parliament. He had already been Minister of Foreign Affairs in *Xhafer Ypi*’s cabinet, from which he had resigned because of *Ypi*’s “reactionary policies” (FA, 119). In November 21, 1923, *Noli* was consecrated Bishop and Metropolitan of Durrës, the highest ecclesiastical rank in the Albanian Orthodox Church. On February 23, 1924, an assassination attempt against *Zogu* took place in the Parliament. Two months later, *Avni Rustemi*, a leader of the Opposition and a national hero for having shot dead a national traitor, was murdered in Tirana. His assassination sparked a revolution by the Opposition leaders. *Noli*’s account of his participation in the revolution is rendered in a stylistic pattern recurrent throughout his autobiography:

“What would Napoleon do in this case? Of course, he would join the people against the feudal landowners ... After all, that was what he had done in all his campaigns, knocking down kings and barons.

What would Scanderbeg do in this case? Of course, he would join the people against their tyrants. After all, that was what he had done all his life...

What would Jesus do? Of course, he would not fight, he was not a general. But he would certainly take the side of the poor and oppressed, as he had always done (FA, 125)."

The revolution was successful, and *Zogu* fled. *Noli* became Premier of Albania. His program consisted in radical social and political reforms, including an agrarian reform. "It was only natural for a Harvard graduate to introduce democracy into his native country" (FA, 126). The program did not get off the ground. *Noli* lays the blame on his cabinet in an article published several years later: "We had the majority when we put on our program the agrarian reforms. We were in minority when it came to implement them⁵." The reforms failed to materialize; the revolution fizzled. He asks the question: "Was Fan Noli's revolution in vain?" And he answers it: "Not at all. It proved that the people of Albania did not want the feudal landowners. It proved that the landowners could not return without foreign intervention. It proved that the landowners were down and out. After all, they never recovered from the blow. So the revolution of 1924 was a turning point in the history of Albania. It was epoch making" (FA, 127).

Was it really so? *Ahmet Zogu* ruled Albania for fifteen more years after his return, during which three other revolutions occurred. These were crushed without foreign intervention. In that same article, *Noli* admits that "rural [Southern] Albania ("*Shqipëria katundare*") was not interested in agrarian reforms because there are no big estates in it. Patriarchal [Northern] Albania was even less interested than rural Albania. Interested was only the Albania of the tenants ("*Shqipëria e bujqërve*") [roughly coinciding with Central Albania]. But they were so terrorized by the beys that when I spoke to them about the agrarian reform, their uniform answer was: "Please, don't create problems for us" ("*Aman, mos na vini në bela*") (TL, 115).

Indeed, except for the sharecroppers of Central Albania and the Muzeqe plain who were still in a condition of serfdom, the rest of Albania had no pressing need for an agrarian reform. *Noli's* program was revolutionary. One can tell what he had in mind by paying attention to the language of the text just quoted. He begins by speaking of "feudal landowners" and then shifts to "landowners" *tout court*. Another text is telling in this regard. *Noli* writes that in 1953 *Vatra* raised \$ 20,000 for him to buy a house. He purchased one in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, which he describes as follows:

"The house is surrounded by a beautiful lawn studded with many kind of trees ... Moreover Fan Noli has bought two more lots on his right and is planning to buy more on his left. His idea is to enlarge the lawn and make an orchard of tropical trees six times larger than the original area he bought" (FA, 128).

⁵) *Liria kombëtare*, March 1, 1929.

A contradiction? Most probably, an ironical rejoinder (notice the hyperbolic "six times larger") to those who had, presumably, criticized him for becoming a landowner in his old age.

III. The Exile Period: the Writer

Noli and his cabinet members left Vlorë on Christmas Day in 1924 on board a ship bound for Bari. He had on that very day completed forty-two years (he lived exactly as many afterwards). According to an anecdote, one morning he appeared before his colleagues in civilian dress. He had also shaved his beard. To his friends looking at him in amazement, he said: "This was my debt to Albania."

He continued his service to the country in another field. Exile turned the defeated politician into a writer — a historical pattern as exemplified by *Cicero* and *Dante*, *Bacon* and *Gramsci*.

"When I decided to join the crusade for Albanian independence, the first thing that struck me was the total lack of Albanian literary works of artistic merit⁶." *Noli* began to translate into Albanian masterpieces of world literature. No less than six works appeared in only one year, 1926: three *Shakespeare* plays, "Hamlet", "Julius Caesar", and "Macbeth"; two plays by *Ibsen*, "An Enemy of the People", and "Lady Ingrid of Osteraad"; and the "Rubaiyat" of *Omar Khayyam* (which had a second edition in 1927). Five volumes of "Don Quixote" (first part) were added in 1930—32. All these publications have the same quality of paper and cover, the same format and type. They were part of a series, the Literary Library ("Libraria letrare"). The title of the series as well as the selection of the works indicate that *Noli's* enterprise was conceived as an educational service to his people. The Literary Library continues, in a more systematic way, *Noli's* work begun with the publication in *Dielli* of works by French writers and followed by the publication in separate volumes of "Othello" (1916) and "The Cabin" (Kasollja, 1921) by *Vicente Blasco Ibanez*.

Comparison of these works with those written during *Noli's* exile shows that his Albanian has become richer and purer⁷). His literary model is *Konitza*, whom he credited later for "guidance and advice"⁸). *Konitza* translated a condensed selection of "The Thousand and One Nights." *Noli* translated *Khayyam*. "Konitza can be considered as the creator of modern

⁶) Introduction to Faik Konitza's, *Albania: The Rockgarden of Southeastern Europe*, ed. Qerim Panariti. Boston: Vatra 1957.

⁷) In "The Cabin," one still finds barbarisms and solecisms such as *akseptuar* and *neqez, i turpshim* and *myshtere*.

⁸) Introduction to Konitza's *Albania: the Rockgarden of Southeastern Europe*.

Albanian prose ... All Albanian authors who came after Konitza are his pupils — including this writer⁹.” The essay on *Konitza* in which these self-effacing words appear is one of *Noli's* best. In *Konitza's* own journal, *Albania* (1897—1910) as well as in his later writings in *Dielli*, many literary essays are found that justify *Noli's* high praise of him. The essays *Noli* wrote as introductions to the works constituting his Literary Library are no less important for Albanian literature. With those essays *Noli* inaugurates a type of literary criticism which was not only non-existent in Albanian literature, but which also lacked a clearly defined status in European literature as well. Sociology of literature is defined today as that branch of literary criticism specializing in analyses of works of art from a socio-political viewpoint. This kind of criticism is only marginally interested in literature as such, i.e. in what distinguishes it from the other arts: formal properties of words and their stylistic conformations. Sociology of literature looks at objects of art as social products, addressing imagination as a circumvolving way to explaining ideology.

Noli calls his essays “critical analyses”. The analysis bears on characters, ignoring formal elements such as language and style, plot and dialogue, narrative patterns and versification structures. The analysis is at times original, but onesided as a rule. Thus Hamlet, become proverbial for his irresolution, is seen as a skillful diplomat possessed with a strong will who, once sure that his uncle has murdered his father, acts according to a well thought out plan of revenge, carrying it out successfully. Nothing is said about Hamlet's ambivalent feelings towards his mother, and very little about his love for Ophelia. *Noli* had once, while in Greece, played the part of Hamlet. He interprets the tragedy from an actor's point of view. The final sentence in his essay is telling in this respect: “It goes without saying that the interpretation of the play by a powerful actor is worth a hundred explanations and critical evaluations by specialized scholars.”

Scholars have written volume after volume to shed light on that typically Spanish and yet universal character which is Don Quixote. *Noli* approaches the novel from a strictly Albanian perspective. According to him, Don Quixote presents a special interest for the Albanian reader because “in Albania the types of the petty bey and the rascal are ubiquitous. All our aristocrats, with few exceptions, are *declassés*, without economic basis, fallen into the class of petty beys ever since Albania freed itself from Turkey. They used to serve Turkey as captains and mercenary chiefs, now they are jobless. Jobless and starving are also the poor peasants and highlanders who followed the beys as mercenaries and brigands, plundering Europe, Asia and Africa.” These two elements are now trying to perpetuate in Albania a “feudal, medieval, backward and reactionary situation.” They re-

⁹) Ibidem.

semble the Spanish knight and his groom in their attempt to resuscitate the age of chivalry in modern Spain. Don Quixote and Sancho would like "to turn back the wheel of history"; they are, instead, crushed by it. The reader laughs and rejoices when they are thrashed, getting what they deserve. The popularity of the novel is explained as "*Schadenfreude*", the pleasure felt at misfortunes of uncongenial people. At times however, the reader pities the foolish knight who is at bottom an idealist, seeking to redress society's wrongs. Sancho's loyalty to his master is likewise moving. "We grieve at the sight of the poor and ignorant peasant ready to die for his master, who fools and ruins him with empty promises and illusions."

The trouble with this interpretation is that the Spanish *hidalgo* was not a *declassé*; he belonged to the minor aristocracy of the time, a quite respectable class. And can one speak of *Schadenfreude* when the main characters elicit sympathy too?

It goes otherwise when *Noli* analyses a tragedy such as "Julius Caesar". Here he is on solid ground, that of his own revolutionary experience. He observes that the title is a cover for fear of offending the king, the real protagonists being tyrannicides. His analysis of them is by way of contrast. Brutus, a stoic, seeks to achieve his ends in conformity with his philosophical principles, Cassius by Machiavellian means. Brutus is sincerely concerned for the welfare of the Roman people, Cassius only so far as to secure their support. And whereas Cassius is not worried by moral scruples, Brutus thinks that the liberator must differentiate himself from the tyrant by maintaining impeccable conduct. The two are also temperamentally different: self-confident and equipoised Brutus, diffident and impetuous Cassius. A born commander the former, a superb organizer the latter whose arguments "can serve as catechism for agitators and propagandists of all times". *Noli* admires *Brutus*, but his approval goes eventually to Cassius. Had Cassius' idea of suppressing Antony prevailed, the revolution would have succeeded. Revolution involves demagoguery and much else besides. Morality and religion are subservient to politics, not the other way round. Those who succeed in politics are not idealists like Brutus, but pragmatists like Cassius and demagogues like Antony.

"An Enemy of the People" is a telling case of an idealist who is a political failure. *Noli* praises *Ibsen* as an "iconoclast and the greatest revolutionary intellectual of the 19th century ... Great as a Norwegian, he is greater as a European". For "the city where Dr. Stockmann acts is a miniature of the bourgeois capitalistic society which thrives on trading in poison and forgery". Dr. Stockmann is a mansided character: he is a socialist because he fights capitalism; an aristocrat, because he believes in an enlightened elite; an anarchist in that he rejects the state and the parties; a tyrant for his readiness to use violence to effectuate reforms. He is also a Christian altruist who sacrifices himself for the common good, and even a Nietzschean superman whose mission is to lead others to the promised land, de-

nied to himself (*Noli's* poem, "Moses on the Mountain", develops the same theme).

"An Enemy of the People" is not *Ibsen's* greatest play, but it is probably the most popular. "In France and Spain, it has been pressed into the service of anarchism as a revolutionary manifesto. When first produced in Paris in 1895, and again in 1899, it was made the occasion of anarchist demonstrations¹⁰)." And here is *Noli's* comment on the play.

"The world stage, old or new, has no play that scorns so powerfully the bourgeois ideals, democratic only in appearance (*"faqe me nder"*). Freedom of speech? But that ceases to exist as soon as the capitalist's interest is hurt. The government of the majority through elections? But the majority are blind, they do not know what they vote for; the capitalists lead them by the nose, and they end by crucifying their benefactors. The parliaments? These are only places for staging debates from the vantage viewpoint of the capitalists. The Christian religion and the modern schools? They are instrumental in distorting and enslaving the minds of the people in favor of the capitalists. Public opinion? The capitalists can make it turn like windmills by buying journalists. No sirs, says Ibsen, the bourgeoisie has only one ideal which it worships as its only god, and that is plundering by all possible means. He is the ablest and greatest who robs most ... Read carefully the fifth act of the play ... This act is a piece of bourgeois life of any people at any time ... The actors have been given various names, yet the types are the same, fitting the molds where I have cast them. They are so and will remain so until the proletarians, waking up from slumber and freeing themselves from slavery, will get even with them. They deserve their fate since they won't change their minds."

The play is no doubt a scathing accusation against capitalism. But Dr. Stockmann inveighs against liberals no less violently: "The liberals are the craftiest foes free men have to face" (Act V). And Dr. Stockmann has no patience with the masses either; he calls them the "vulgar herd", "mob", "rabble". Towards the end of the play, when all abandon him, he turns to the proletarians: "The poor I shall keep them anyhow. But by heaven! I'll make them listen to me!" The play ends with Dr. Stockmann's sentence, "The strongest man in the world stands most alone!" And that is Stirner.

In his autobiography, *Noli* recognizes three spiritual fathers: *Napoleon*, *Scanderbeg* and *Jesus*. We can add a fourth one, *Khayyam*. On what grounds? First of all, on purely artistic and philological grounds. *Noli's* translation of the "Rubaiyaat" is his literary masterpiece. It is much more than a translation; it compares with *Fitzgerald's* work. The "Rubaiyaat"

¹⁰) William Archer, Introduction to the play in *The Collected Works of Ibsen*. New York: Scribner 1929, p. 8.

does not figure in the Literary Library series. Not to include it there is to place it in relief as exceptional and unique. For while his other translations were motivated by an educational-political as well as aesthetic-concern, the "Rubaiyaat" was a work of love, striking a personal chord. It is the only work among those of the exile period which has two editions. And it is the only one that is also annotated. Moreover, unlike the other works, it carries a pseudonym: "Rushit Bilbil Gramshi".

Did *Noli* use the pseudonym out of deference for the church, *Khayyam* being a free thinker, the translator a priest? "Rushit" is the genitive-dative case of (*r*)*rush*, 'grapes' — the work begins with the line, "At night in my sleep, the soul said to me: Drink!" And "bilbil" means 'nightingale'. So far the two names connote Epicureanism, *Khayyam*'s philosophy. But how are we to explain "Gramshi"? The essay introducing the "Rubaiyaat" is dated while also including the name of the place where it was written: "Librasht, Fall 1926". The essay was, of course, not written in Librazhd, which is a small town in Central Albania; it was written somewhere in Europe where the author lived during his exile period. The fictitious toponym calls attention to the third name, Gramshi, another small town in Central Albania, a few miles from Librazhd. The Albanians often use the name of their birth-place as a family name. An example is *Faik Konitza*, whose family name is that of a town in Epirus. Did *Noli* choose the name of a town located in Central Albania, "the Albania of the tenants" ("*Shqipëria e bujqërve*"), to contrast himself with his literary rival, the *bey* of Konitza? Or was the name perhaps meant as a tribute to *Antonio Gramsci*, who was arrested by *Mussolini* just in Fall (November 8) 1926¹¹? What makes this other hypothesis plausible is that on December 8, 1926 *Noli* published in *Liria kombëtare* an article on the Italo-Albanian Treaty in which he denounces the treaty, which had just been signed. On January 15, 1927, *The Herald Tribune* published a telegram by *Noli* in which he describes the treaty as "the preamble to a new Balkan war" and calls *Mussolini* "an imperialistic clown" (TL, 95).

Noli dedicates "Rubaiyaat" to the Persian poets *Nizami* and *Hafis* who saved the poems from "the vandalism of the fanatics". The essay informs the reader that *Khayyam* was persecuted for his irreligiosity. He was obliged to make his living by teaching the Koran and the Canonical Law in which he did not believe. Since he dared declare his apostasy, he had to suffer the consequences. At some time in his life he had to make a pilgrimage to Mecca in order to appease the rage of his foes. He returned a still more hardened sinner.

¹¹) Probably *Noli* did not know that *Antonio Gramsci* had Albanian blood in his veins. In his "Letters from Prison" (*Lettere dal carcere*. Turin: Einaudi 1965, p. 506), *Gramsci* notes that his ancestor emigrated from Epirus to Italy in 1821 or after.

I shall briefly discuss *Noli's* essay on *Tolstoy*, and with some reservations¹²). According to *Noli*, *Tolstoy* had all the faults of his decadent class, the only distinction being "his superhuman effort to reform himself and account for his sins" (257). Yet, unlike any other Russian writer, *Tolstoy* was "an uncompromising opponent to tsarism, the upper classes, capitalistic bourgeoisie and official Russian church. On these points he was in agreement with the Bolsheviks" (261). One reason *Noli* admires *Tolstoy* is that he, like Dr. Stockmann, saw himself in the role of John the Baptist with regard to Christ. "His prophecy came true", he writes, "tovarish Lenin came seven years after his death". The essay bears as motto *Tolstoy's* sentence, "The Great Revolution will come from Russia."

Noli expressed his militant radicalism not only in writings on literature during his exile period. He headed the Revolutionary National Committee (KONARE), founded in March 1925 — later named Committee of National Liberation — and wrote many articles in the Committee's paper, *Liria kombëtare* (National Freedom), published in Geneva. He continued his attacks against King Zog (the "Salep Sultan") and polemized with *Konitza* who tried to denigrate "his" (*Noli's*) revolution of 1924. *Noli* was a delegate for the Balkan countries at the Congress of the Friends of the Soviet Union in Moscow in November 1927 (at the time he supported the idea of a Balkan Federation including Ethnic Albania). *Pravda* (December 2, 1927) published a text in which *Noli* expressed sympathy for the Soviet regime while attacking the "imperialistic" warmongers. One of his articles, "Schubert the Plebeian," in his rubric "Hither and Thither" in *Liria kombëtare*, inveighs against the "haves" ("*kamësit*") who starved to death the genial composer and monopolize him now that he is dead. "They go even further. They want us to believe that by starving Schubert they made a service to music. How so? Well, Schubert composes a piece in a hurry and then runs to sell it for a dime with which he buys a piece of bread. But since he cannot calm down his hunger, he rushes to write another piece, and so on. The explanation is ingenious, but it has a flaw, as illustrated by a Nastradin tale. Nastradin had trained his donkey to work without giving him food. Unfortunately, just when he had completed the training, the animal died. When the bourgeois tell us tales about artistic achievements produced by empty stomachs they deserve as an answer one on the jaw" (TL, 102). In an article on the political situation in Albania (February 1, 1929), *Noli* identifies feudalism as the country's sore spot, and then calls for an agrarian reform which will free the tenant peasant from both the landlord and the bureaucrat. Such a reform can be accomplished only by the peasants themselves "under a government of the peasantry and the working class" (TL, 109) — in other words, a Soviet government.

¹²) The essay is found in Nasho Jorgaqi's anthology (see n. 1) without the name of the translator.

In 1930, *Noli* obtained a six-month visa for a visit to the United States, during which period he started his own paper, *Republika*. When his visa expired, the periodical was edited by *Anastas Tashko*, the son of *Noli's* old friend. *Republika* was founded in opposition to *Dielli*, then controlled by *Konitza*, *Zogu's* Minister Plenipotentiary in Washington. An opponent of the King had written in *Liria kombëtare* that *Zogu* (he was sick at the time) would not be able to die, his throat being obstructed. The King would not die, *Noli* commented, before *Konitza* had licked off all the insults he had once sputtered against the King (TL, 123). *Konitza* had written that *Noli* should learn how to write. *Noli* replies, calling him, a bey, *aga* ('notable' in Turkish): "We thank the Aga for his goodness and kindness, but cannot accept his lessons, since we are neither beys nor agas. We are plebeians ("harbutë"), thank God, and take pride and rejoice in being plebeians ... The Aga of *Dielli* says: 'But beys are Albanians, aren't they?' No, Aga, they are not, they are only beys, faithless and countryless, their country being there where their mansions and estates are" (November 27, 1930, TL, 128).

A short article is in praise of *Toscanini* who refused to play the Fascist anthem in Bologna (Juni 25, 1931). In another article (June 11, 1931), *Noli* analyzes the great depression: "The banks are full of gold, the silos full of wheat, the stores full of commodities. But the people are penniless and lack bread and shoes" (TL, 143). *Noli* had once extolled President *Wilson*: "His moral greatness shows in his defense of the small nations — *regere parvos*"¹³). In "*The Crush is Around the Corner*" (July 9, 1931), *Wilson* is implicitly referred to as the initiator of American imperialism: "Traditional American isolationism ceased with *Wilson's* decision to join the Allies in World War I." After the war, the United States invested up to four million dollars in defeated Germany, thus turning it into a "semi-colony". Now President *Hoover* has granted a moratorium to protect the United States' interests, threatened by England and France in their ruthless policy to bleed Germany white. "There was a holiday in the New York stock market when *Hoover* announced the moratorium ... All stocks went up" (TL, 148).

IV. Back to the Fold: the Scholar

Republika ceased publication in 1932, shortly before *Noli's* return to the United States. He was fifty when he resumed his duties as head of the Albanian Orthodox Church in America. He ceased his invectives against the King, made peace with *Konitza*, and devoted himself to reorganizing his church. He continued to translate Byzantine liturgy into Albanian, publishing two liturgical books as well as "Hymnare" (Hymnal, 1936), a compila-

¹³) Ligjeron Fan Noli, ed. Lefter Dilo. Tirana: Mal Osmani 1944.

tion of church music, mostly Russian, for mixed choir. He later published two more musical books. "Eastern Orthodox Hymnal" (1951), basically an English version of "Hymnare", includes anthems rendered according to the rhythm of the old Slavonic text as well as traditional *plainchants* melodies. "Byzantine Hymnal" (1959) contains anthems of the Liturgy of *St. John Chrysostom*, rhythmically translated from the original Greek, together with compositions from various Russian composers. He also tried his hand at composing. In the chapter on publications in his autobiography, *Noli* lists the following (unpublished) original compositions: "Scanderbeg," a tone poem for orchestra; a "Byzantine Overture" for orchestra; a song for tenor and orchestra based on a *Verlaine* poem; and also a *capella* song for mixed choir based on Psalm 137.

Musical activity is an integral aspect of *Noli's* personality, though perhaps not so important as his literary activity. *Qerim Panariti* reports *Noli* saying that if his name will be remembered in the future, it will be for his literary works ("Albumi" II, 77). The saying is rather puzzling, considering that *Noli's* literary work consists overwhelmingly of translations accompanied by literary essays plus some poems. Translations by themselves are not a sufficient title for immortality. And we have already discussed *Noli's* production as a literary critic. His poems, seventeen in all, were collected in one volume in 1948. The modest title, "Albumi" (Album) is pertinent. They are occasional pieces written on the spur of the moment, mostly during his exile period. They are all political. Some of them allegorize autobiographical aspects with biblical images ("Moses on the Mountain", "St. Peter Before the Brazier," "The Christ and His Whip") and some eulogize Albanian patriots murdered by their (and *Noli's*) enemies (*Bajram Curri*, *Luigj Gurakuqi*), or friends of Albania, such as Colonel *Thomson*, killed by fanatic rebels. One of the poems, perhaps the best, the "Hymn of the Flag", has become very popular.

Political poetry is certainly possible, though extremely difficult. Few have succeeded in it, and they are among the greatest: *Dante*, *Goethe*, *Heine*, *Rimbaud*, *Brecht*. None of these poets limited himself to only political themes. Poets usually write on nature, love, the human condition and destiny, the mystery of being. No such themes are found in *Noli's* verse. Nor is there found in them a concern for formal perfection, which informs, on the other hand, his rendering of the "Rubaiyaat." *Noli's* writing of poems comes to an end with the end of his exile, the last being "Beside the Rivers," written in Hamburg in May 1930. After his return to the United States, *Noli* wrote music, not poetry. I would describe his poems as effervescences of his political passion which fall short of becoming lyrical efflorescences.

This is not to say that *Noli's* interest in poetry and literature was not genuine. This is to say that it was overwhelmed by politics. And it so happened that he approached literature by way of the theatre, a mixed genre combining writing and acting. We can say he had love affairs with litera-

ture. He must have realized at some time that literature was not his *forte*, resolving to devote the rest of his life to scholarship.

Before we tackle this other capital aspect of his personality, we must pause to consider the political situation in which he found himself after his homecoming.

There was little he could do in politics at the time. *Vatra* was dominated by *Konitza*, who had long eclipsed *Noli* as leader of the Albanians in the United States and Canada. *Noli's* diatribes against the American system had made him suspect to the authorities as well as controversial to most of the Albanians, then become US citizens. The old days when *Noli* could enflame their spirits with Albanian patriotism were over. The depression of the thirties exercised a dampening effect on their enthusiasm for the old country, faced as they were with economic survival. *Noli* himself had to care for the survival of his own church, which could be done only by fostering cohesion, not by fomenting discord. He had to choke back his political convictions and engulf himself in his spiritual duties. Officiating at church and writing liturgical books at home served all members of his community, irrespective of their being *Nolists* or *Zogists*, pro or contra the American system.

There is evidence that *Noli* compromised with King *Zog*. He seriously considered returning to Albania to live there for the rest of his life. And he accepted money from the Albanian treasury to help defray hospitalization expenses incurred during his illness in 1933. The occupation of Albania by *Mussolini's* troops in April 1939 found him unprepared for political action. His chances were minimal. The ousted King *Zog*, mainly because ousted, continued to enjoy national support.

In 1941, *Constantine Chekrezi* arrived in Boston. A former editor of *Diel-li* and *The Adriatic Review* as well as his own journal *Illyria* (1916), *Chekrezi* was also author of historical and didactic books in English and in Albanian. He continued his journalistic career in the mother country. He was member of the High Council (*Këshilli i Naltë*) when he organized an unsuccessful revolution against King *Zog* in 1935. *Chekrezi* was respected by the Albanian-Americans. He was also acceptable to the State Department. In a short time he was able to set up an organization, The Free Albania Organization, and began publishing a paper, *Shqipëria e lirë* (Free Albania), still published today.

This happened in November 1941. On December 7, 1941, the United States entered the war. *Noli* saw a chance and came to the fore. He proposed the creation of a united front, *Bashkimi i Shenjtë* (Sacred Union), consisting of a triumvirate: *Noli*, *Konitza*, *Chekrezi*. He was able to persuade *Konitza*, but not *Chekrezi*. The Sacred Union did not materialize.

Noli had to wait for the end of the war to make another move. A government of National Liberation dominated by the Communist Party had come to power in Albania. Its program looked similar to the one *Noli* had been

fighting for during his Albanian premiership and his exile. He welcomed the Albanian government. The US government opposed it. On July 26, 1946, the Senate approved the *Pepper* resolution favoring the cession of Southern Albania ("Northern Epirus") to Greece. Alarmed by this event, *Noli* visited Washington, trying to influence authorities. From Washington, he went to New York where he had talks with members of the Security Council (Albumi II, 86). On November 6, 1946, the US government recalled its military mission from Tirana. Soon after, it broke off diplomatic relations with Albania. Once more *Noli's* attempt to resume his political career miscarried.

The Albanian government ignored his actions on its behalf. He was unacceptable to the Party even as an author, on a par with *Konitza*, *Fishta*, *Koliqi*. One can imagine his disappointment. Slighted by the Albanian government and unappreciated by his fellow Albanians in America, he withdrew into his shell, disgusted with everything Albanian. Of the seven liturgical books he published from 1949 to 1957, six are in English and only one is in parallel Albanian and English. And his last publication, "The New Testament" (1962), bears on Greek scholarship. *Qerim Panariti*, then editor of *Dielli* and one of the rare few befriended by *Noli*, describes him as diffident and "secretive" (Albumi II, 89). I had the same impression when I visited him in 1960. He was distant and inaccessible, his face a mask of stone. To *Panariti* who once asked him how could he bear with Albanians his whole life, he answered: "I caught Albanian fever" ("*Më ka zënë shqipja*") (ibid.).

Scholarship provided an antidote. *Noli* took a B.A. from Harvard in his youth. His Bachelor of Music degree (1938) was preceded by his "Hymnal" (1936); he studied music because he loved it. During World War I, he did graduate work in the field of East European and Russian History. His PhD is of 1945 with a thesis, "George Castrioti Scanderbeg", published in 1947. In the same year appeared his monograph, "Beethoven and the French Revolution."

Noli's scholarship concerns in the first place historiography. His interest in history begins with his translation of *Sami Frashëri's* treatise, "Albania: Past, Present and Future" (1906). In the list of his publications, this work is described as "historical", along with six other works: "Kalendari i Vatrës" (Vatra Calendar, 1918), "Historia e Skënderbeut" (History of Scanderbeg, 1921), "George Castrioti Scanderbeg" (1947), "Beethoven and the French Revolution" (1947), "Historia e Skënderbeut" (1950), an abbreviated Albanian version of the 1947 treatise, and "Fiftieth Anniversary of the Albanian Orthodox Church in America: 1908—1958" (1960). We shall review them in this chronological order.

Sami Frashëri's treatise is called "historical". Can a work dealing with the past, present and future of Albania be called historical? History is of the past, not of the present, and not at all of the future. Something happens

in Albania, say a change in leadership. I write about it. Am I writing history? That is journalism, not history. It is journals that keep us abreast with day-to-day events. And if I write about the consequences of that event, all I am doing is giving my wishful thoughts a literary expression. I may try hard to fit them into a logical structure so as to make them appear more convincing. They remain, nonetheless, hypotheses which may or may not come true, depending on circumstances I have no control over and some of which are totally beyond my visual reach. *Sami Frashëri's* treatise is a programme of action for the making of Albania, contingent on the situation existing at the time, and preceded by an introductory historical survey.

The "Vatra Calendar" is a chronological account of the Federation *Vatra*, based on minutes of meetings and other pertinent documents, covering the period February 31, 1912 to May 25, 1917, and ending with two poems, one by *Ramis Harxhi* and the other by *Noli* ("Jepni për Nënë," "Give to the Mother"), written for the moneyraising campaign for the cause of Albania. Two chronological articles, "Memorable Dates in the History of Albania: 1404—1917" and "Chronicle of the European War: 1914—1917," precede the transcription of the documents. The second half of the volume consists of illustrations.

In 1921, the Korçë society *Arësimi* (Education) published *Noli's* "Historia e Skënderbeut." Except for a versified narrative, "Istori e Skënderbeut" (1898) by *Naim Frashëri*, no work existed on the life and deeds of the national hero. *Noli* set out to produce one. His main source is *Barletius*. In the story of this Albanian humanist, *Scanderbeg* fights and wins his battles with his sword as well as his tongue. The hero's elaborate speeches to his soldiers must have particularly appealed to a churchman about to become a diplomat. The story was meant to instill pride in the hearts of the Albanians; it had a political, not scientific, aim. It reads well. It consecrated *Noli* as an Albanian writer.

Noli describes this work as "a popular version of the story of the national hero" (FA, 132). Having embarked on a program leading to a doctor's degree in history, he decided to write a scientific work on the same subject. The treatise has 240 pages, of which only one-third is occupied by the narrative text, the rest consisting of two chapters on sources, an appendix, bibliography, notes and an index. The critical apparatus is impressive, indicative of painstaking research. The finished product is puzzling. The chapters are short, an average of fewer than ten pages. Chapter 3 is somewhat longer (14 pages) due to the insertion of *Longfellow's* poem on *Scanderbeg*. A poem in a historical work? "Very probably *Barletius* and *Franco* embroidered their Wild West Story out of Albanian folk songs. It is bad history but it makes good poetry. *Longfellow* set to verse its climactic end and gave it a place in his 'Tales of a Wayside Inn'" (23).

Beginning a historical work on the Albanian national hero with a versified tale is rather debunking. And the ratio between the critical ap-

paratus and the historical text brings to mind an Albanian saying about birds with a rich plumage but with little meat. The first chapter, "Background", begins as follows:

"The plebeian Cato thought that wars are fought by peoples and not by commanders. Accordingly, he wrote a history of Rome in which no commander was named, and the only name occurring in his history was that of an elephant" (7).

Debunking are some of the very titles of the chapters: "Scanderbeg and Alphonse V against Mehmed II"; "Scanderbeg and Venice against Mehmed II." One reads in those chapters: *Scanderbeg* was able "to unify the country under the protection of Alphonse of Naples" (52) — the word "suzerainty" occurs elsewhere. Then: "On October 17, 1463, Gabriele Trevisano was sent to Albania with a Venetian contingent of 1,300 cavalrymen and infantrymen, 2,000 ducats ... and all of Scanderbeg's pension arrears ... The Venetian wanted to restore the League of Alessio" (67). "The Venetians offered 3,000 ducats and as many soldiers as would be necessary to Scanderbeg to capture the fortress of Elbasan ... Consequently, a convention of the League was called at Alessio to provide ways and means to that end. In the meantime Scanderbeg fell sick and died of fever on January 17, 1468. On his deathbed he won his last victory *in absentia*" (69).

The excerpts give an idea of the style. Let us approach the work on its scientific grounds. Once *Barletius* has been dismissed as an authority, what is *Noli's* main source? It is *Antivarino*, the name *Giammaria Biemmi*, author of a historical work on *Scanderbeg* (1742), gave to the anonymous writer of a book in Latin on *Scanderbeg*, published in Venice in 1480 with the type of *Radolt of Augsburg*. A specialist on incunabula could not find evidence that such a book was ever printed. And *Franz Babinger* concluded that *Antivarino* is a fiction¹⁴). But *Noli* thinks that *Babinger* is wrong because *Luccari*, the Ragusan annalist, knew of a "History of Scanderbeg" by the Archbishop of Durrës who was from Antivari and whose brother had served in *Scanderbeg's* army. *Luccari* used that work in his "Annali di Ragusa". Yet *Noli* has not seen this work by *Luccari*, he relies on testimonies by *Johann Ph. Fallmerayer* and *Karl Hopf* who had seen it. In reading *Biemmi*, *Noli* was struck by the originality of some of his data which, *Noli* assumes, cannot derive but from *Antivarino*. "Antivarino can be reconstructed from Biemmi's frequent quotations and can stand on its own feet as an independent source of information, very frequently confirmed by other sources" (91). "It is rather hard to believe that Biemmi could commit a forgery" (78). *Noli's* historical work rests on that belief to a great extent.

¹⁴) Preface to Georges T Petrovich, *Scanderbeg. Essai de bibliographie raisonnée*. Paris 1881. Reprt. Munich: Rudolf Trofenik 1967, p. XIX.

And what is his picture of the national hero? *Scanderbeg* was “a peasant leader” (36). He could contain for some time the Turkish invasion, with the help of the “entire Catholic world whose cause he championed in the Balkans” (2), because he “adopted the traditional weapon of his peasant class, guerrilla warfare” (73). He belonged to the “petty or rather patriarchal aristocrat which is nearer to the peasants than to any other class. The characteristic of the petty aristocrats is that they have no economic basis and therefore do not form a class by themselves ... He identified with the Albanian free peasant class and became the greatest and most typical natural leader” (72). “It was his unassuming dignity that made him popular not only among his own people, but also among the peasants of Serbia and Greece; they considered him the common leader of their class against exploiters” (73), “the Turkish feudal lords of the East and the Venetian merchant princes of the West” (72).

The demystification attempt is remarkable. But does it hold up?

Noli tells us that there were three social classes in *Scanderbeg's* Albania. Besides the free highlanders, and besides the “petty aristocrats or rather patriarchal chieftains” (8), there were also “the merchants of the flourishing towns on the seacoast” (ibid.). This other class was also “solidly and bitterly opposed to Turkish domination. They wanted to remain free” (ibid.). Some of the petty aristocrats defected to the enemy, but “most of them made common cause with the two other classes” (ibid.). From such premises it would follow, one thinks, that *Scanderbeg's* war was a national rather than a class war. A little further, *Noli* concedes that “an Albanian cannot be a slave” (*Makushev*) and that the Albanians are “fanatically freedom-loving” (*Fallmerayer*). In these two sentences, the passion for freedom is predicated to all the Albanians, regardless of class belongings. It follows that class consciousness is not a valid criterion in the case in question.

Speaking about the *Balshas* who were able to create a first Albanian state “twice as large as modern Albania” [!], *Noli* explains their success “primarily by the fact that they broke away from the Greek Orthodox Church and joined the Roman Catholic Church in 1368” (9). The *Balshas* succeeded because they “identified” with Roman Catholicism. Less than a century later, *Scanderbeg* succeeded because he too identified with Roman Catholicism: his war was “a crusade against the Turks” in one of its aspects (4). A crusader is a Roman Catholic — where are the proofs that *Scanderbeg* was such a one? Because he accepted money from the Popes? Speaking of *Scanderbeg's* father, *Noli* writes that he, as a “typically Albanian” man, “changed it [religion] according to his shifting political orientations,” now a Roman Catholic, then a Byzantine Orthodox, and even a Moslem (21). Making *Scanderbeg* a crusader is denying him his being “typically Albanian”.

Discrepancies such as these occur because *Noli* is inconsistent in applying his ideological grid. He just cannot get over his nationalism, which in-

terferes continually with his class criterion, causing disparate concepts to be strange bedfellows. A crusader was a feudal lord or a “merchant prince” (in the Fourth Crusade), whereas *Scanderbeg*, we are told, was little more than a patriarchal chieftain. Because he was “unassuming” and fraternized with his soldiers? *Napoleon* did the same. But that did not prevent *Napoleon* from becoming Emperor of France and the ruler of Europe.

“Beethoven and the French Revolution” reads better because *in absentia* here is nationalism itself. We have finally reached the grounds of true internationalism, with *Beethoven* as *Noli*’s most representative hero, the incarnation of both the spirit of music and the ideals of the Jacobin revolution. The slender volume (125 pages) opens with an introduction that states the question and explains the method of investigation. It then considers *Beethoven* first as a person and secondly as a “rebel.” The work has a section on sources, a bibliography chapter and an index.

In the “Banquet”, *Plato* has *Alcibiades* like *Socrates* first to shrines featuring a drunken *Silenus* but enclosing statuettes of gods and then to the satyr *Marsyas*, the flutist, for the charm of the philosopher’s speech. *Noli*’s portrait of *Beethoven* follows that pattern to a great extent. “Beethoven the man” reveals his *Silenus* side: his ugliness and sickliness (he was probably affected by syphilis), his vulgar way of eating and drinking (he was a hopeless drunkard). The love of his life was his nephew, whom he stole from the mother, insensitive to her protests. The court decided in his favor. *Beethoven* spent the rest of his life in bringing up the angelic boy according to his pedagogical principles — “he was familiar with” *Rousseau* and *Kant*, *Plato* and *Aristoteles*, *Homer* and *Tacitus*, *Shakespeare* and *Goethe*, we are told (58).

“Beethoven the rebel” makes more than good for his human faults. He abhorred religion: “I have often cursed the Creator and my existence”¹⁵. He was an atheist, like *Khayyam*; Christ to him was “only a crucified Jew” (75). He hated priests whom he never called *Priester*, but *Pfaffen*. On his deathbed, he took the sacraments. The clergyman gone, he said to his friends: “*Plaudite amici, comedia finita est*” (77).

Beethoven despised kings and lords no less than Popes and priests. “All the slogans of the French Revolution can be found in Beethoven’s writings” (78). “Fidelio” is “primarily a hymn to liberty” (80). In his Ninth Symphony, a hymn to universal brotherhood, *Beethoven* had *Schiller*’s lines sung by the chorus: “he wanted to reach the masses and proclaim to them the new message of the French Revolution in a language they understood” (81). He made “the sopranos holler and yell and shriek triumphantly at the top of their voice like the market strumpets of Paris when they saw the guillotine chop off the head of Marie Antoinette and Louis XVI” (83). The sopranos complained; “they said it would sound fierce. That was exactly

¹⁵) Letter to *Amenda*, June 1, 1801.

what he wanted, for then the masses would understand his message" (ibid.). How else could he "rouse those apathetic, sleepy, lethargic Vienna masses?" (82). For "so long as the Austrian has brown beer and sausages, he will not start a revolution" (ibid.).

Beethoven dedicated his *Eroica* to *Napoleon*, whom he saw as the genius of the Revolution. When they told him that his hero had proclaimed himself Emperor of France, he tore off the title page with the name *Bonaparte* on it and threw it on the floor. And yet *Beethoven* was a ruthless egoist just like *Napoleon*. He was "a precursor of Nietzsche" (94). He wrote to a friend: "Power is the ethical system of men who stand out of the rest, and it is also mine" (ibid.). *Noli* disagrees: "No society can ever recognize or tolerate such an individual privilege for any of its members" (94). He specifies that *Beethoven* at times wrote "reactionary music" (108). And he wrote the "Missa Solemnis" for money. "How is it possible for an irreligious Jacobin to write a *missa*", *Noli* asks. "He can do it if he knows the technical side of the job; but it would not be a *missa*, it can only be a *messe noire*; and the *Missa Solemnis* is just that" (108).

"The ideology of a person can be easily determined by his favorite books", *Noli* writes (84). Which are his own favorite books? "An Enemy of the People," which he translated twice? The *Rubaiyat*", which he edited twice? Or his last historical work, where the composer speaks vicariously for him? He wrote that work when Albania was emerging from a period of foreign occupation, led by a young Communist Party with methods comparable to those of the Jacobins. If *Noli's* treatise on *Scanderbeg* as a "peasant leader" conveyed a desire for a presidential office, his contemporaneous revolutionary manifesto exalting *Beethoven* the "Jacobin" reinforces that hypothesis. Had he not sown the seed of what was then being reaped? Alas! In those days the concept of revolution was closer to the revolution of *Hadji Qamil*¹⁶) than to his 'democratic-bourgeois revolution', as the latter was contemptuously and yet not impertinently referred to by those in power.

V. Noli's Testament and his "New Testament"

1958 marked the fiftieth anniversary of the foundation of *Noli's* church. On that occasion he wrote a commemorative work, "Fiftieth Anniversary", in which the history of the Church and his autobiographical story are the two sides of the same coin.

The volume opens with a "Historical review of the Albanian Orthodox Church from St. Paul to Scanderbeg," where the national hero appears as a

¹⁶) *Hadji Qamili* was the leader of a pro-Turkish proletarian peasant rebellion in Central Albania during the reign of Prince *Wied*.

Uniat, i.e. a Roman Catholic of the Byzantine rite. Here the westernizing bias — already conspicuous in the treatise on *Scanderbeg* — seconds *Noli's* endeavour to get the Albanian Orthodox Church divorced from the Patriarch of Constantinople. *Noli's* capital role in reaching that objective can be read between the lines. He credits *Vissarion Xhuvani* for it — in the November 10, 1930 issue of *Republika*, the autonomy of the Church is seen as a manoeuvre of King *Zog* (TL, 118). *Noli* had cultivated the idea of autonomy among the Albanian-American clergymen under his jurisdiction. Two of them, Rev. *Vasil Marko* and Rev. *Vangel Chamtsche*, accompanied *Noli* when he went to Albania in 1921. The Congress of Berat (1922) passed the resolution for the autonomy. Rev. *Marko* was sent to Constantinople to notify the Patriarch. The Patriarch delegated an Albanian bishop, *Hieretheos*, to study the question. *Hieretheos* consecrated *Noli* as bishop, who was then appointed Metropolitan of Durrës. After *Noli's* departure from the country, the government tried to fill up his vacancy as well as that of *Hieretheos*. *Vissarion Xhuvani* was finally able to reconstitute the Synod in 1929, one of the new bishops being the former Archimandrite *Vangel Chamtsche* of Jamestown. *Xhuvani* ran the Autocephalous Albanian Orthodox Church until 1936. He then resigned, “living in retirement ... until his death in 1959” (16)¹⁷. *Christopher Kissi* replaced *Xhuvani* in 1936. Negotiations (not mentioned in the text) took place between *Kissi* and *Noli* in view of the latter's return to Albania. “*Kissi* resigned in 1949, probably for reasons of health,” *Noli* writes (18). *Kissi's* resignation entailed a reshuffling of the Synod headed by *Paisi Voditza*¹⁸. The Patriarch of Constantinople claimed that “*Kissi* was deposed uncanonically ... he refused to recognize *Paisi Voditza*” (20). He acted so for “purely political” reasons, the Patriarch being “only an agent of the Greek government” (ibid.), on the pretext that Albania was still at war with Greece (an Albanian fascist government had declared war to Greece in 1941). The Greek government had stated that “Greece would conclude peace with Albania only on one condition, that Southern Albania should be ceded to Greece” (ibid.). The Patriarch's refusal to recognize *Voditza* was “purely Greek politics” (21). *Noli's* account of the history of the Albanian Orthodox Church is unilateral.

The autobiographical narrative tells a story of another kind. In his monograph on *Beethoven*, *Noli* pokes fun at the composer's “claim to be a nobleman while he was only a petty bourgeois” (106), adding: “Nietzsche and Ibsen, though of pure and authentic petty bourgeois origin, tried pathetically to prove that they were descended from Counts and Princes” (107).

¹⁷) *Xhuvani*, who was arrested after the Communist take-over, was still alive in the prison of Burrel in 1956, when I was released from it.

¹⁸) His son was Vice-Attorney General at the time, if I remember correctly.

Noli's autobiography begins with an account of his birthplace, Ibrik-Tepe, which "according to tradition ... was a military colony established by Byzantine emperors" (35). The author does not say that his family could trace its pedigree that far. He notes, however, that "the Turks inherited that military colony from the Byzantines," and that the Albanians, Moslem or Christians, fought for the Sultan just as they had fought for the Byzantine Emperor. "An Albanian leader was entrusted with the task of recruiting young men as volunteers whenever they were needed in the almost continuous Turkish campaigns in Asia or Europe. He enjoyed the courtesy title of captain. Fan Noli's grandfather was one of these Captains ... Captain George Noli lost his life in one of those campaigns. He left a huge fortune consisting mostly of choice farmlands near the village" (36). *Noli's* portrait of his grandfather comes close to the portrait of *Scanderbeg* in his scholarly work.

The portrait of his father is even more hyperbolic. "Stylian Noli had three passions: hero worship, leadership and church music ... He had a beautiful tenor voice ... he knew Byzantine music thoroughly ... All the congregation admired him" (46). He taught music to his son *Theophan*; "he spent hours every day in teaching him Byzantine notation and chanting ... These first music lessons from his father were extremely important in Fan Noli's later career" (47). "Besides music Stylian Noli wanted to teach his sons hero worship. His hero was Napoleon." *Theophan* was "as receptive to hero worship as he was to music" (ibid.). The last two sentences vary on the title of "Beethoven and the French Revolution."

Noli was fortunate to have a mother who could also claim some distinction. *Noli's* maternal uncle (the importance of the *avunculus* in the Albanian family is well-known) was a man with a passion for reading. He was a cripple; "he concentrated on books" (54). "He had the largest library in the village ... He used to lend books to the boy ... One of them was the Albanian translation of the New Testament by Konstantine Kristoforidi. The other was an illustrated edition of the 'Story of Scanderbeg' in Greek. The boy took the books home and read them with avidity from beginning to end" (ibid.). It was Uncle *Tassi* who advised his nephew to follow the examples of *Scanderbeg* and *Jesus* rather than that of *Napoleon*. The story of Uncle *Tassi* summarizes *Noli's* activity as a writer of historical and liturgical books.

The narrative pattern is one of recapitulation. The autobiography is romanticized history. It practically ends with the account of *Noli's* ordination, the rest being fill-in. One reads in the preface: "It [the autobiography] is rather sketchy after 1908. Very probably this gap will be filled in the future. On the other hand a complete list of *Fan Noli's* books is given here for the first time." Chances are that *Noli* did not want to fill in the gaps, the list of publications standing for them. He had lost interest in his nationalistic past. The list of publications is followed by comments of

others on his works. Comments on the *Beethoven* monograph occupy seven pages; the “miscellaneous comments” on all his other books only two. He writes extensively about his infancy and youth, and dwells at some length on his Greek and Egyptian periods. The narrative after his ordination is „sketchy” as well as fragmentary. His Albanian premiership is an important page in Albanian history. How does he account for it? Of the nine pages devoted to that event, only two bear on the subject matter and the tone is jocose. “Asked by his friends to join the rebels,” he consulted *Napoleon*, *Scanderbeg* and *Jesus*. The answer was yes, so he “joined the rebels and led them to victory” (FA, 126). Follows the list of his cabinet members, then a short paragraph on his programme of reforms, and then another on the blunders of his adversary. The rest (“Daniel in the Lion’s Den”) is devoted to the assassination attempt against *Ahmed Zogu* made by *Bekir Walteri* — a family vendetta. *Noli* was sitting next to *Akif Pasha* of Elbasan when *Walteri* fired his shots in the corridor of the Parliament. *Zogu*, lightly wounded, rushed into the hall. “Some of the deputies took cover under their desks and others were screaming hysterically” (120). The old Pasha “held an old-fashioned revolver in his trembling hand. He took aim at his old enemy, Shefket Verlaci, who was surrounded by his bodyguards. One of them was unusually sinister-looking. His upper lip was slashed and twisted out of shape so that the upper lip could not touch the lower. With his protruding gold teeth, he looked like a hideous, snarling bulldog” (ibid.). The whole thing is to *Noli* a spectacle, which he watches, amused, focusing on a picturesque detail. The protagonists of the scene are ignored. The would-be tragedy is then given a comical twist. *Walteri* had sought refuge in a restroom, where he kept shooting and “singing patriotic songs” (122). In the nearby restroom, a deputy of the Conservative Party “was screaming that he had nothing to do with the assassination attempt.” Finally the deputy got out “half dead from fright” (125), after the would-be assassin surrendered.

The blanks in the church history sector and the gaps in the autobiographical sketch are continued by omissions in the chapter of comments on his works. *Noli* had sent complimentary copies of his *Beethoven* monograph to professors and scholars. The replies are likewise complimentary for the most part:

George Bernard Shaw: “It is the work of a first rate critic and biographer. I read it through from end to end with the utmost satisfaction.” (Omitted is *Shaw*’s criticism that *Beethoven* is non-sectarian rather than irreligious.)

Thomas Mann: “I have read your book with interest and fascination. It is a real contribution to the Beethoven literature.” (*Mann* also wrote that the influence of the French Revolution on *Beethoven* is exaggerated.)

Included are excerpts from reviews of the monograph in six newspapers and magazines. The review in the *Sunday Times* of London (March 26, 1950) sounds ironical: "The cross-fertilization of two ancient cultures, the Albanian and the American, has produced gratifying results, especially in the matter of English style." But the reviewer in the *Harper's Magazine* issue of March 1948 is serious when he writes: "Fan Noli has done meritorious work in discarding the conventional generalities." And *Musical America* (December 1, 1949) comments: "The whole monograph is a priceless piece of debunking ... Everything is documented to the hilt."

Judgments such as these must have comforted the heart of the aging scholar. The recognition had finally arrived in the form of written statements by foreign scholars, writers and musicians. Written from an Olympic-like distance, as it befits an Epicurean politician turned philosopher in his old age, *Noli's* last original work could be considered as his testament, containing the essentials of what he thought would secure him a lasting place in Albanian literature and honorable mention in the Republic of Letters. That his mind was set at the time more on the latter than on the former is proven by the monumental work concluding his literary activity.

"The New Testament" (1961) is an English translation from the approved Greek text and, as such, the first of its kind. A two-page appendix at the end of the volume gives five passages from the King James Version facing *Noli's* translations of them. The comparison shows that the King James Version is inaccurate as to the meaning of some words. *Noli* translates *oikumene* with "Roman empire" (King James has "world" instead) and *astheneia* (referring to *Jesus*) with "suffering" (the correspondent word in King James is "weak"), in line with his conception of *Jesus* as a "jewish patriot" (Albumi II, 94). The translation is meant to be a scholarly achievement in the field of Greek philology. The rendering of the text into "modern English" is no small deed either. And the work is destined for a worldwide audience, the English-speaking or English-using members of the Orthodox Church all over the planet. The work presents its author, an Albanian Primate, as a Greek scholar as well as an English writer.

I am not a Greek scholar to evaluate *Noli's* interpretation of The New Testament, nor should I pass judgment on the language. My comment will be limited to him as a Primate.

Noli's last publication (the man would not die before giving the reader the shock of his life) has on its red cover "The Poet of Nazareth" as a title, with a big golden Greek cross underneath. The reader has to go to the front page to ascertain that the Poet of Nazareth is indeed Christ himself. There one reads that the booklet is "a revised version of the Gospel of St. Matthew, with a rhythmical translation of the sayings and parables of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ." The back page is no less bewildering. It contains at the top the usual copyright indication: "Copyright, 1962, Metropolitan Fan S. Noli." The middle of the page is occupied by the text of

the canonical "License": "*The Poet of Nazareth* is hereby approved for the use of the Churches and the Sunday Schools under the jurisdiction of the Albanian Orthodox Archdiocese in America. (Signed) Metropolitan Fan S. Noli." An advertisement follows: "Copies of this book, \$2.50 each, can be obtained from Metropolitan Fan S. Noli, 816 North West 3 Avenue, Fort Lauderdale, Florida." A second advertisement is found at the bottom of the page: "Another book by the same author: "Beethoven and the French Revolution, \$2.50."

The *Beethoven* book and "The Poet of Nazareth" have the same price. One wonders what *Beethoven* has to do with *Jesus* whom he called "a crucified Jew." Is it because poetry and music are both arts? Or perhaps because *Jesus* was as revolutionary as *Beethoven*? And why does *Noli* make use of a sacred text containing the sayings of *Jesus* to advertise his own text on *Beethoven*, chosen from among all his other books? The text of "The Poet of Nazareth" is a versified rendition of the Gospel of *St. Matthew* in *Noli's* own translation of The New Testament. It would have been more appropriate, one thinks, to advertise in the booklet The New Testament itself.

Noli explains in the preface that *Jesus* was not only a great teacher, but also a great poet, "like all the great rabbis of Israel." He spoke in verse so that his disciples could memorize his sayings. They did in fact memorize them, and it is in this way that they survived, until they were translated into Greek prose from the original rhythmical Aramaic oral text (the reader may remember that *Barletius'* "History of Scanderbeg" was thought to be in great part a compilation of Albanian oral verse). The prose is faithful as to meaning. The poetic flavor has necessarily been lost, as it always is when verse is translated into prose. *Noli's* rhythmical translation purports to recapture that flavor. He has chosen to translate *Matthew* because this gospel contains the most complete collection of *Jesus'* sayings — besides being the most poetic among the synoptic gospels, according to general opinion. The translator explains that his rhythmical translation covers about three-fourths of the gospel, adding that his rhythmical translation "happens to be the first of its kind ever published in English." One more absolute record.

Of course there is nothing wrong with translating the gospels into verse. It has been done in the past. *Dante* rendered in *terza rima* the "Pater Noster" in his "Comedy." True, he only paraphrased the prayer. Had he translated it, he would have made himself liable to charges of heresy. For a sacred text cannot be changed even by one iota without the authorization of the church, its guardian and owner. And the slightest departure from the customary approach to a sacred text as established by tradition and sanctioned by the supreme ecclesiastical authority constitutes sacrilege. Now *Matthew* has been translated by *Noli* from "the approved Greek text of the Church of Constantinople and the Church of Greece." Was his translation

approved by the supreme authorities of these two churches? Of course it was not, *Noli's* church having split away from the two churches. *Noli* himself approved his translation, he being the head of his own church. Subsequently, from his translation of *Matthew* he made a selection of the poetic sayings of *Jesus*, according to his criteria of poetic appreciation, and proceeded to retranslate them rhythmically. Was his retranslation approved? It was approved by himself. Authorship and censorship and ownership exercised on a sacred text of the Christian religion, all these rights concentrated in the hands of one person. An exercise of power more unique than rare, comparable to the authority of the Vicar of Christ.

"The Poet of Nazareth" epitomizes *Noli's curriculum vitae* ever since he left Europe on board a ship with a *Nietzsche* book in his hands. His admiration for *Napoleon* (he came back to him in his old age by translating *Heine's* "The Grenadiers" and *Hugo's* poem on the Waterloo battle) was sublimated into his exaltation of *Beethoven*, whose "ethical system resembles very much that of *Nietzsche's* Superman and Will to Power," he writes in his *Beethoven* monograph (112).

Noli was (who would question it?) the founder and organizer of the Albanian Orthodox Church in America, its living spirit as well as its embodiment. And he must also be credited with the paternity of the idea for the autonomy of the Albanian Orthodox Church. His leadership of *Vatra* and his editorship of *Dielli* are first rate but not unique; he shares the merit with *Konitza* as well as others (*Dako, Chekrezi*). *Noli's* services to Albania as a diplomat are likewise paramount, comparable to those by the founders of the Albanian nation. The 1924 revolution is "his" in part, his election to premiership meritorious¹⁹). His statesmanship was a delusion. Harvard democracy suited the Albanian situation as a "golden packsaddle" (to use his expression) suits a horse's flayed back. Making a revolution and governing a state require different talents. — *Noli* was sufficiently qualified for the former, but not also for the latter. As an Albanian writer, his great merit is to have translated masterpieces of world literature in a popular, colorful and at times original Albanian. And he is perhaps the most prolific Albanian writer: more than 5,000 published pages, without counting his articles in journals and his speeches. Of that amount, no fewer than 3,000 pages are liturgical books. With more than 6,000 pages of sacred and liturgical books in Albanian and English, *Noli's* title as a champion of Byzantine Orthodoxy is as solid as a mountain rock. His scholarly work on two European figures, *Scanderbeg* and *Beethoven*, adds another international dimension to his more than national stature. His scholarship was of the non-academic type, ideology often substituting for scientific rigor. His ideology was essentially that of the diaspora radical of

¹⁹) According to Teki Selenica, *Shqipëria e ilustruar*. Tirana 1928, p. 114, lots were drawn.

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peasant background turned into a missionary militant for the sake of his dispersed nation. "The Poet of Nazareth" brings his subversive non-conformism to the point of explosion. A more rebellious act in the field of literature can hardly be conceived.

I do not know what *Jesus* would say to it, were he to rise again. *Mohammed*, when called a poet by his adversaries, had a sura come down from heaven to refute the charge.