

# Reception of *Don Quixote* (1605) in Albania through Fan Noli, the Translator and the First Critic of the Novel

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## Abstract

This article aims to make an apologia for Noli as the first translator of *Don Quixote* by Cervantes and also highlight his contribution as the first critic of this work. To achieve this, our study adopts a reception aesthetics approach and a historical perspective, analysing both the horizon of expectation for *Don Quixote* in Albania, as well as Noli's translation in the light of various translation theories and schools. This article examines a great literary work written about four centuries ago, which represents a complexity resulting from the temporal distance of reception, not only in terms of publication but also in translation, within entirely different cultural, social, and ideological contexts. Noli has been able to guide Albanian readers towards the reading of a masterpiece, with the hope that this novel highly valued would become popular among Albanians and influence Albanian aesthetic and political thought.

**Keywords:** Socio-Cultural Context; Translation; Criticism; Reception; Ideology; Press; Cervantes; Noli; *Don Quixote*; Albania.

**Título:** La recepción de *Don Quijote* (1605) por Fan Noli, el traductor y el primer crítico literario de la novela

## Resumen

Este artículo pretende ensalzar a Noli como primer traductor de *Don Quijote* de Cervantes y destacar su aportación como primer crítico de esta novela. Por esta razón, nuestro estu-

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dio se enfoca en la estética de la recepción y en la perspectiva histórica, analizando tanto el horizonte de la expectativa del *Quijote* en Albania, como la traducción de Noli a la luz de diversas teorías y escuelas de traducción. Este artículo examina una importante novela escrita hace unos cuatro siglos, representando la complejidad resultante de la distancia temporal en recepción, publicación y traducción, en contextos culturales, sociales e ideológicos completamente diferentes. Noli guio al lector albanés hacia la lectura de una obra maestra con la esperanza de que esta novela altamente valorada se hiciera popular entre los albaneses e influyera en el pensamiento estético y político albanés.

**Palabras clave:** contexto sociocultural; traducción; crítica literaria; recepción; ideología; prensa; Cervantes; Noli; *Don Quijote*; Albania.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Literary works in general, and the novel genre in particular, have a special character, a polysemic character, which turns them into 'opened works'. Literary works do not exist in themselves and do not always appear the same to the reader in all times and contexts. However, as it moves from a specific historical and social context to another, it conveys certain values to the reader, constructs a relationship between the past and the present.

Considering the polysemic character of literary messages, the task of the translator seems difficult, especially when it comes to literary translation. The translator is conditioned by many external and internal factors, linguistic and non-linguistic. He aspires to bring a final translation, but it is known that he cannot achieve it. The reader expects him to be a transparent intermediary, faithful to the original text, as well as the literary critics (Meregalli 1985, 277-278).

In general, there are two categories of readers when it comes to literary works: those who read but do not communicate the impressions they have gained from their reading, and those who communicate their feelings and considerations to others. According to Merregalli (1985, 276), the latter group includes intermediaries between the literary text they have read and those to whom they communicate it: translators, literary critics, and free interpreters. "Literary reception, on his part, is a literary creation that constantly enriches the meanings of the text to which it refers" (Meregalli 1985, 282). The literary receiver is not passive but is open to being influenced. To read a work

according to the theory of reception means to accept the possibility of a “multiplicity of readings and a multiplicity of interpretations” (Dado 2009, 294) that the reader brings in time and space.

The main theorist of reception, Hans Robert Jauss (2001, 73-76), wrote the main principles of reception in 1967, where he proposes the idea that reception is related to the reader’s experience, based on the historical, political, and cultural aspects in which the work develops. Hence, it is important to understand the meaning of the text and its form throughout the historical development of the concept. Understanding the relationships established during the reading process between the author, the text, and the reader is of particular importance.

Translation has great importance during the reception process. The role of the translator consists of transferring a spiritual object from one cultural sphere to another; he operates between two worlds that do not communicate with each other. The reception of translated texts carries with it the problem that the text in front of us is a variant of the original due to different interpretive variations, and because the translator in the act of translating includes diversity of values from his own culture. The Spanish academic Francisco Ayala values the translation of a literary work as “a denaturalization that alienates the meaning of the text, regardless of how delicate and accurate the hand that risks to achieve it is” (Ayala 1965, 15).

Literary criticism is important and fosters discussion. The literary critic engages with a literary text, evaluates, compares, classifies, and studies, and so on. When referring to the critic, an important aspect of their work is the value a literary work had for readers at the time it was written, as well as the experience or reception of the work by future generations in different places.

“Literary criticism has a special role, as it gathers the ‘specialized readings’ of the texts; it gathers the interpretations and evaluations of some privileged readers, the literary critic has a superior role compared to the reader” (Garcia Barrientos 1999, 54).

A book as beloved and widely read in Albania as *Don Quixote* by Cervantes<sup>1</sup> should necessarily be examined in the light of the aesthetics of reception,

1. The presence of Spanish literature translated into Albanian is not a phenomenon that began early, starting with Ibañez, Cervantes, translated by Fan Noli, at the beginning of the twentieth-century. There is little information regarding the end of the nineteenth-century. In the Albanian State Archive (file 10, page 11) there is a religious book translated by Ndre Mjeda, a Catholic Jesuit priest and poet of the Albanian National Renaissance, who was connoisseur of Spanish because he was trained as a priest in Spain at the age of 13, at La Compañía de Jesús, in the Charterhouse Monastery of Porta Coeli, Valencia. The book dedicated to Saint Mary, was published in 1892, in the city of Shkodra by the Printing House Shtypshkronja e Zonjës së Papërljeme, and is titled *T’Përgjemit Zojs Bekume* (The Confession of Blessed Lady). Ndre Mjeda was a friend and ideological follower of Fan Noli in the political movement for the democratization of Albania. He contributed to the consolidation of the Albanian language with the Latin alphabet.

The reason why Spanish literature has no earlier translations is thought to be related to the fact that the Albanian language consolidated its alphabet at the beginning of the twentieth-century, precisely when it was also recognized as a written language.

which is part of the theory of literature and analyzes, among other things, the reaction of the reader and literary criticism to a literary text. The first literary critic of this novel in our country is its translator, Fan Noli, and this is noteworthy. Noli became ‘an intermediary’, as the Spanish scholar Meregalli would consider, between the literary work he translated and the Albanian reader, an ‘institutional intermediary’ (Meregalli 1985, 276), because in the preface to the book and in some articles in newspapers, he elaborated and communicated his philosophical and ideological perspective, regarding the book, characters, and author Cervantes, thus his literary reception. “These are the intermediaries we call institutional, who play an important role in literary life, who are in some way a privileged object of the study of literary reception” (Meregalli 1985, 276).

In the years 1932 and 1933, Fan Noli fully translated the book of Cervantes’ novel *Don Quixote*, titled in Albanian as *Sojliu mendje-mprehtë Don Kishoti i Mançës* (*The Ingenious Gentleman Don Quixote de la Mancha*). He accompanied the translation with his comments in the written press of the time, in the newspaper *Republika*,<sup>2</sup> promising to present the hero of Spanish literature dressed in elements of Albanian culture, and stating that the Albanian language had all the potential to express the wonder of Cervantes. “*Don Quixote of La Mancha*, whom we present to you in a *takie* (old traditional hat for men) and *fustanella* (old traditional quilt for women) [...] read his story in Albanian, in the language that suits him more today than any other anachronism” (Noli 1987, 314).

Noli followed the path of Albanian Renaissance figures<sup>3</sup> who embodied the ideas of Enlightenment and Humanism in their works, except that their (literary) creations had an Oriental character, while Noli’s translations carried a Western spirit. Noli himself declares that he drew inspiration from Albanian Renaissance figures, while the authors he translated were his great teachers. He also demonstrates his critical power of interpreting literature from the outset by confronting his own literary criteria with the translated masterpieces (Hamiti 2000, 33).

Noli translated a literary text that resisted time and still moves the reader even today, after a century. “In Fan Noli’s pen, the Albanian language demonstrated its abilities and richness, aesthetic and semantic values” (Jorgaqi 2005, 66). Noli wrote that he achieved an ‘Albanianization’ of the work, while

The reasons why the Albanian language was delayed in its consolidation are historical, because Albania spent five centuries under the Ottoman Empire (1478-1912), which attempted to assimilate the language and culture of the country.

2. The newspaper *Republika* in Boston was founded by Fan S. Noli after his emigration to the United States. It was a weekly newspaper and operated from 1930 to 1932. The newspaper was written in the Albanian language and was distributed not only to Albanians in America but also to Albanian colonies in Europe, while it was illegally circulated in Albania. The newspaper covered important political, cultural, ideological, and other issues related to Albania.

3. The Albanian National Renaissance was a pan-Albanian movement that resulted from the political, social, and cultural movements for the liberation of Albania from foreign occupation. This movement began in the mid nineteenth-century and continued until 1912 when Albania was declared independent.

organically intertwining elements of Albanian culture and language, anachronisms, and oriental borrowings.

The reading of *Don Quixote* in Albania has changed over the years, depending on the historical context and the maturity of the reader and literary critic. From a humorous novel of the seventeenth-century, today it is read as a philosophical novel. The reader now sees beyond its humor and mockery, Cervantes' existential messages, idealism, sacrifice, and altruism towards the weak. Our study refers to a literary work, *Don Quixote of La Mancha*, written more than four centuries ago, so its reception presents the complexity of the distance between the moment of creation and interpretation, reception, in completely different cultural, social, political, and ideological contexts. Thus:

The modern poetics of opened work is based on the principle that there exists a specific relationship between the work and the reader, to whom the author has given the right to interpret the work in his own way, according to this perspective. This poetics conceptualizes the literary work as a potential structure that is actualized by the reader... and the critic's task is to explain the effects of the text on the reader (Dado 2006, 49-50).

*Don Quixote*, both as a book and a character, does not solely belong to Spain; it has emerged from the confines of national literature and belongs to the realm of universal literature.

Critics often link the names of Cervantes and *Don Quixote* with the birth of the modern novel in Europe and a world where the absolute Divine Truth is fragmented into numerous relative truths. Consequently, Kundera perceives the relinquishment of this certainty, this singular truth, human maturity in the modern era. In his work *The Art of the Novel*, he writes:

To understand the world through Cervantes as ambiguity, one must confront, not a single absolute truth, but rather a gathering of relative truths that contradict each other [...] To embrace, therefore, the uncertainty as the only certainty demands a significant strength (Kundera 1986, 17).

Thus, *Don Quixote*, also known as 'The Book of Books', would make its entrance into the Modern Era giving rise to a multitude of interpretations that have not ceased since the work was first published. The French critic Marthe Robert expresses:

Undoubtedly, *Don Quixote* is the first novel of the 'modern' era, if by modernity we understand that literary movement which, in its continuous self-exploration, questions, doubts, and reflects upon its own doubts and beliefs regarding its own message within the themes of its own narratives (Robert 1972, 167).

Through *Don Quixote*, Cervantes created an incredibly complex character that has often divided critics and inspired numerous interpretations, yet the

quixotic enigma remains unsolved to this day. Two of the primary interpretations are as follows: either Don Quixote stands in complete contrast to Cervantes, and the realism portrayed by the latter is valid, thereby rendering Don Quixote a ridiculous and futile figure; or he fights for a lofty ideal against a mundane and wretched reality, thus ascending to the realm of a sublime saint. We believe that reducing the intricate figure of Don Quixote to these simplistic terms oversimplifies it and dilutes its inherent ambiguity. Noli's controversies with his contemporaries can be partially explained by the fact that they were advocates of one ideology or another. In truth, many critics err by interpreting Cervantes' apparent intent as absolute truth, when it is merely a tool for self-discovery and a literary device intended to challenge the reader's perceptions.

Cervantes' literary masterpiece has exerted a significant influence on global literature, serving as a creative template for numerous writers. In this regard, M. Robert would assert:

The writers of the nineteenth-century were all inspired by *Robinson Crusoe* and found immense pleasure in *Don Quixote*. And even though the direct influence of this youthful reading may not always be immediately apparent, their art invariably carries the subtle imprint of it... (1972, 167).

Critics have pointed out the similarities between Don Quixote and Emma Bovary, in terms of the influence of their readings on a dreamlike literature and an escape from a specific time and reality. Don Quixote ventures into the anachronistic realm of his beloved novels, which nourish his appetite for adventure and his estrangement from the world and the reality that surrounds him. He holds an unwavering faith in his dreams and a self-created reality shaped by his own imagination and the books he reads. Likewise, Emma gets lost in dreams inspired by the novels of a romantic literature of the past, which allow her to exist outside the unsettling reality she faces.

Borges, in his work *Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote*, sought to capture the essence of Cervantes' masterpiece, a work that is written and rewritten throughout different epochs, like a manuscript overlay where the faded yet elusive imprints of the original writer persistently resurface (Borges 1974, 444-450).

Another intriguing case is Unamuno's philosophical essay *Vida de Don Quijote y Sancho*. The author believes that Cervantes possessed a restricted intelligence that failed to comprehend the strength of his own imagination. Unamuno takes this notion to such an extent that he lacks any links between Cervantes and his character Quixote, going as far as to narrate Quixote's life as if the hero had truly existed, completely disregarding any involvement of Cervantes himself (Unamuno 2017).

Perez-Borbujo, in complete opposition to Unamuno's thesis, articulates a perspective that undermines our argument regarding the ambiguity of Don Quixote's character and its profound implications and connection to the protagonist himself: "Vemos un fuerte paralelismo existente entre las peripecias

del Quijote y la vida del propio Cervantes, que ha de tener en cuenta a la hora de evaluar la intencionalidad y el propósito de la obra cervantina” (2010, 31).

*Don Quixote* has influenced Albanian literature ever since its translation, a phenomenon that has touched literature worldwide, as the ‘novel of novels’ stands at the foundation of the works of many writers. Numerous Albanian authors have emulated its humor, satire, iconic character duo, linguistic harmony across three registers, incorporation of real events and figures into literary works, polyphony, structure, and more. Among them, Noli stands out as one who was profoundly influenced by Cervantes’ humor and satire in both his prose and poetry.

The recipient of the 2009 Prince of Asturias Award in Literature, Ismail Kadare, in his first interview with the Korean-Japanese press on the occasion of receiving the Pak Kyongni Literary Award in 2019, expressed, among other things: “Surprisingly, it was Cervantes with *Don Quixote* who truly balanced me. If there is humor in my work, I owe it to *Don Quixote*”.<sup>4</sup> Kadare found external inspiration from Cervantes to explore into the realm of the grotesque. However, Kadare’s humor, unlike Cervantes’, does not aim to make you laugh; avoids burlesque and instead remains rooted in the grotesque. In novels such as: *Gjenerali i ushtrisë së vdekur*, *Pashallëqet e mëdha*, *Nënpunësi i palatit të ëndrrave*, we encounter the traces of a bitter grotesque.

The figure of the grotesque was embraced by numerous Albanian writers during the years of dictatorship as a way to convey their truths without risking censorship. *Don Quixote* spoke through a hidden language, to communicate subtexts and allusion, using humor in his every remark and employing ambiguity to convey deeper meanings. Albanian writers, therefore, grasped this technique well and adopted it as their own model.

The archetype duo of characters has been skillfully emulated in two novels by the esteemed writer Dritëro Agolli: *Shkëlqimi dhe rënia e shokut Zyllo* and *Arka e djallit*. Agolli seamlessly integrates real characters and situations into his works, adorning them with Cervantine humor and encompassing a wide range of linguistic registers for communication, aiming to evoke both parody and practical folk wisdom.

## 2. FAN NOLI THE TRANSLATOR OF *DON QUIXOTE*

It is not at all a coincidence that Noli began the translation of *Don Quixote* in the 1930s. Noli, the bishop, with an extraordinary passion, dedicated himself to the translation of the book, after losing several battles in the po-

4. Kadare, Ismail. September 26, 2019. “Vjershat në një gjuhë që letërsia nuk i pranon” in the newspaper *Panorama* on line. Available at: <<http://www.panorama.com.al/vjershat-ne-nje-gjuhe-qe-letersia-nuk-i-pranon-rrefimi-i-kadare-gjenerali-seshte-romani-im-me-i-mire/>>. Accessed July 13, 2023.



litical field. We recall the Democratic Revolution of June 1924 in Albania,<sup>5</sup> led by Noli, who overthrew King Zog I<sup>6</sup> for only six months, and then Noli took the path of exile, saddened and embittered. Noli, as an intellectual, was dedicated to politics and democracy, but beyond that, he had an exceptional talent, and his translations shone, comparable without fear to the greatest masters of translation in world history. His work to bring *Don Quixote* into Albanian began in 1930, after he had previously translated several masterpieces of world literature such as *Othello*, *Julius Caesar*, *Macbeth*, *Hamlet* by Shakespeare, *Cabaña* by Ibáñez, *The Enemy of the People*, *Hedda Gabler* by Ibsen, and the *Rubaiyat* by Omar Khayyam.<sup>7</sup>

Noli has his own translation method, which is now at the foundation of the Albanian school of translation and is called ‘shqipërim’ (Albanianization) or recreation. This method for the use of the colloquial language and freedom in dealing with the text:

Included in these operations and abbreviations are not a few that the translator of the novel into Albanian has made... What sets Noli’s translations apart from the usual translations that have been made in Albanian is precisely his work as a recreator... Noli not only chose masterpieces of world literature, but usually chose them for their subject matter, which sounded current (Shuteriqi 1974, 310-311).

According to Saverina Pasho, a translator and literary scholar:

It should not be forgotten that translation is not a simple technical process, but an ideological and political process that responds not only to the demands of fidelity to the source text, but also to the demands of the time and values associated with the horizon of the target work. In the case of Noli, we must also take into account his emblematic personality, the fact that he was not only a translator but also a poet endowed with a refined and rich thought, philological and religious erudition, a polemical spirit and strong political passions. This helps us better understand why Noli chose to translate *Don Quixote* and why he provided it with an Introduction that

5. The Democratic Revolution of June 1924 is closely linked to the name of Fan S. Noli, as he played an important role in organizing and leading it. After the failure of the revolution, which was an intellectual and peaceful movement against the monarchy of Zog I, he became the prime minister of Albania. After the fall of his government six months later, Noli left Albania because his life was in danger, and he avoided an armed clash between republicans and monarchists by settling in the United States.

6. Ahmed Zogu I (1895-1961), King of Albania (1928-1939), was the leader of the country from 1922 to 1939. He held various ministerial posts in the Albanian government before being driven into exile in June 1924, for only six months, because of the Democratic Revolution led by Fan Noli. His primary political rival was Fan Noli.

7. Fan Noli (1903-1965) was an important figure in the culture, literature, autocephalous Orthodox Church, and politics of Albania in the early twentieth-century. He played a crucial role in consolidating the Albanian language through translations of works by prominent authors in world literature. He translated *La cabaña* by Blasco Ibáñez (1921) and *Don Quixote* by Cervantes (1933) from Spanish into Albanian. Both of these books continue to be reprinted and revised according to Noli’s version.



has been so fiercely discused in recent debates on the need for a retranslation of this work (Pasho 2012, 104-105).

Ismail Kadare, the renowned Albanian writer, believes that the works selected for translation by Noli have a direct connection to his political and social activities and were used to serve him:

*Don Quixote* was translated into Albanian by the bishop of Albania. This bishop was at war with the future king of Albania. The bishop tried to overthrow the monarch. To give people and himself courage, he first translated *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* and actually managed to overthrow the king. Later, the king overthrew the bishop again and the situation was reversed, and while the bishop was very depressed and distressed, he was given the task of translating *Don Quixote* (Kadare 2005, 8).

The translator had to study extensively and look at publications in other languages before undertaking the translation of *Don Quixote* into Albanian. This is evidenced by the translation itself and several articles published by the translator in the newspaper *Republika* in the years 1931 and 1932, as well as the introduction he wrote for the book (Noli 1987). Noli had read the book in Spanish, as he knew the language of Cervantes, which allowed him to translate directly from the author's language, thus providing Albanians with a translation from the original. Noli had read extensive scholarly literature in different languages about the book *Don Quixote* and the author, and had also synthesized his critical position towards the work and characters while still in the translation process, which he expressed in various journalistic articles. We believe these are the main reasons why his translation still stands the test of time. Noli's language in the translation is powerful and expressive. This translation mastery helped introduce the multilingualism of a work like *Don Quixote* into Albanian. The translation was excellent, not only because of the translator's talent, but also his knowledge of the fundamentals of several languages, knowledge of world culture and history, and of Spanish. This translation was also of high quality because Noli was a very good connoisseur of Albanian language and culture.

Fan S. Noli has the merit in the eyes of Albanian readers, as he organized the first meeting between them and Cervantes' novel *Don Quixote*. He gave Albanians the opportunity to know a genius of world literature in the conditions of illiteracy, cultural emptiness, and political turmoil. Noli translated a masterpiece translated into all languages of the world, making Albanian language an extraordinary service, as he demonstrated how rich it is, while providing an excellent translation model. Noli contributed to the intellectual and civic enrichment of Albanian readers while giving them a world masterpiece.

This is not a random selection for translation, because among other things, it was intended to impose models of great literature against a kind of pa-

raliterature often archaic, influenced by Turkish literature and nourished by the most reactionary layers of society, nostalgics of an Albania that had to remain under the Ottoman Empire (Pasho 2012, 106).

Albanian literary critic has praised Noli's translation for several reasons: for its lively narration, popular expressions, and preservation of the emotional intensity conveyed in the original book. According to Dalan Shaplllo,<sup>8</sup> who considers Noli's translation excellent, his phrasing flows naturally in Albanian, has emotional and popular color, and includes Turkish loanwords which, at the time of translation, carried a special emotional value.

This raises the question of whether Noli committed the 'crime' of undermining the original culture. However, the author argues that Noli's adaptation of servile archaisms with Oriental archaisms, the use of Turkish loanwords to create a parodic effect, and the selection of certain elements to 'soften' the original text instead of 'destroying' it are evidence of his genius.

Noli did, in fact, shorten some parts of the original text, and it is not clear why he avoided translating the lyrics in the novel. It is possible that he simplified the work to make it more accessible to Albanian readers. However, it is unlikely that Noli, a translator and poet who had previously translated *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* into verse, found it difficult to translate the lyrics into Albanian. Instead, it is more likely that ideological tendencies gave him the freedom to make extensive cuts to the original text and to bring out what he considered to be the most essential aspects for Albanians, considering that he attempted to use the translated text in his political battles through the introduction (preface).

R. S. Lizaralde, a Spanish writer and translator who is well-versed in Albanian literature, believes that the cuts Noli made to the work were made to streamline the text and make it more suitable for Albanian readers.

... could be considered a true translation crime, but they do not take away the smallest value of his bold work: the semantic richness he displays, always in the vernacular language, the ability to reproduce even subtle satirical nuances in expressions, toponyms, or personal names, the liveliness of the language, the use of Eastern archaisms to reproduce the parodic effect of the cervantine archaisms of the Caloric novel, all of this (and more) turns Fan S. Noli's version into a true masterpiece in the Albanian language, both for its wonderful and captivating style and for its strength and ability to penetrate (just like the original *Quixote*) all layers of the population... his knight and squire became fully integrated characters in the imagination and thinking of the Albanians of that time and of those in the future (Lizaralde 2008, 45).

Researcher Plasari believes that Noli shortened the work inspired by ideological reasons, as he put it entirely at the service of his political ideas:

8. Shaplllo, Dalan. September 22, 2004. "Kalorësi i vrerosur nëpër botë". Newspaper *Dita*: 14.

He made the cuts... at first glance, for the benefit of a greater artistic coherence of the work... In our opinion, they were dictated by the very original preconception that Noli had made of the figure of the Knight of the Sorrowful Countenance. From this preconception, however, there could not fail to arise some inconsistencies with many parts of the work; perhaps it was also at risk of being damaged by them (Plasari 1990, 202).

In these circumstances, the old question raised by Humboldt, Schleiermacher, and Berman would be rephrased: should translation orient the reader towards the linguistic and cultural universe of the original text, or should it transform the source text to make it understandable for the reader and the receiving culture? If we were to refer to Umberto Eco, we would say: "In other words, for a translation of *Homer*, should the translator transform his audience into Homeric Greeks or should he force Homer to write as a contemporary author?" (Eco 2010, 218).

This question may seem paradoxical, but if we turn to the Albanian context during Noli's translations, what chance would Shakespeare or Cervantes have of being understood in a place with such a high illiteracy rate?

The book *Don Quixote of La Mancha* is a text that conveys the culture and tradition of Spain and the Spanish people at the end of the Middle Ages, at the beginning of the seventeenth-century. Like any other novels, it brings a text and a context. This cultural panorama came to the Albanian cultural context many centuries later, at the beginning of the twentieth-century, making it difficult for Albanian readers to understand.

The text of *Don Quixote* is typified from a cultural perspective as it has many cultural elements such as idiomatic expressions, three very characteristic language registers with nuances belonging to three specific social layers, typical cultural situations, ways of thinking and acting, etc. that make difficult to understand the author's idea if the translation is done word for word or if only the words are transferred from one language to another.

At a time when Albanian readership was small in number and not very educated in foreign literature of past centuries, when the translator Noli wanted to use the hero and the book in its entirety in the arena of political and social struggle in which he was involved, necessarily, he would 'betray' the original text, he would use the Albanian cultural element to explain certain terms, he would intervene in the explanation of expressions or replace them with others taken from the Albanian reality of the time.

In the case of Noli's translations, the problem is even more complex, since the latter was also a follower of the ideology of the Albanian National Renaissance, for which the strengthening and apology of the Albanian language, its beauty and richness were imperatives of the time. The cultural and political context of an Albania that had only a few years since it had emerged from centuries of Ottoman occupation and had finally been able to establish a Latin alphabet in 1908, conditioned in a way the choice of works that intellectuals of the time would undertake.

Considering the Albanian context and being himself a writer, Noli opts for a free and creative translation.

... this was a choice made by Noli, as a writer he found it difficult to overcome his legitimate desire to be a creator in his work, and because his greatest concern was that the book of Cervantes would be understandable to his contemporary audience and would have the greatest impact on them (Pasho 2012, 106).

So, he chooses to do a more creative translation of *Don Quixote*, which results in even a great translator like Noli not being faithful to the original, but rather maintaining a mostly ethnocentric value by offering a text oriented towards the audience.

Noli's translation tends to homogenize the novel; he adds explanatory notes, numerous abbreviations, changes toponyms and anthroponyms, leading towards a vulgarization of the original text. Noli's 'unfaithfulness' in this work, from our point of view, also includes the removal of many parts of the novel, which fully justifies a re-translation of the work.

When he translated *Don Quixote*, Noli translated some special character names into Albanian, such as: Doncella Placerdemivida-Zonjusha *Gazijetës-sime*; he used the substitution technique with a special name close to Albanian culture, such as: Juana Gutierrez-*Vanka e Opingaxhiut*; the translator created non-existent toponyms, such as: tierras del Preste Juan de las Indias-*Çinmaçin*; some Albanian cities appear in translation with a genuine humorous intention, such as: Argamasilla-*Domosdova*, etc.

The archaic language filled with Turkish loanwords (turkishisms) is intentional, with the sole purpose of the parody and burlesque effect, to accompany moments really filled with humor. Noli built grotesque expressions in the Albanian translation, built in the spirit of the grotesque of the language of Cervantes, which sound appropriate and have expressive force.

He also used borrowings that have a certain stylistic color, such as from Spanish: *kastigoj, dominatori, prononcuar, mag, singullare, proklamoj, infantilizëm, aliancë, profesoj*, etc.; and oriental borrowings: *mesele, millet, toptan, ujdís, hava, badjava, zullum, yrnek, harxhe, takëm, syrgjyn, penxhere*, etc. The translator created new words in the Albanian language or made word compounds: *mirësoj, mançarak, mjaltërrjedhëse, zemërlehta, asfare*, etc. He used Albanian proverbs, replacing the Spanish ones, to bring the novel closer to the readers' preferences and enhance the transmission of humor:

... vetë e gatuan çorbën vetë le ta hanë (Cervantes 2008, 172).

... con su pan, se lo coman (Cervantes 2006, 311).

We believe that Noli follows Cervantes' model, who, in the Prologue of his book, writes to his readers in a familiar tone, treating them as friends, aiming to gain their affection and loyalty in reading the book, and explaining the novel features of the book he has written (Cervantes 2006, 103-111).

The translator's desire to collaborate with the reader during the translation process is quite interesting and even innovative within the framework of Albanian literature. The translator carefully embraces the feedback and desires of the reader week after week in this interactive process.

Do not hesitate, but send us the subscriptions. And send them to us as soon as possible. We ask this not only for ourselves, but also on behalf of the notable, exiled knight of La Mancha, Don Quixote, whom we present to you with his cap and quilt. If you do not fulfill this wish, then you will not be able to read his story in Albanian, the language that suits him more today than any other out of excessive nationalism. May it be good for you! (Noli 1987, 315).

*Don Kihoti or Don Kishoti?* (Noli 1987, 346). The translator is concerned not to lose or irritate the reader, as the protagonist is changing his name. The translator's desire to engage in a joint discussion about translation issues is evident. Noli has made the decision to revise the transliteration of the hero's name into Albanian, from Kihoti to Kishoti, for several reasons. However, we wish to distinguish, among others, the desire that the Albanian version of Don Quixote in terms of pronunciation should closely resemble the Don Quixote of the original language.

Thus, the French and Italians pronounce his name like this more often... I noticed that most Albanians pronounce the name of the Knight of La Mancha, Don Kioti, which is an unpardonable sin. This forced me to transcribe the name as the Spaniards pronounced it in the seventeenth century, namely Don Kishoti (Noli 1987, 346).

### 3. NOLI AND LITERARY CRITICISM IN THE INTRODUCTION AND IN THE NEWSPAPER *REPUBLIKA*

In this section we will find Noli's various interpretations of *Don Quixote* through the hermeneutic approach.

The first publication of the book was accompanied by a preface written by Noli himself, which replaces the prologue written by Cervantes. This prologue has not been included in any subsequent editions of the work in Albanian, but for the first time, we find it translated in a book by Professor Uçi, titled *The Philosophy of Donquixotism* (Uçi 2010, 83).

Noli's merit according to Uçi, lies in the fact that he built introductions in the books he translated, which are:

The first model, excellent and prestigious, of literary critical thought in Albanian, of aesthetic analyses of world literature masterpieces. An important merit on the path of Albanian art criticism, a historical merit of Fan

Noli, who founded a true school of critical-literary thought with his ideas already in the first half of the twentieth-century (Uçi 2010, 315).

Noli's introduction is the first serious critical voice on the work of Cervantes, at the beginning of the twentieth-century in Albania. Cultural emancipation of the Albanian reader is a top priority for Noli. This is why he presents to Albanian readers a 'literary masterpiece', a 'precious gift', 'the most precious work in the world', 'one of the most popular works in the world', 'a book that had such great success' (Noli 2008, 5-9).

Noli noticed that his progressive and democratic ideals of the time in which he believed, coincided with the ideals of Cervantes' work. Albania at the beginning of the twentieth-century was strangely confronted with medieval Spain. Just like the Spain of Philip III suffered from religious inquisition and fought against Middle Ages that did not want to surrender, Albania, according to Noli, was oppressed and stepped on by feudal lords and clergy, by scoundrels and Zog's *bashibozuks* who wielded swords over their heads (Noli 2008, 8-9).

Noli sought to find something important in Cervantes' novel that allowed him to project it convincingly into contemporaneity, rather than just discovering the polysemy of the grotesque figures of the novel. The above purpose captivated Noli so much that his assessments, now, when formulated outside the context, seem one-sided, tendentious, sociological, and inadequate.

As noted by scholar Aliu, the reception of Noli's work is influenced by the positivist tradition originating from the Balkans, which tends to oversimplify and impoverish the approach and treatment of literary works (Aliu 2010, 92).

In his preface, Noli says that *Don Quixote* will be better understood in Albania than anywhere else, and he directs the Albanian public towards a deeply ideological or rather political reading. He believes so strongly in his mission and is so deeply engaged in it that he occasionally overlooks different perspectives, which also accounts for the aforementioned assertion. Thus, he will naturally situate Don Quixote and Sancho in the Albanian context as representatives of the two main social classes existing in Albania.

The social integration of the two heroes, 'borrowed' from European barricades and placed in the Balkans, particularly in Albania, is undoubtedly a distinctive feature of that time, but it is also noteworthy from an intertextual perspective (Aliu 2010, 93).

Therefore, for Noli, the work had current value and served to remove the mask of division within the Albanian feudal class. By uncovering the central idea of the novel, always from Noli's perspective where the Spanish noble class, fallen from its former position, seeks to turn back time, he brings into play the Albanian feudal class, which was in decline but still struggling to maintain its rule over the poor and oppressed peasantry.

... Don Quixote [...] sacrifices himself for the fairy tales of the reactionaries. We are also moved by Sancho's loyalty towards Don Quixote. Our

hearts break when we see the poor and uneducated peasant die for the feudal lord, who takes him by the neck and deludes him with false promises and illusions (Noli 2008, 8).

Noli calls this work “revolutionary, because in order to discredit the books of chivalry, it was necessary to discredit the entire Middle Ages with all tales” (Noli 2008, 6). Noli, for his part, writes a revolutionary introduction, aiming to discredit the regime of King Zog I, as he is turning back the clock of Albania. He wishes to discredit those social classes that support the monarchy politically, ideologically, and economically. All of this, according to him, is synonymous with backwardness, a return to the time of Turkey. According to him: Cervantes chose as heroes two of the most reactionary and medieval types.

... one of the funniest couple, with the most absurd intentions and the most grotesque conclusions imaginable... these two take on the task of turning Spain and the whole world 300 years back and throwing it all into chaos and confusion, from science to magic, from history to fairy tales, from progress to darkness (Noli 2008, 6).

Through this introduction, Noli builds a panorama of the political, historical, social, and ideological situation in Albania at the time; he reveals his progressive beliefs, as well as those of the class he represents; he uncovers the mission he had taken on himself: to become the spokesperson of the new time and the social classes that sought change, carrying the ideology of revolutionary change. According to Noli, Cervantes’ work was revolutionary because it carried the power of change. This critical interpretation of Noli is related to his inclination to directly project *Don Quixote* into contemporaneity.

In Noli’s assessment, Cervantes wrote a humorous novel with deep dramatic notes, a novel dressed in deep humanism and illusions. “With optimism and enthusiasm, patience, faith and heroic perseverance, which deserve to be used for a better cause” (Noli 2008, 8).

Noli deserves credit for recognizing the comedy, the grotesque, the burlesque and the tragedy intertwined in Cervantes’ work. Sancho and Don Quixote are a comic couple that make us laugh and cry. He writes that even “the washboard and spinning tops of Albania make us laugh and cry today, just like Don Quixote and Sancho” (Noli 2008, 8-9).

Just like Cervantes drew inspiration from his own life and incorporated autobiographical elements into his work, the translator is motivated by his political activities and has developed a critical approach to the two fictional characters, whom he associates with real historical figures. Cervantes, throughout his life, was characterized by humanism and a warrior spirit, qualities that he bestowed upon his protagonist. Similarly, the translator, perhaps following in Cervantes’ footsteps, in the impassioned Prologue fueled by his own battles and those of his fellow compatriots, attributes to Cervantes’ characters the traits of the two social classes with whom he engages in ideological conflicts.



With the Introduction that accompanied the publication of the novel, he laid the foundations for the reception of this work and thus created an anticipatory horizon for the work in Albania. Fan Noli encouraged the Albanian reader to read the book with these words:

*Don Quixote of La Mancha* has been, for every nation and every country, one of the most popular books of the world, popular for the masses and for the discerning philosophers such as Kant, Schopenhauer, Eduard Fitzgerald, the renowned translator of Omar Khayyam, who calls it the most hurtful work in the world (Noli 2008, 5-6).

It seems that Noli had the expectation that the work, one of the most popular in the world, would become highly popular among Albanians, and he asked Albanians not to consider it as foreign. In his first presentation of *Don Quixote*, he asked them to take it as their own: “We have a compatriot, a gilded Albanian...” (Noli 2008, 5).

To deepen his exploration of *Don Quixote* and engage with his readers, Noli employed various media platforms as both founder and editor-in-chief. Consequently, prominent Boston-based publications, including *Dielli* newspaper, *Adriatik Reveu*, and the weekly *Republika* newspaper, transformed into intellectual forums of their time. *Republika* newspaper, as expressed in its name, reflects the political views of its founder in support of the Republic as a governing model. This was a political aspiration that transformed into one of the most important themes of the newspaper’s articles.

An important theme of the articles was Noli’s fervent desire “to intellectually enrich the Albanian reader” (Uçi 2010, 308) through the translation of the book *Don Quixote* and the critical study of the book, thus becoming the first translator of the novel, also the first researcher of Cervantes’ work in Albania. He not only beautifully adapted the novel from a linguistic perspective but also presented a quite original interpretation of the literary text in several articles, contextualizing it within the Albanian context of the time. “Noli conveyed in Albanian one of the greatest and most difficult works of world literature... a masterpiece that had been translated into all languages of the world” (Uçi 2010, 308), directing the reception based on his philosophy and presenting his vision for the characters because he was convinced that *Don Quixote* was his steed of battle.

There are about twenty or thirty literary masterpieces that a person should not die before reading them. One of these is *Don Quixote* by the Spanish writer Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra. We have started to publish it in *Republika* for two weeks now. It is the most precious gift we can give to a dear reader. We are sure you will enjoy it. It is impossible not to like it. Read it with the attention it deserves (Noli 1987, 313).

He mentions the names of scholars and critics from around the world who have differing viewpoints and evaluations of this complex work. For instance,

he strongly disagrees with “the Russian writer Turgenev, who presents Don Quixote as a tragic hero alongside Hamlet...” (Noli 1987, 346), and others like the French writer Anatole France, who portrays him as “a comic buffoon that elicits laughter from the audience” (Noli 1987, 347).

In his article, Noli informs the readers about the book’s comic and tragic nature, expressing it as follows: “You want to cry and laugh with what he says and what he does... That’s how they laughed and cried, reading *Don Quixote*, with millions of people for hundreds of years” (Noli 1987, 314).

The focus of his literary criticism is solely on two characters and the author Cervantes, whom he considers equally important. We believe that he continues the ‘game’ of the writer Cervantes, removing the barriers between reality and imagination. Don Quixote and Sancho are as real as their creator. “That Don Quixote is an immortal type. Look wherever you want and you will see him alive in front of you in every corner and every inch” (Noli 1987, 314). In this undeniable appreciation of the figure of Don Quixote, Noli joins the opinion of many other writers and critics. For instance, Borges asserts:

... antes de Don Quijote, los hombres creados por el arte eran personajes propuestos a la piedad o a la admiración de los hombres; Don Quijote es el primero que merece y que gana su amistad. Dulcemente ha ganado la amistad del género humano, desde que ganó, hace tres siglos, la del valeroso y pobre Cervantes (Borges 2001, 252).

Cervantes created his duo of characters to discredit chivalric literature, while Noli updates these characters in the Albanian context and aims to discredit the Albanian monarchy and the feudal class that supports it. Thus, he argues that Don Quixote is not an idealist nor is he sacrificing himself for an ideal. “We admire people who sacrifice for the ideals of human progress” (Noli 1987, 348). Noli stated, but according to him, Don Quixote is just one embodiment of the reactionary forces that impede progress.

In Albania, we have thousands of Don Quixotes, unenlightened reactionaries who try to turn back the wheel of history, people who live by the tales and fantasies of Oriental patriarchy and feudalism. These reactionaries are comical because their backwardness makes us laugh, but they are also tragic because they sacrifice themselves for those tales and fantasies just like Don Quixote (Noli 1987, 314).

Noli’s interpretation of the characters in the novel is not exhaustive, nor is it always accurate. He tried more to bring it together, rather than to uncover the ambiguity and multiplicity of the novel’s figures. Today, Noli’s interpretation appears to be one-sided and somewhat unconventional.

The Albanian scholar in North Macedonia, Ali Aliu, in his book *Albanian Don Quixote*, aims to explain ‘Noli’s position and interpretation’, affirming that Noli is well-informed about the literary criticism of the novel and its main

characters. Aliu emphasizes that the Albanian reality requires urgent assistance, inspiring Noli to summon Don Quixote for help (Aliu 2010, 96-97).

Without a doubt, all paths lead to a single realization: the entire philosophy of the grotesque, the parabolic carrier of Cervantes' novel, Fan Noli will employ it in service of his own mission, in the context of the drama and the struggle through which Albanians, as well as himself, journeyed during the twenties and thirties of the past century. It is an era when Albanians will once again confront a great challenge and historical test: be it in the East or in the West, in Europe or in Asia (Aliu 2010, 96).

The reader's analytical perspective of Fan Noli was significant for the time it was written, and his viewpoints continued to hold weight until the 1990s.<sup>9</sup> However, over time, new concepts have emerged that have enriched the overall understanding of the novel. The scholar Uçi refers to these viewpoints of Noli as positive interpretations.

... that are original, standing alongside other interpretations that emerged in the four-century past and in the historical and cultural circumstances of modern times. The experiences of contemporary receptive aesthetics prove that positive scientific evaluations are ensured by connecting the best achievements of the past with new discoveries and hypotheses, while clearing the path of development from subjectivity (Uçi 2010, 317).

The fact that *Don Quixote* has inspired so many interpretations that have evolved, been modified and enriched over the centuries, attests to the significance and enduring vitality of this work, which remains both youthful and timeless.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

Our study addresses a rather specific issue in the field of literary communication, the role that Spanish literature has played in Albanian literature, the Albanian literary community, and Albanian literary criticism, through the great writer Cervantes and the book *Don Quixote*. Our work aims primarily to emphasize Noli's merit as a translator and the first critic of Cervantes' work, highlighting his often politically influenced interpretations. An important argument of our work is also the recipient's horizon and echo in the conditions of a significant temporal and spatial distance, as well as socio-cultural distance from the distant century of the publication of *Don Quixote*.

9. During the 45 years of Communist Dictatorship in Albania (1945-1990), Fan Noli's receptive and analytical perspective on the book *Don Quixote* and its characters did not lose its relevance and was ideologically exploited for the interests of the dictatorial system. Don Quixote as a character was portrayed as a representative of the reaction, of the class that had lost power and desired the political overthrow of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat. After the 1990s, with the establishment of a democratic order, this viewpoint is highly regarded as subjective.

Cervantes, with *Don Quixote* and Sancho, has revolutionized world literature with this extraordinary novel of the Modern Times, and continues to influence it today. Albanian literature encountered the echo of this book in the early twentieth-century when it was first interpreted into Albanian through Noli's highly accomplished translation.

On the other hand, Noli's prologue laid the foundations of Albanian literary criticism, revealing the motives for introducing Cervantes to Albanians and presenting a critical view of the work. It is constructed upon multiple parallels raised with a clear social and ideological purpose, as Noli aims to unmask and potentially change the Albanian reality through literature, if possible. Such is the parallelism through which he analyzes the social classes from which the two heroes of the novel come with those of the political landscape of the time in Albania. Interpretations that may seem inaccurate today, but had their significance in a specific context and sparked an important intellectual debate.

While translating Cervantes' masterpiece *Don Quixote* into Albanian, Fan Noli published it in the weekly Albanian newspaper in America, *Republika*. This newspaper, which focused on the topic of Albania and Albanians, with a primary concern for the progress and emancipation of the country, published critical articles about the book, sparking a debate among distinguished personalities of Albanian culture about the importance of Cervantes' work, the expected horizon in Albania, and its influence on the socio-cultural panorama of Albania. In the Albanian press of the time, Noli's genius as a translator is undoubtedly evident, as acknowledged by current scholars. Despite contemporary criticisms of Noli's translation, he established an important translation school that still has its followers today.

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