

A “Best Selling” British Author who wrote About Great Renaissant- De Rada and Albanians



History

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Abstract

Rarely authors of global reputation have written about Albania and well-known personalities of our culture and rarely they have remained or still remain in the darkness of anonymity for the general public and Albanian researchers. For this reason, insight, finding, lighting and display of writings, works and creations, yet unknown, of historians, linguists, ethnographers, writers, and foreign journalists, contributors with unrepeatable values for Albania, the Albanians and the history of our nation, remain an obligation, both scientific and noble. Finding the works and “unknown” authors is a homage in respect of the contributions they given for us, publication of their works would unfold in global dimensions the values that our nation has kept and conveyed, would enrich the funds of Albanian archives and along with it, the research bibliographies for a deeper image of our heritage. Definitely in this article it is evoked the image and work of a British author, Norman Dagllas, who until now remains unknown not only for the Albanian public, but also for the circles of our researchers. In the framework of a series of extensively well-known publications in its time, his most interesting, culminating and reputable republished work remains, “Old Calabria”. In the center of this work, which has seen the light of re-publication over 20 times and has been translated into most languages of the world, is our great poet of National Renaissance, Jeronim De Rada. And yet, strangely, it is still unknown and translated or published in Albanian.

Introduction

Italy, the country of literary inspirations became such for the famous writer Norman Douglas, as well. Although his first work was published when he was not in a very young age (at the age of 43 years old), it was followed by a series of other works welcomed by the public and the reader of his time, but also later on. Fiction literature of several genres, publicists and travel notes, constitute the corpus Norman Douglas’ work.

Among his work, it is distinguished “Old Calabria”, a bestseller, which presents in detail the daily and spiritual life of Italy’s Arbëresh, habits, garments, their origin. Particularly this work stops in the life of the greatest poet of Arbëresh and one of the greatest of the Albanian National Renaissance, Jeronim De Rada. It is perhaps the first work written about De Rada, written at the time he was alive and one of the few works written about him in 100 years.

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However, unfortunately, he yet remains anonymous to us!

Norman Douglas, without any doubt, is a denied Nobelista, a “best selling” writer of the twentieth century and he continues to remain so even today! (Tomlinson, 1931). He became famous in particular for Italian readers, but also beyond, everywhere in the world, with news reports, articles and analytical studies about this country. He had to be such also for us, the Albanians, due to a great and completely special contribution and special he offered to us....

But, unfortunately for us he remains anonymous yet!

He was born in Austria, in 1868 to an Austrian mother and a British father. He was educated in England, Germany and France. He entered the British diplomatic mission in 1894 and after two years he left due to a scandal. In 1897 he was settled in Italy, in Naples and married Elisabeta Theobodina, and they had two children together. However, their conjugal life did not continue for long. In 1903 he divorced. In the following years, he lived in Kapri, in Italy and partially in Southern France, where he started to write intensively, finally dedicating himself to the field of letters. (Ackroyd, 2001)

His first work was “The place of Mermaids”, published in 1911. The publication which further followed, in 1912, was “Fountain in summer” and in 1914 “Old Calabria”.

Other publications of the author are “The Wind of South”, “Memories of a bookseller”, “Memories of Doctor Mur”, “They left”, “Alone”, “Together”, “One day” and this way continues the long list of his writings until the year of his death, 1952. He was a rebellious talent, keen on drinks and repeatedly in scandals. (Ackroyd, 2001).

The genres used by Douglas were: novels, novelettes, stories, publicistics, journalism, etc. However the ones which left more traces in his creations were “travel notes”, which have a unique and unrepeateable shape.

There is not the least doubt that in this genre, one of them, “Old Calabria” is considered as the “culmination or apex of Douglas’ creations in the first period” (Russo, 1998). He started writing it in 1911 and continues it until 1913, it seems that the material of these years did not meet the pleasure and expectations of the author, therefore he continues to work the material in 1914 as well, a period of time in which he gave it the last pen and sent it for publication. The publication of the work was received with much interest and very quickly the book became a “bestseller”. From that time “Old Calabria” has been re-published more than twenty times and it has been translated in many languages of the world.

The work has much interest; we would say an extraordinary one for our country, the history of Albanian Renaisasance, for Arbëreshe world and particularly for our great Renaissant, Jeronim de Rada. Perhaps, “Old Calabria” is one of the rare works of fiction literature written by a great personality of literary world, which was widespread so extensively that made much famous in Europe this personality, De Rada, his dreams, his mission and that of the Albanians for independence and prosperity. By means of this publication, the “bestseller”, which continues to be sought after and republished yet to present days (the latest re-publication in English in 2012), the image of De Rada, as anticipated accurately by Dougla, “has become become a prophet of the Albanian issue, since all the anticipations of this poor Albanian nobleman became true in such a stunning way”. (Chaney, 2000)

The below translation pertains to Chapter 21 of this book, entitled “An Albanian sir”. In addition to this chapter, “Old Calabria” has also two other chapters dedicated to the arbëreshë of Calabria, entitled “Albanians and their College” and “The “Greek Silla”. (Douglas, 2012)

“Old Calabria”

An Albanian “Sir”

“One day I found myself on the road that leads to the village Makia, about three kilometers away from San Demetrio. Although in ruins, it was still quite picturesque. The landscape with houses located in the patch, interrupted by the small church of St Elijah's, Early God of Sun - Helios, admirer of peaks and rocks, that in his Christian form, was brought herein by the rude Albanian colonists was brought here from their homeland, as several centuries earlier this saint had accompanied the Byzantines in the same trip and fifteen centuries earlier had accompanied Greeks on their travels.

Jeronim De Rada, a fervent patriot, whose great aspirations for Albania were rooted and took modern dimension and form, was born in 1814, in Makia, in an old and relatively rich family. The ideal that followed this person throughout his lifetime was the rebirth of his country; - And if the attention of international congresses, linguists and folklorist has been already focused to this small corner of land (Makia), it is entirely his merit. I wish to remind you that in 1902 twenty-one newspapers across Europe were dedicated to Albania (eighteen only in Italy, as well as one in London).

He was the son of an Orthodox Christian Priest. After a strict religious education under his father's roof in Makia and College of San Demetrio's, he was sent to Naples to complete his university studies. It was a feature of the character of this man since the beginning of his youth to focus and deal seriously with modern literature, to meditate and abstract looking for more in-depth and correct knowledge. In these circumstances he left his Latin teacher, the well-known Puoti, because of his somehow more particular tendencies and passion that he had for grammar rules. Although he inherited an attitude against doctrines preaching materialist and conspiracy theories, which were vigorous at that time in Naples, he joined the anti-Bourbon movements in the late thirties and narrowly escaped the death penalty, which led to execution some from his friends. Soon after, his natural devotion faced him with charges of reactionary monarchist trends.

His salvation from all threatening dangers, he shall attribute to the hands of God. Throughout his life, he was a diligent reader of the Bible believer, a firm believer and even its ascetic, always devoted and with childish purity of soul to the creator. His soul moved wonderfully into a fiery rhetoric world.

In the world of his holy dreams, ideal visions and dreams used to swarm kindly. Exactly high above a benevolent God stood up and weaved plans for the prosperity of Albania; only a perverse and malignant creature, a true devil could prevent the good intentions of this man for all humanity on earth, a society, which, according to him, reaches such ideal by planting and harvesting the sweat of the brow, as previously predicted by ancestors. Unlike many poets, he never disappointed nor repented for his thoughts and ideals that he deemed as the most appropriate bed of his human world. He was a devout believer in his dreams and ideals, too. However, the leitmotif that led him, the brighting sun of the day and the illuminating star of the night, was the belief in the "mission" of Pelasgian race, spread around the shores of the Internal Sea (Mediterranean) - in Italy, Sicily, Greece, Dalmatia, Romania, Minor Asia, Egypt - a flaming conviction and belief deep-fixed in his conscience, the same as the one still invigorating for "Lost Tribes", to the enthusiasts of England.

He deemed that the world found it difficult to understand how much it owed to his people and his country; According to his judgments, Achilles, Philip of Macedonia, Alexander the Great, Aristotle, Pirro, Diocletian, Julian Apostat - were all Albanians. Still further, - although at the end of his life, he continued earnestly to confess:

"But this villainous devil, who, for more than four thousand years has prevented the Pelasgian race to get together in its own state, is still trying in secret to prevent the work that would lead him to this union."

Tired and disgusted with the noise and mess of Naples, he eventually left from here, at the age of thirty-four years old and moved to his native village of Makia, refusing one or two lucrative assignments. He described himself as disappointed by "stupid self-pleasures" of liberalism, for the fact that in those conditions he was lacking what a French psychologist had called "the function of truth"; his temperament was not of the kind dealing with such realities. Such getaway was a special stage in his life - it was a Great Apostasy. Afterwards, he lost personal contacts with the diversity of numerous human opinions. In Makia he remained confined exploring Albanian injustices, its legacies, using correspondence with foreigners, writing and writing over and over again, wasting all his wealth to the service of Albania, while extreme poverty would follow him till his last footsteps.

I have read some of his works in Italian language. They are interesting works, with prophetic meditations and recognized sighs of Dodonian oaks of his homeland they capture you with their tough and manly mysticism. He displays a Black brilliance, with abducted speeches and intertwined with his goodness, with vivid flashes of inspiration, shining his past morals. He held these visions but in another aspect: - he was a passionate and determined admirer of Eweig-weibliche. Some of the women characters in his poems preserve the freshness of the morning dew, their exquisite originality even after the not too fine intervention of the translator.

At the age of nineteen years old he wrote a poem about “Odyssey”, which was published under a pseudonym. Then, three years later, he emerged with a new edition, a collection of rhapsodies, folk songs, entitled “Milosao”, which he took from the lips of Albanian girls, in their villages. This is his most well-known work and it has been translated into Italian language more than once. After his return to Makia, he was accompanied by years of apparent creation absence, but not for very long, and especially during the last twenty years of his life, his literary activity became quite intense. He dedicated to studies and publications in the field of journalism, folklore, poetry, history, grammar, philology, ethnology, aesthetics, politics, and morality - proving that nothing improper was written under the pen of his talent. And, indeed - he was fruitful, his admirers say, even in his errors. But, unlike other dedicated people behind a single idea, he boldly tried in other fields of thought where specialists fear to deal with. His biographers count forty-three different works produced by his pen. All of them pulsate notes of patriotism; they are “fragments of a heart”, and indeed, he stated that he used the exact science of grammar as a battleground to challenge the enemies of Albania. But perhaps he was more successful as a journalist. His periodical journal “Arber’s flag” (or “the flag of Albania”) became the symbol collection of all his countrymen from every corner of the globe. (De Rada, 1883).

These articles of different nature - which had undoubtedly innovation for his central theme - attracted the attention of German philologists and linguists and of all freedom, folklore, and poetry lovers. The greatest Italian writers, such as Cantu praised and raised him too high; while Lamartine, in 1844, wrote to him:

‘Je suis bien-heureux de ce signe de fraternite poetique et politique centre vus et moi. La poesie est venue de vos rivages et doit y retourner...’

‘I am well-pleased with this sign of poetic and political fraternity between us. Poetry came from your shores and there it must return...’(Lamartin, 1886)

Hermann Buchholts discovered worthy scenic crossings, such as those of Shakespeare and fragments of Eskilian greatness in his tragedy Sofonisba. Carnet compares him with Dante, and the euriditus Mr. Gladstone wrote to him in 1880 – a postcard – a postcard - which as it can be assumed, praised his sincere efforts on behalf of his country. He rightly became the object of numerous writings, articles and leaflets. Throughout life, Albania had been a myth to him. It was he who discovered the divine relationship between the Albanian and the Pelasgic languages; who created the literary language of his country and formulated its ambitions and political goals.

Meanwhile, the clouded “Autobiology” summarizes within the complex political intrigues in Naples, entities which are not related to the focus of his major works; and “Political Testament” a small booklet, published at the end of his life is more interesting. It also lays favorite and somewhat surprising theses, whereby he claims that Albanians should not look for help or mercy, much less to save themselves, only to their *brothers*, the Turks. Meanwhile, by many Albanians on both sides of the Adriatic, he was procalimed *Turkofil*, while he was accused and denominated by the Greeks with the terms “crafty thief” and “faithless arrogant”. From Austria, he was declared an “a disguised enemy of his country’s freedom”, yet this challenging man seems to have thought quite well about everything. A year before his death he wrote about an Italian translator of Milosao (I will state the original fragment to demonstrate his dark language):

“Ed un tempo propozio la accompagna: la ricostruzione dell’Epiro nei suoi quattro vilayet autonomi quale e nei propri consigli e nei propri desideri; ricostruzione che pel suo Giorale, quello dell’ottimo A. Lorecchio – cui precede il principe Nazionale Kastrioti, Chini – si annuncia fatale, e quasi fulcro della stabilita dello impero Ottomano, a della pace europea; preludio di quella diffusione del regno di Dio sulla terra, che sara la Pace tra gli Uomini.”(De Rada, 2002)

A wonderful speech indeed, which accurately illustrates the disadvantages of living in distance from the great urban centers of thought. If he traveled less with his soul and more with his body, his reflections could have been modified and corrected, as he did not visit the Albanian colonies in the other part of Italy or Sicily. Hence, it was born and chained his great self-confidence for the mission he had undertaken - faith on his ideal cultivated in solitude, intellectualism and geographical terrain where he lived. Therefore, such yearning, extraterrestrial and almost divine will that abounded inside him was apparently an expression of his aspirations to life.

He stayed in his home, both poor and diligent; folded by human exaltation, confused and bemused by the contemporary overcomings and achievements of the human mind. That's why his attitude and activity in San Demetrio was outside the world developments beyond. A chair of the Albanian Literature Department, in San Demetrio, established in 1849, but closed violently after three years, reopened and renamed in 1892 in the same function by the historian and minister Pasquale Villari; for a very long time, he was also director of the municipal school in Corigliano, where, with his characterizing energy, he managed to issue and publish a newspaper; while fierce journalistic campaigns and clashes followed each other; in 1896 he organized the first congress of the Albanian language in the city, an event that brought together delegates from every part of Italy and received a warm letter of congratulations by the Minister Francesco Crispi, an Albanian himself. (Stillman, 1899) Again, in 1899, we find it with reference to the twelfth international congress of Orientalists in Rome.

And, however, above everything else, he admired the distant attitude there in Makia.

Folded with his heavy sorrow, he hitched in the last years of his life under his silent dreams. Meanwhile disasters had hit him one after the other. His friends were fewer and passed away; his brothers also, later his beloved wife and then four boys – he survived even after his loved ones had left; The only one who remained at the end after everyone, a creature hitten hard, remaining between tragic and noble isolation. . Over eighty years old, haggard, he dragged his feet three times a week to give lectures in San Demetrio; he still worked on a small piece of land with his weak and powerless arms; he wrote and versified poems and rhapsodies for relaxation even though he was in the old very age of eighty-eight years! Local residents will tell the trees under which he was used to stop and rest, all sunny landscapes he adored, the stones on which he sat; they will tell you sad stories and events of his poverty, the collapse in deep grief barely surviving through borrowing. Over recent months he was often grateful to a piece of bread in exchange for a bag with raw oak, gathered by him, to feed buyers and pigs. Poverty to the last point of misery came due to his firm loyalty to the ideal that he had, which has not been already manifested in its ordinary form, but, on the other hand it exalts suffering. The efforts of all his life are just there! However, so far no “Albanian issue” has been yet declared, to shock the European chancelleries. However, he set fire to a conjuring punk and as a magician he produced and brought to the attention of the world this ghost, which has yet to be solved.

He died in 1903, in San Demetrio; and there he remains buried among oaks, on the hill.

However, it will not be easy to find his graveyard.

His passionate biographer passionate, a talented poet, has outlined the idea of a monument worthy for him that in recognition of his memory and recognition puts it in the peak heights of Akrokeraune. But it would be equally worthy if also - some simple memorial rocks would be placed in the area where he lies buried.

If he died in his native Makia, it would have been done, but death took him at another parish of San Demetrios and his remains were buried with those of its poorest citizens. An illustration of the microcosmos of that pure soul of Albania, for which he had sacrificed his entire lifetime, efforts that had led it towards a bright and noble end!

He was Mazzini of his nation.

A Garibaldi, which for the times of crisis that may come, may appear again through tumultuous crowds. (Douglas, 2012)

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Looking at this chapter of the work, “Old Calabria”, it is not difficult for the reader to understand with how much love and passion Norman Douglas wrote about Jeronim de Rada, the great missionary of the Albanian question, for this symbol of sacrifice up to self-denial in the interest of his country, for this “prophet” (Douglas, 2012) who anticipated the brightened tomorrow of a people under captivity through centuries.

However, if Britain's work even today, almost one hundred years after its first publication, has value, attention, curiosity, thirst and interest to read, published and republished, the reason is not the fact that Douglas met the poet and our Renaissance by chance on a routine trip to poor Calabri. No! Douglas as a journalist and writer in his life, got to know and meet with hundreds of characters, more well-known and with much more reputation than the lonely arbëresh, personalities of politics, media and European nobility, but none of them took this place in his work and did not shake the soul of the British soul more than he did, de Rada.

The genius of Douglas managed to distinguish that after the miserable old man, in the lost and poor province of Calabria, it was a prophet of the Albanian question. This master of letters heard the dreams of De Rada, but saw the spirit of Arbëresh as well; he visited their graves and also their poor homes, carefully gathering the nectar from their desires and dreams through centuries, with particular passion and love. With this dough in hands, Douglas managed to conceive within monumental rows, the yeast of all de Rada's contributions, love, sacrifices, his confused soul, pain, thirst and dreams for his homeland and above all his devotion without any compromises about the Albanian ideal. (Russo, 1998)

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