

Naim Frashëri

Founder and professor of Albanian literature for children

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Abstract

The tradition that Naim created is alive and inspirational even among the lives of the present society. More than a writer, Naim is the greatest poet of our National Renaissance, is a patriot, think-tank and famous activist of education and Albanian culture. His most special merit in this literary creativity stands in the fact that he raised the literature for children at a higher artistic level, strongly affecting the other Renaissance figures.

Which are the virtues that Naim Frashëri wants to develop among the children?

As a writer and professor, Naim aimed to activate through his creativities the intellectual and educational thought and the spiritual moral emancipation of the children. In his literary creativity, Naim Frashëri appears not only as a famous writer and poet, but as a great professor at the same time, publishing literary and pedagogical works.

The book *Reader for boys* with short stories distinguished him as a talented prose writer for children, whereas the poetic art in the collection *Poetry for the first grades* established him as the founder of the poetry for children, where Naim appears as an educator and serves as a propagandist of the noble virtues of love for work, of honour, faith, justice, truth, humanism, will for learning and knowledge, love for one's country.

In the general view of this literature, as a poet and writer through different genres and types, Naim aims to give advices, to convey wisdom and philosophy but also to emanate elements of culture and good manners, behaviour and moral.

Naim, likewise his predecessors: *Naum Veqilharxhi* and *Kostandin Kristoforidhi*, dedicated himself to the literature for children to deeply affect the conscience and moral of the children. In this point of view there is another reason why Naim dedicated himself to the literature for children: he was convinced that the boundaries of the linguistic culture of the nation are laid down at school and in childhood. *"Little boys and maids need to learn their language, to read it correctly and write it good"*. Thus, the poetry and prose for children subdue to his aim; the artistic and patriotic education of children.

Therefore, for this contribution that he brought, Naim Frashëri deserved being named as the founder of Albanian literature for children and as its main representative during the National Renaissance.

Keywords: Pedagogical works, prose for children, poetry, national renaissance.

The kingpin of Albanian literature of Renaissance, the one that gave voice to the people's aspirations for freedom and progress as a great poet of the nation, is Naim Frashëri, the nightingale of Albanian language. The tradition that Naim created is alive and inspirational even among the lives of the present society. More than a writer, Naim is the greatest poet of our National Renaissance, is a patriot, think-tank and famous activist of education and Albanian culture. He glorified the nation and freedom, the language and school, wisdom and progress.

*And the light of wisdom,
Shall lead us forward
Forward toward freedom!*

The literary creativity for children of Naim is very extensive and rich. According to Nonda Bulka, he was among the first renaissance figures that understood the necessity of creativity for children as an important mean for the cultural and spiritual emancipation of the young generation. The philosophic concept of Naim Frashëri expresses his clear motive that *"shaping Albanian is not enough, Albanians need to be shaped too"*¹.

In 1884-1885, together with Jani Vreto and Sami, he published the cultural review Drita (which after several editions changed the name into Dituria). There was a total of 12 editions, where beside the poems for adults, he began to publish literary and educational works for children.

In his literary creativity, Naim Frashëri appears not only as a famous writer and poet but as a great professor at the same time, publishing literary and pedagogical works such as:

- *"Poetry for first grades"* (for primary schools) was first published in the "Drita" review, 1884, then in 1886 in Bucharest.
- *"General knowledge for the first grades"* (prose, school books, 1886) it was first published in 1885 in "Dituria" review.
- *"General history for the first grades"*, Bucharest 1886, prose.
- *"History of Albania"* prose, 1888-1898
- *"Four seasons"*, prose, translated from French, 1864.
- *"Herds and crops"*, lyric poem, 1886, Bucharest.
- *"The true wish of Albanians"*, a patriotic poem written in Greek for all the Albanians living in Greece, Bucharest 1886... etc.

It is worth emphasizing that all the works of Naim have educational, didactic, pedagogical qualities and served to those students and people that did not have the systematic education.

Naim is among the first that equipped with school books the first Albanian school, inaugurated in March 7, 1887 in Korça, and the first school for girls as well, opened in 1892 in the same city.

Beside the works for adults "*Herds and crops*", "*Flowers of the summer*", "*History of Skanderbeg*", "*Qerbela*", etc, Naim published books for the first Albanian schools such as *General history*, *History of Albania*, *Knowledge* (in its second editions was named *Omneity*), and other three books as well where there is mainly a collection of his literary creativity for children:

- *Poetry for the first grades*. Bucharest 1886
- *Reader for boys*. First part, Bucharest 1886
- *Reader for boys*. Second part, Bucharest 1886

The short stories in the book *Reader for boys* qualified him as a talented prose writer for children, whereas the poetic art in the collection *Poetry for the first grades* established him as the founder of the poetry for children, respectively 37. It is a true mosaic, a mixture of proverbs written in verses, tales partly taken from the French fabulist of XVII century, La Fontaine, and some created from him and a lot of poems with philosophic topics such as *Words of the candle*, *Omneity*, *Human kind*, *Thought*, where he appears as an educator and a propagandist of the noble virtues of love for work, of honour, faith, justice, truth, humanism, will for learning and knowledge, love for one's country².

His most special merit in this literary creativity stands in the fact that he raised the literature for children at a higher artistic level, strongly affecting the other Renaissance figures.

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One of the features of the literary creativity for children is that he collects and writes poems, prose and creations addressed to the children where they are characters.

Some prose works for children of this writer have novel features, others have fable features. However, they have characteristics of emanating wisdom that bring knowledge on nature, society and universe in the world of children.

In the story *Wise maid*, the children learn about the sun and other stars. How were they created? How do they move in the space? Between the lines of these stories wise thoughts and advices are naturally conveyed, as it happens below when the mother says to her daughter: *"Read and learn to understand universe and God"*⁴.

He always aims the artistic and patriotic education of children. Naim Frashëri has written short prose as: *"Aristotle"*, *"Hippocrates"*, *"Themistocles"*, where historical knowledge, historical events and characters are unfolded, exploiting the essence of the historical anecdotes.

Thus, through the braveries and deeds of Skanderbeg, the writer builds his prose to outline in front of the children's eyes the Albanian glory through centuries. Indeed this works is an apotheosis of bravery, honour, courage, pride and above all is an apotheosis of freedom and independence.

Naim's Skanderbeg is represented as the first among the firsts, with strong democratic features despite the fact that he remains a legendary hero; he represented a perfect harmonization of the moral virtues with the most perfect body qualities and a powerful mind. In Skanderbeg, according to Naim, God has collected:

*All kindness of the world
And all the bravery
Wisdom and knowledge
Beauty and humanity*⁵....

Naim has not failed mentioning the hero's love for knowledge and education. Naim visualizes Skanderbeg as a fighter, protector of knowledge and education⁶.

Thus, he tells the anecdote about Themistocles, who is obliged to leave Sparta to go to Persia, and then he prefers drinking poison to leading the Persian army against his own country.

The prose about Aristotle is composed of a dialogue between the Greek philosopher and his alumnus, Alexander of Macedonia, for the reconstruction of the city of Stagira, which was surrounded by his father, Philip of Macedonia.

Hippocrates, presents the dialogue between the king of Persia, who invites Hippocrates to go and live with him, and the above mentioned Greek doctor who replies: I cannot abandon the need of my country and pursue your good.

Among dialogues and narrations the writer creates an interesting world for the children.

The prose of Naim Frashëri also includes a lot of descriptions, tales and anecdotes on the life of animals. Some of them are the following short stories: The dog and his loyalty, The horse, The dog, The lamb, The winter, etc. In the first short story, the reader cannot forget the character of the dog named Xhuf, who gives his life to protect his master's wealth.

Still, in *Naim Frashëri's* prose for children one can notice the romantic trend to reflect the historical topic intertwined with the modern topic; in this prose one can feel the realistic spirit which can be called as the domain spirit of the ideology of this prose. Whereas, artistically speaking the children's prose which rises from a realistic plan to a fantastic one is more successful than the above mentioned one⁷.

Prof. *Rexhep Qosja* righteously notices that: *Naim Frashëri*⁸, often starts his proses in the same way a tale starts. In this way, the apparently realistic proses, from time to time, are created according to tale patterns.

On this perspective, by analysing some of the writer's short stories, we can easily notice the nature of popular tales in his prose, such is the case of the first edition of the compilation *Reader for boys*; the prose: *A mother had a son and a maid* (The wise), *A boy always told lies* (The liar), *A mother had three little kids* (The awareness), *A man was on his way and got tired* (The man with no brain), *A mother who had three boys and a ring* (The good mother) etc.

Naim Frashëri makes use of the nature of the Albanian traditional prose, the tale and narration elements also for another reason. In this way the discourse is more appropriate for the psychological world of the children. They include wishes, prayers and greetings which create a rich emotional world for the children.

Another feature of his prose is that the situations, happenings and braveries which spurt of wise words and proverbs, and often they take the form of orally transcended legends which realise the knowledge, moral and artistic education of the children.

All the proses for children of Naim Frashëri are simple in content, they include general information, without psychological and thematic deepening which generally convey the moral ideas and instructions. They often put against each other contradictory ideas, the good and evil, the beauty and the ugliness, the wisdom and ignorance. *This*

mythological awareness to make the world their own, emphasizes Prof. Qosja, makes them interesting for the children's world, but makes them artistically simple.

So, by submitting in all ways the structure of the prose to the instructions with deep moral feelings, Naim Frashëri damages them artistically. For this reason some of his proses for children are more similar to a moral article than artistic prose⁹.

A very important place in N. Frashëri's literary works for children is occupied by **versifications**. This poetic art occupies a special place in "*Poetry for the first grades*" (1886), which is the first edition with verses in the Albanian literature for children, but also in the compilation *Paradise and the flying word* (1894).

Regarding quantity, there is more poetry than prose, but regarding the content, they are similar. Naim Frashëri's poems for children in general are composite, with a more intense meaning, therefore they are harder to assimilate. They are poems dedicated to children and grown-ups the same and for this reason they require the help of the teacher or parent.

We notice this in the poem *The words of the candle* (which is more for adults), where the poet expresses his mission as an educator, who the same way as a candle, must burn and blaze only to enlighten people's minds. As he has illuminist ideas, our poet seeks to morally perfect the man (the child), to convey to him the ideas for progress and civilisation.

He sings this way:

*Here among you have I risen
And aflame I am now blazing,
Just a little light to give you,
And I change your night to daytime!*

In the diverse poetic creativity of Naim Frashëri, the erudite poem occupies a considerable place, where special importance is given to erudite rise of man, especially of the children. He is also willing to sacrifice poetry for the disperse of knowledge. To popularize this kind of knowledge, in his own writings our poet has created poetic-human relationships with emotional nuances, according to the children's request and psychology.

In some creations the patriotic feelings of Naim also appear. So, in the poem *The Knowledge*, the poet tells how the Albanian people is among the first and the most ancient peoples who came from Hindi and occupied the European continent:

*The Pelasgians were the very first ones,
And their children, us, Albanians¹⁰...*

In these poems we notice the mastery of Naim as a writer and teacher to give children scientific knowledge in an original way, simple but attractive. Thus, our poet gives great importance to the explanatory poetry about knowledge, because he seeks to influence the young readers, to create in them righteous thoughts about the world, so that they do not submit themselves to religious prejudices.

A whole cycle of Naim's poems is dedicated to man's *moral rise*, education and schooling. Such are the *poems Humanity, Forgiveness, Meditation, The Truth, The words of the wise* and adopted fables of *La Fontaine and original fables written by him*.

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So in many poems of this cycle, the *Words of the wise*, from modern grounds for that time, he gives moral lessons and instructions, valuable for anyone, he makes the evaluation of pure human virtues and feelings, he talks about the importance of work and knowledge in a man's live, he criticizes vices, he glorifies the noble feelings of love for one's language, country, parents, friends, etc.

Despite from the generally didactic moral spirit, in poetry of such character we notice the careful craft of a great master of the Albanian language. In most of the cases the moral instructions are given laconically, through a quiet paternal tone and in a poetic way, by using for this purpose stylistic figures, simple phrases and associations which facilitate the assimilation of meanings with universalized values, such as:

*"If they learn,
To sing*

.....

*That wisdom
And humanity
And goodness*

.....

*The heart gets warmer
The soul gets bigger"¹¹*

According to the poet, knowledge is one of the primary, fundamental conditions for the man's moral rise. For him knowledge is the most valuable wealth of man, which always draws him out of poverty.

Or, in the "Words of a wise man", which is also written in verses, the value of knowledge is given indirectly. If it is true that knowledge is the mother of goodness, it is also true that the opposite, ignorance is the source of evil. It leads to stupidity and maliciousness.

*“Brigandage, maliciousness,
And all the evil there is
In all humanity
Are children to ignorance”¹²*

Naim wishes to teach the children to condemn lies, defamation, greed, hatred, vices:

*You have to live true,
And leave a good name behind¹³*

Charity is one of the important moral features of a man, which Naim would repeat more than once, being in the moral poetry written by him, or through the fables of La Fontaine, that in childhood one must develop kindness:

*Since childhood we must
Make kindness a part of us¹⁴*

Naim would show special care to another feeling: Love for one's country. Even though there are few poems which can be called national, Naim Frashëri has written many national verses:

*If man doesn't love his nation,
And his motherland,
He is not part of humanity
He doesn't love neither himself¹⁵*

Naim Frashëri wants a new education for children, based on knowledge and not religion.

The *fables* are very nice for the children. They are considered as the most beautiful creations of Naim Frashëri. One's attention is drawn by 23 fables which he adopted in a marvellous way from La Fontaine or he constructed them according to patterns of the popular fabulist. They were primarily published during 1885 in *Dituria* review, in a special rubric titled *“Truths and tales”* and the next year they were compiled in *“Poetry for first grades”*. In this adaptation we notice the original assistance of our writer in the thematic selection of the fables to make them appropriate for the situation as well as expanding their expressing values. The moral idea is generally clear from the development of the plot itself and from the action of the conventional characters, who are described in a simple style and by using specific artistic figures.¹⁶

The majority of the fables allude for phenomena of the Albanian reality, they express the protest against repressors, social injustices and they condemn the moral norms of rich classes and many damaging human vices.

So very naturally, through narrating in a calm tone, despite using a long verse, the author's message is clear in the fable *“The fox and the stork”*.

*The fox had found just a bone
In the throat it stuck and not go
The stork saw and it went to its rescue
Down the throat it slid and put the bone away,
The fox then rose and grabbed the stork by its throat*

.....
*The evil never quits its deeds,
So, his goodness is not to be believed¹⁷*

Their originality is characteristic for these fables. Naim has been really creative with them. He gets some details or elements from the source and processes and further develops them in his own expressions, in his individual style, with his poetic talent¹⁸

You can also notice the romantic spirit of life in them. The animals are humanised and they appear as carriers of human virtues and vices.

The author does not have only didactic and moralising purposes in the fables. Like the master La Fontaine, Naim also tries to give us a beautiful artistic creation in the first place. After the reader is satisfied with the attractive event, through different details, the dialogues and different behaviours of the animal characters, the author comes to the moral instruction. So, the moral instruction is almost always given at the end of the creation in the form of a proverb.

In the fable “*The locust and the ant*”, all other classical world fabulists make the lazy locust starve, but Naim acts differently. The ant gives her sufficient food to survive till spring and gives her an advice:

*The other time be careful,
before the weather gets wilder,
gather something in summer.*

Then it continues with the moralising instruction:

*He who doesn't work, you should know,
never has anything to eat¹⁹*

It's a wise and generous preaching, relevant to the character, ideals and temperament of our great poet.

Naim's fables are generally dominated by the narrative character. In some others the action takes place without the author's comments or interventions. And these are the most beautiful creations. The traditional spirit is present in these fables, where the author uses traditional locutions and phrases. Their beginning often resembles our tales, without details, but with a description of the setting where the event will take place. That's why Naim Frashëri's fables are almost original poetic creations.

In conclusion we can say that Naim Frashëri has enriched the Albanian literature for children with a diversity of contents and poetic features. But Naim Frashëri's merits as a writer for children, as a prose and poetry writer for children can be seen as a whole only if it is considered that at the time he wrote for the children in Albanian, there was no specially developed tradition in the Balkans or in Europe.

He started a new literary tradition which would be expanded and enriched by his successors. Therefore, for this contribution that he brought, Naim Frashëri deserved being named as the founder of Albanian literature for children and as its main representative during the National Renaissance.

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