

History, Politics and War in the Life of a Resistance Poet and Statesman¹

Walter Vori Lalich
Macquarie University
Sveučilište Macquarie, Australija

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Summary

Poet Vladimir Nazor had a key influence on the Croatian national consciousness with his poems, stories and myths reflecting current political and social difficulties and the fight between Good and Evil. His still popular works uplifted the national spirit from the start of his active life towards the end of the 19th century. Nazor made one of the most spectacular symbolic gestures throughout Europe during the Second World War by joining the antifascist national liberation movement. Nazor became a symbol of resistance. His role of a distinguished elder statesman extended after the war years, but recollections of some contemporaries raise interesting questions.

Keywords: Nazor, poet, antifascist, resistance, statesman

1. Introduction

This chapter aims to cover the political and social context that shaped Vladimir Nazor, not only as a major writer but also as a key public figure in Croatia during the Second World War. In the twilight of his life Nazor, through direct action became a public symbol of a new Dawn. He was the most controversial and popular person in the struggle of the Croatian people for national liberation and democracy against the subordination and the darkness hanging over Croatia and Europe during the Second World War. The focus is placed here primarily on the contemporary influences on his life, the creativity and activities that had established Nazor both as a key literary figure and as a symbol of national emancipation. However, the context of the period covering his own lifetime from 1876 to 1949 is not disconnected from the earlier history of a “nation that was for centuries forced into provinciality and opposition” (Supek, 2006: 136), or as Nazor himself put it even more radically in his wartime diary *With the Partisans* on 21.1.1943: *Our life so far was of no value: a life of slaves and servants* (1965b: 343). The preceding centuries conditioned the period when he himself rebelled, when something *unbelievable is happening* (Nazor, 1943, in Supek, 2006: 136). The Croatian nation started to resurrect its state from the ashes of

history (Supek, 2006: 136) as the Slavic and the Croatian sentiments protruded out of the depths of the springs buried long ago, according to Nazor (1965b: 344), the lifelong admirer and creator of myths.

The political, economic and social difficulties of the Croatian nation and its struggle are reflected in his poetry, myths, stories, speeches and other literary works. Very early in his career Nazor was described as a programmatic poet, and as one of the most important poets of the vitality of *Croatian energy* (Barac in Zidić, 1975: 271). In his method and developed characters, his work parallels that of his contemporary, but much better known, English modernist poet W.B. Yeats (Gjurgjan, 1995). In his time, Nazor was well known and appreciated in neighbouring countries, particularly in Slavonic ones. Nazor was very well known to the Italian fascist intelligence service and identified as *an unrelenting and uncompromising Croatian nationalist* because of his strong stand against Italian territorial pretensions to the Croatian Adriatic coast (Zidić, 1975 326-7). Still, the rich contribution of this grand man of literature due to political developments is being ignored by some among the nationalist segments whose forebears fed on his nationalist lines (A.B. Šimić in Zidić, 1975: 273-4). However, the main annual prize for Croatian literature carries his name, as do public places in many cities, and various schools including the one in Split from which he matriculated in 1894. This chapter is divided into four segments starting with a brief analysis of the historical context that impacted Nazor's worldview and continues with his reaction to probably the worst event in his lifetime, World War Two. By 1940 he feared that people were becoming dehumanized, but expressed a hope that political and social justice will overcome at the end (cited by Vučetić in Nazor 1965a: 22). His rebellion, departure from Zagreb to join the partisans in the antifascist struggle for a free democratic Croatia and the path to the greatest honours is woven together in the epilogue with the reflections of his close friend, Jozo Kljaković (1992), whose fate diverged.

2. Historical context

A brief introduction to the Croatian historical context and contemporary social and political environment is presented to assist comprehension of Nazor's literary work and engagement. He found inspiration, hope and strength in Slavic mythology and in the independent Croatian state in early medieval period. It expanded over three centuries from a small dukedom in central Dalmatia into Slavonia thus defining its northern borders (until today) with Hungary, and incorporating Bosnia and Herzegovina early in the tenth century. The aim of the Croatian dukes and, from 925 onwards, of its kings was to rule over the last remnants of the Byzantine Empire on the eastern Adriatic coast. They were successful despite strong efforts by Venice, which ruled the peninsula of Istria. After the defeat of the last Croatian king by a

Hungarian royal pretender in 1097, Croatia joined Hungary in a personal royal union in 1102 that lasted till 1918. Various royal families exchanged the throne until the Croatian parliament accepted the Austrian Habsburgs in 1527, and this decision was followed by the Hungarian nobility too.

However, one of the royal pretenders sold his royal rights over Dalmatia to Venice for 100,000 ducats in 1409. Napoleon liberated Istria and Dalmatia from Venetian rule, but also terminated the independence of the city of Dubrovnik in 1808. After his defeat Austria placed coastal provinces under the direct rule of Vienna, breaking the nexus of Dalmatia with the rest of Croatia which remained directly linked with Hungary. This meant the beginning of a century long struggle for the unification of Croatian territories. After the empire was reorganised as the Austro-Hungarian Dual Monarchy in 1867, Croatia was forced into a subservient position to Hungary (Lampe, 2000: 60-3). The northern port of Rijeka was detached from Croatia, and only the Hungarian language was allowed for official purposes on the railway line across Croatian territory to this port. At the same time Austria, in an attempt to attract a newly unified Italy, allowed the importation of cheap Italian wine that, together with a grapevine disease, phylloxera, led to the destruction of the wine industry in Dalmatia (Tanner, 2001:110). This caused large scale emigration, including from the island of Brač, where Nator was born. Dissatisfaction among Croatian and other Slavic nations in the Empire caused the search for new political solutions that included national independence, the pan-Slavic movement and the pan-South Slavic (Yugoslav) movements.

The dismemberment of Austria-Hungary at the end of the First World War did not bring much relief to the embattled Croatian nation. The peninsula of Istria, the cities of Rijeka and Zadar, and five islands were given to Italy by the victorious Allied powers as a reward for its opting for their side, completely ignoring the rights of self-determination by the Croatian majority (Tanner, 2001:114,119; Lampe, 2000: 111-4). The rest of Croatia was engulfed in further political difficulties as victorious Serbia had its own expansionary political aims (Obad, 2006: 219-234). The extensive negotiations that started already during the war were finalised in an agreement by which the South Slavic parts of the former empire joined with Serbia in December 1918. Although Yugoslavia provided barriers against further foreign aspirations on Croatian territories, it was at the same time a major disappointment.

The new kingdom, based mostly on a rural economy, was marked by many problems, including the further partition of Croatian territories through the administrative centralization, murder of leading members of the major Croatian political party, the Croatian Peasant Party, in the Belgrade Parliament in 1928, and the imprisonment of its leadership. Although Croatia also mostly had a rural economy, it was nevertheless one of the most urbanised and industrialised parts of the new kingdom. The king, Alexander, proclaimed a dictatorship in 1929, but was

killed in 1934 during a state visit to France by Croatian and Macedonian nationalists. Eventually, a new Belgrade regime restarted negotiations with the leadership of the Croatian Peasant Party that led to the reunification of the Croatian territories in 1939. However, Yugoslavia soon succumbed to the German attack in April 1941.

The leader of the Croatian Peasant Party, Dr Vladko Maček, rejected the German offer to rule in Croatia, but Ante Pavelić, the leader of Croatian nationalist Ustashe refugees who spent over a decade in exile in Italy, accepted it. The newly proclaimed Independent State of Croatia (NDH) was divided into two spheres of influence, German in the north and Italian along the coastline, while another Hitler ally, Hungary, annexed Međimurje, one of its northern regions (Lampe, 2000: 203-4). The new Croatian regime took over Bosnia and Herzegovina; consequently in such a state Croats made up barely more than a half of the population. The regime started to apply a policy of rectifying this ratio at the expense of Serbs and Jews, which caused an open rebellion by the Serbian minority in the July 1941. This was preceded by a rebellion of Communist party members who took up arms after the German attack on the Soviet Union in June 1941.

The first international agreement signed by Pavelić with Mussolini in Rome on the 18th May 1941 accepted an Italian prince as King of Croatia and ceded further parts of Dalmatia, including its historical cities of Split and Trogir to Italy. This ignited a third source of rebellion along the Adriatic coast. This widespread resistance in Croatia succeeded as *a miracle of World War Two*, according to Werner Heisenberg's pre-war student Ivan Supek (ibid, 116-7). It was a broadly based national liberation movement aiming to create a free, sovereign, democratic, united and federal Croatian state (Goldstein, 2006: 262-265; Iveković, 1945: 12-3). This authentic Croatian liberation movement was not a dogmatic communist revolution although they initiated and led it in a broad coalition (Supek, 2006: 117-22, 130-132). However the final outcome was the unlimited power in Communist hands at the end of the war (Lampe, 2000: 226-233).

3. Passionate struggle

Vladimir Nazor, a giant of Croatian literature, was not only, among its greatest literary figures but also one of the most influential Croatian intellectuals in the first half of the twentieth century. His output includes poems, epics, novels, stories, essays, articles, literary studies, political speeches and an exceptionally important war-time diary, altogether covering a period from 1893 till his death in 1949. His life spans a turbulent historical epoch for Croatia and its people who were administratively divided in Austria-Hungary and in one of its successor countries, royal Yugoslavia, until 1939 when the long demanded unification was achieved at last. In many of his works and speeches he emphasised his own nationality, never as a nationalist, but

within a wider Slavonic, Yugoslav, and general humanist framework. The struggles and misfortunes of his nation are reflected in his works throughout his long creative life (Kovačić cited in Zidić, 1975: 272).

His work was underlined by an optimism expressed as a victory of Good over Evil, of Light over Darkness (Šicel, 1978: 231; 1982: 140), except in the aftermath of the Great War which evidently deeply impacted him as he reverted to more intimate lyrical and reflective writings. To achieve majestic poetic effects he interwove his lyrics with myths, symbols, allegory and metaphors reflecting the inner-self and the outside reality (Novak, 2004: 192). He created myths to express his anguish and hope. The reality was harsh and his life was interspersed with many complex issues on which an ordinary human being could have little influence, least of all Croatians who deeply felt oppression and outside influences on their lives and destinies.

The support for his optimism he found in old Slavonic and Croatian mythology, which he expressed in his *Slavonic Legends* and *Croatian Kings* and were written in his early creative decades (see Danijel Džino in this volume). Moreover, Nazor resorts to that historical time in his potent message to people from his own region, Dalmatians, in June 1943, to rise up and defend their soil, which he recorded in one of his major wartime works, the diary *With the Partisans* (1965b: 385-8). In this message he draws on national pride, courage and defiance. One of his most popular epic poems, *Medvjed Brundo (The Bear Brundo)* is about the resistance against foreign incursion (Nazor, 1965a). It is a poem about an old bear who tries in a desperate act to prevent foreign invaders to cut down forest on his beloved great mountain, Velebit, to build golden palaces in Venice. The message is a very contemporary ecological one, the destruction of forests and animal life, but *Brundo* is allegorical representation of Croatians who although in unenviable position are not united. In an uneven struggle, heroes like *Bear Brundo* and old wolf, *Vukan*, vanish. Nazor was well aware that there was no easy path ahead for his country. Decades later he had to make a personal choice in such a struggle. This poem, written during the early days of First World War, comes after a series of works based on historical Croatian kings and Slavonic mythology. He deeply felt current political and social issues and responded with patriotic poetry and the creation of myths that reflected the aspirations of his countrymen at a time of trouble.

He sought support and inspiration for his creativity in nature and in particular in the local Mediterranean environment where the sun is a source of life. Nature as a major source of inspiration and support (Novak, 2004: 193) provided Nazor with a creative strength and continuous ingenuity over half a century. To him the landscape personifies life, and he wrote poems about olives, grapes, rocks, pines and grasshoppers (Nazor, 1965a; Šicel, 1978: 235). The Croatian migrant writer Bogdan Radica (1996: 382) puts an emphasis on his belonging to the tradition of Dalmatian literature, which is essentially a Mediterranean one reflected in love for the sea,

waves, sand, and the afternoon sunshine. The joy and support found in nature makes Nazor a very contemporary writer despite the passage of time.

However, in one among his very impressive stories „Water” („Voda”) (Nazor, 1965b) Nazor describes the hardships of life on his island at the time of severe drought, despair and selfishness through a fight for a drop of water at the collective expense. Although Nazor did not visit his birthplace for nearly thirty years, he was nevertheless acutely aware of the hardships of life on the island of Brač and throughout the country and also of emigration as a major social issue at that time. Some among his key poems are about enslaved labour on foreign galleons and emigration, and their dismal effects upon families and existence (Nazor, 1965a: 118, 151; Zidić, 1971).

A teaching career brought Nazor to the peninsula of Istria with its Croatian majority in the early days of the 20th century. When Italy took over in 1918, Nazor moved to nearby localities in newly established Yugoslavia, which was considered initially a guarantor of Croatian territories from the external aspirations. This experience and the political context of life in this very sensitive area deeply affected his feelings, political thoughts and impacted on his literary expression. As a poet of neo-romantic and symbolic modernist expressionism he wrote in the standard Croatian language (*štokavski*), with which he apparently was not very familiar (Šicel, 1982: 124, 127). However, in some of his works he reverted to the more familiar dialect from Istria (*čakavski*) which enabled him to express his feelings beyond the standard language, although it differed from the same dialect used in his birthplace in Dalmatia.

This linguistic gesture underlined his political sensibility and awareness of a hostile social and political environment and the suffering of ordinary persons. Driven by his national sentiments he reintroduced *čakavica* into literary practice, the dialect in which the very first literary works in the Croatian language were written five centuries earlier (Nazor, in Zidić 209-12). In his great fable about a giant *Veli Jože* (*The Great Joe*) (Nazor 1965b) and a poem „Galiotova pesan” („Galleon rover’s poem”) (Nazor 1965a) he identifies his most intimate sensibilities and responses to the plight of his countrymen (Šicel, 130). Nazor fits well with the description by the great Italian revolutionary and liberal nationalist, Mazzini (2005: 76-7), that Slavonic poets reflect a real life and a spirit of action expressing a struggle of a confined nation. Reflecting on real life issues under aggravated political conditions Nazor created in 1908 an everlasting poem and a legendary giant who resisted foreigners. His giant *Veli Jože* eventually became a major revolutionary inspiration to the Croatian majority in Istria many decades after he created it (Šicel 1978:5).

4. Towards a New Croatia²

Nazor passionately loved his homeland and followed its political fortunes not only spiritually, but without any political affiliations and not taking sides until very

late in his life when he expressed himself in the most direct way (Novak, 2004: 191). He distanced himself from the NDH (Independent State of Croatia) regime and did not support it in any way. Milovan Djilas (1977: 212, 303) claims that Nator's decision to join the Partisans was prompted not only by idealism, the Yugoslav idea and Slavic sentiment, but also by the fascists' wartime atrocities. This nationalist bard (Novak, 2004:194), together with another much younger poet, Ivan Goran Kovačić, joined the Partisans at a very difficult time in the last days of 1942 at the age of 65 years, burdened with health issues and well after his retirement from the public service. He left the comfort of his villa built just before the war in Zagreb to join the fight against fascism, writing a programmatic poem „Čamac na Kupa” („A boat on river Kupa”) (Nator, 1965a: 259) clearly delineating his desire to support a fight for freedom. In this poem, a political manifesto, he expresses his hope that this rundown little boat would carry the whole of Croatia across this river that *divides Good from Evil* to the other side, towards difficult but holy paths of honour and liberty. Before his symbolic crossing of Kupa river, Nator wrote in 1941 a poem about the Apocalyptic beasts taking over the Earth, and us not knowing until the last breath that ...*Either we are running in front, or after them...Demons, Demons* (ibid: 257). His *Tempest* cycle of poems written that year, burdened with the anxiety and foreboding of spilt blood (ibid: 245-252), is indicative of Nator's feelings. The old poet felt a need to make a loud statement.

His personal decision and unexpected departure were a shock as he was considered to be a nationalist poet, not a leftist, least of all a communist (Iveković, 1970: 126; Augustinčić, cited by Radica, 1984:345), and hence it acquired the significance of an *exodus* in the words of the leading diarist of that time (Horvat, 1989: 17). Furthermore, Horvat speculates that Nator did not follow a political program, but a desire for a glimpse into a new world, comparing it with Moses' anticipation of a Promised Land. The confused NDH government spread the news that he was kidnapped, and many times later that he died or was killed, but he evidently thought that it was they who had kidnapped the Croatian state and heritage (Kadić, 1987: 287). His decision had a shock effect on both sides of the civil war. Another émigré author, Ante Kadić asserts that his arrival was equal to a Partisan victory on the battlefield. It was a sensation, for the best and the oldest Croatian poet was among the Partisans in the forests in Croatia (Radica, 1984: 235).

The front page headline of the resistance newspaper (*Vjesnik*) published on liberated territory in January 1943 was: *The greatest Croatian poet is among us*. *Vjesnik* also carried his speech to the communist youth organisation given on the 2.1.1943, which was ecstatically received (Iveković, 1970:104-5) and where he states*whilst for centuries our people shed blood for foreign interests...* Now, it is not so. We are giving our blood, but for ourselves..... I am speaking as a Croat. You, communists, are among the first ones who can save the Croatian nation from a very

critical situation in which it has found itself just yesterday... At the end of this first among many wartime speeches, Nazor concludes with a wish to live long enough to see something new that must come after such a tempest and wickedness, and after such a stern will to resist it. He was of opinion that it is not a time to remain a naïve passive observer and hence indirectly supportive of the occupying Axis forces (Nazor, 1965b: 348, 386).

This old man understood with historical timing the critical state of human civilisation and felt that it was his human duty to participate in this fight and that he has to make a decisive step, leave the adulation in Zagreb and take a boat across the Kupa river to join the liberation movement. In his own words he had to *run away from serfdom and shame... to breathe the freedom imbued with the feelings of national honour and human dignity...* (ibid: 386). His departure to join the Partisans was among the key moments in the civil war and revolution in Croatia, and in the rest of Yugoslavia (Iveković, 1970:233). Nazor, through his active poetical and political engagement, became one of the leading figures in a broadly based national liberation movement in Croatia (National Liberation Front) (Iveković, 1970: 126). He felt that the Man within him dropped a heavy burden and received new wings as he found an aim in those ominous days for the Croatian nation and the humanity through eradication of the Evil and extolling the Goodness (ibid: 386-8)

He was elected very soon as a president of the Executive Committee of the first meeting of the Antifascist Council of Croatia (ZAVNOH) that assembled on the liberated territory in the heart of Croatia in Otočac in June 1943. After the fall of Italy he was re-elected to the same position at its second meeting in October that year while the liberated territory was continuously expanding (Iveković, 1970:235-7). At its first session Nazor rejected any foreign interference in the future of the country and continued *Alone, without any help, with our own blood and sacrifices we shall free ourselves, with our people...we will in a new Yugoslavia build the new Croatia according to our and our people`s desires* (in Supek, ibid: 121). The liberated territory expanded throughout the war despite the heavy assaults by the German and Italian armies, Croatian NDH Ustashe and home guard units, and Serbian Chetnik (irregular royalist) forces, although its centre changed locations due to fortunes of war. However, the NDH regime had lost control of most of its state territory already by 1943 (Lampe, 2000: 219, 222). In reality the liberation movement was an alternative government (Tanner, 2001: 163) over a large territory with various forms of political organisations, diverse cultural, educational and artistic activities, and where newspapers, various publications and propaganda materials were published. The expansion of schools is a good indicator of the movement`s expansion during the war, from 252 schools in 1942/43 to 915 in 1943/4 with 33674 students and 965 teachers of whom half were qualified (Iveković, 1970: 190). These data describe the strength of the liberation movement and the importance of the role of the old

poet as the Executive President of the Assembly representing the national liberation movement in Croatia.

Towards the end of 1943 the second meeting of the Anti-Fascist Liberation Movement for Yugoslavia (AVNOJ) denounced the royal government and proposed a post-war federal structure (Lampe, 1000:221). Following this decision, Nazor as president of ZAVNOH, at its third and last meeting in the town of Topusko on 8 and 9 May 1944, declared that from then on this body would assume the role of the Parliament (Sabor) of a democratic and federal republic of Croatia (ZAVNOH 1945: 23). In the concluding part of his presidential address he remarked that *these are fateful historical days when we are building ourselves a joint future, a better life for our people and the whole of humanity, and we are a small nation, we never had luck so far, but at last a happy moment has arrived, where after many battles and hardships we are taking up a visible honourable place in human history*". At this meeting, Vladimir Nazor was elected as the first President of the Croatian Parliament. His concluding words were not only that Fascism is in its death throes and that Freedom is coming, but also that most likely the first tasks of the legislative body, which is built on solid foundations, would be the reconstruction and advancement of living conditions (ZAVNOH 1945: 62, 77).

In this process the elderly poet with a weak body and ill health rejuvenated himself (Iveković, 1970:106). His words carried a new strength and he was welcomed everywhere with gratitude and adoration. He found a new energy and was prolific during the war, writing among many others an important anti-war poem „To an Orthodox mother” („Majci Pravoslavnoj”) that transcends the national and religious divide; it is about the Serbian blood that was spilt on Croatian soil. Despite his age and debilitating illnesses Nazor withdrew with the Partisans to Montenegro and Bosna-Herzegovina (Iveković, 1970: 257), but they took good care of him (Kadić, 1987: 287) during two large joint Axis military attacks around the rivers Neretva and Sutjeska where many Partisans fell (Lampe, 2000: 220). He writes about this experience in his diary *With the Partisans* (1965), while his travails were witnessed by Djilas (1977: 3113) who accompanied him back to Croatia. The ailing Nazor had to be carried when there was no horse available, but his spirit never gave up.

In his work Lampe places an emphasis on the rise of the separate Croatian Communist led liberation front (2000: 223). It was a Croatian liberation movement where communists had a major role, but they were not the sole participants as it included among others a large number of Croatian Peasant Party rank and file too. Nevertheless, other struggles were going on at the same time, mostly as a consequence of the ideological differentiations within the Croatian Communist Party between its fundamentalist bolshevik and democratic factions, the latter having had aligned with the left stream of the Croatian Peasant Party (Supek, 2006:116-9). This ideological infighting had been intermittent since the pre-war years. In Croatia this struggle was

focused on the general secretary of the Croatian Communist party Andrija Hebrang, who was most supportive of a broad democratic alliance and of Croatia as a federal republic (Tanner, 2001: 164,182). Over time Tito and his comrades disconnected him from everyday political life in Croatia by giving him a ministerial position in Belgrade and replaced him with more dogmatic followers. Hebrang died under mysterious circumstance while incarcerated, although according to most assessments he was killed in Belgrade in 1948. The subsequent developments in a country that was, before the Stalin – Tito split, in supposedly the most *advanced* stage towards socialism of all the east European states (Judt, 2007: 173) had dire consequences for Croatia which did not recover politically for decades, but also led to the breakup of Yugoslavia.

Nazor's fictional poetic hero, the sleeping giant, *Veli Jože*, has woken up as a symbolic hero in the uprising against Italian fascism in Istria and for national emancipation during the War in 1943 (Žanić, 1998: 325). Over time *Veli Jože*, through the school curriculum and its spontaneous acceptance by the public, became a symbol of Croatian national energy and resistance and was clearly identified with not only the national sentiment of the Croatians from Istria. The message sent to the poet by the Partisans from the northern Adriatic peninsula was that the giant has awoken and is engaged in a fight against fascist tyranny. To this message Nazor responded by putting a contemporary symbol, the red star, on the forehead of the giant (Bratulić, 1987: 195, cited by Zanić, 325). However, when Italy collapsed, the democratic Croatian liberation movement, including the Central Committee of the Croatian Communist Party and the ZAVNOH Assembly leadership, ignored the declaration of the Croatian national liberation movement in Istria for reunion with Croatia proper (Strčić, 2004: 265). They were apparently more concerned with what Moscow would think, since Stalin recognised Istria, not as Croatian national land, but as Italian political territory, and therefore the pre-eminence of the Italian Communist Party in that region. It took the Croatian leadership ten days to change their mind, and declare unification after having requested the people of Istria to hold a new assembly under the auspices of the representative of the Croatian Communist Party, and to declare unification with Yugoslavia also. Nevertheless, very soon they were rebuked by Tito and his headquarters who insisted that such questions had to be dealt with at the Yugoslav level (Goldstein, 2006: 265; Tanner, 2001:164). This was one among many differences between the two bodies and the competing ideological factions that surfaced in the midst of the war.

Even Nazor did not escape such dark clouds. As the executive president of the Anti-Fascist Council of Croatia (ZAVNOH) he insisted on the need for public use of the standard Croatian language. After all, he wrote in his 1942 collection *The last harvest* a poem titled „About the language” the following.... *In this breakdown and trampling of everything. Never has a Croatian known better. That he has to live and die*

with his own language (Nazor, 1965a: 254). His comment that Croats are insulted because the official news bulletin used the *language of Belgrade streets (čaršija)* was not welcome and it was duly reported to Djilas who transmitted the complaint to the head of the secret service OZNA, Aleksandar Ranković, in September 1944 (Dedijer, 1981: 842-3). Furthermore, Nazor was reminded by Djilas that his role as the President of ZAVNOH was purely a symbolic rather than an executive one as Nazor thought (Tanner, 2001:176). This was, according to Djilas (ibid: 317), the cause of tension between the Croatian leadership and Nazor. He accepted the suggestion to consult with Hebrang on all major issues. Soon afterwards, in July 1944 he was taken to Italy to recover from his illnesses.

In Italy he was lodged in Grumo in Appulia province, close to Bari, in a villa *of a good Italian family*. He had special care, a nurse who took a particular care of him to the point of restricting access and visits. According to Kadić (1978: 288) she was asked to keep a diary of events. After recovery in mid-August 1944 he met with Tito in Bari who promised him a return to Vis in a fortnight. In the meantime he was transferred to Cozzano where four guards looked after him, and where he finished his diary and had it sent to Moscow for publication (Kadić, 1978: 292-3). He arrived soon at the island of Vis on the 9th September 1944 and received the highest state recognition and acclamation by citizens wherever he went. Very soon as island after island and city after city were liberated, he visited them, made speeches, and celebrated Easter. In Split, where he attended high school, he received a heroes' welcome, later moving to Šibenik and Zadar where he placed *an emphasis on the Croatian spirit of this city*. After nearly a half a year in Dalmatia, he finally arrived in Zagreb on 13th May 1945, where he made his first public appearance three days later at the central city square, Jelačić Square (Kadić, 1978: 296-8), after nearly two and half years at the battlefield with the pen. Very soon, on 24th July he was elected president of the Croatian Sabor (Parliament).

Nazor belonged to the generation that hoped to achieve a political utopia that would be the best possible solution for Croatia. Like many other he accepted the post-Versailles royal Yugoslavia as a realistic option in given international circumstances, but it became a major source of disappointment, a failure. A new, post-war, Yugoslavia reinvigorated through war and resistance was to many Croats an acceptable option as it promised social and political reforms and equality. Nazor recognised Tito as the leader who would achieve such aspirations. In his *Legends about Comrade Tito* (1946) published at the end of the war he apostrophises *Tito rides ahead of the long Partisan column* indicating his strong belief in the days after the liberation. However, once in Zagreb, he started writing his daily thoughts where he lamented also: *The storm has caught up with me too. At the end, it brought me to this position; it did not give me Power, but Honour!* (Kadić, 1978: 298). Something of this turbulence in the feelings of the old man of literature was also caught by his

old friend, the painter Jozo Kljaković who visited him for an hour in Italy. By the end of the war Nazor was the leading personality in the political life of Croatia as the first president of its Parliament that emerged through the struggle for democracy. In that role he witnessed a takeover of the government by well organised communist forces who rode to success on the back of a broadly supported popular national liberation movement (Kljaković, 1992: 273). By 1947 the Croatian parliament with the old Nazor at its head was not making any major decisions as the new officially federal state was again centralized, and again all major decisions were being made in Belgrade (Goldstein, 2008: 418). The democratic aspirations of many participants in this difficult struggle for freedom were destroyed by a doctrinaire communist regime (Goldstein, 2008: 414-421). At the same time the worsening of relations with the USSR disturbed Nazor too. However, he took the side of Tito without any hesitation, although like many he was fearful of the consequences (Kadić, *ibid*: 299). But his collection of political hymns and odes to Tito, Stalin and the Red Army written in early 1948 was never published as the political situation suddenly changed. Soon after, Nazor died the following year.

5. Epilogue

Nazor was well guarded in Zagreb, had a large staff, and kept at a distance from the daily events

that were going on in a not so idealistic world. Kadić (1978: 298) makes the point that this good natured elder went on living in his magic tower far from the reality of the vengeance and destruction of the very ideals he went to fight for. But was it really so? A contemporary Croatian witness, Bogdan Radica (1996: 381), remarks that even in his last days Nazor did not succumb to conformism irrespective of his position. It is very probable that Nazor was well aware of the forthcoming turn of events well before the end of the war. In a major biography of Nazor, the author, Žeželj (1973), mentions many visits to Nazor during his stay in Italy, but not a visit by his old friend Jozo Kljaković, a Croatian painter, who himself provides some important insights about the mood of his friend in the days preceding the Allied victory in his memoir *In the Contemporary Chaos*, published initially in Buenos Aires in 1952.

Together with Ivan Mestrovic, a leading Croatian sculptor, both anti-communists, and formerly leading proponents of the Yugoslav idea and patriotism, Kljaković was incarcerated by the NDH regime for four and half months (Tanner, 2001:157). This was of a great embarrassment to Pavelić who eventually allowed them to migrate to Italy in 1943 where they spent the rest of the war. Kljaković came down south to Bari from Rome where he lived and worked. He remained there for 19 days. During this eye-opening trip he was eventually allowed to make a short visit to his old friend. Nazor welcomed him with open arms and a hug, but to the painter's surprise

a tear fell on the poet's beard. Why a tear, Kljaković asked himself later; what went across Nazor's mind when he saw him? Today, when Nazor has climbed high, he cries! Kljaković could not find answers to many questions that he asked himself while describing this meeting. He considered that Nazor was completely destroyed physically and spiritually. To him, Nazor looked very tired.

However, Nazor then berated him in a loud voice - why did he not join them in the forest, and he continued with harsh comments about some of their common acquaintances (Kljaković, 1992: 271-4). Nazor then continued with a lengthy monologue, read his new poems, described war events, criticised other artists for not joining the war effort, adding that they have bad references, and that he, Kljaković, probably has the best one among those who did not join the Partisans. Nazor talked a lot, but Kljaković claimed that he did not tell him much at all, and wrote: *He was not even aware what he was talking about - Nazor was not alive. That was a living skeleton, and only his creative will kept him alive. I bid farewell to him with the same feeling as if I were saying goodbye to a dead Nazor.* Kljaković made the decision not to join Nazor and the Partisans in their victory, but to follow the refugees, the defeated ones, including his former gaolers, to Argentina in 1947. Eventually he returned to Croatia in 1968 where he died the next year. His memoirs *In the Contemporary Chaos* were published in Zagreb in 1992. Many questions could be raised from this story. The well intentioned friend, an artist, made a major life decision on basis of this meeting with his old friend. Despite the outflow of words, Nazor did not tell much that would have encouraged his friend to join him on his return to a liberated home. The sharp painter's eyes penetrated deep into the soul of the old poet, they discerned something that the old poet did not tell or dare to tell him. The symbolic power was betrayed by a lack of appropriate words. It comes as a great surprise that a man rich with words who influenced so many could not mount an argument that would have influenced his old friend. They went across different seas, one to his old and another to his new home.

6. Conclusion

The focus of this text is on the part played by this elder statesman of Croatian literature during the Second World War. Vladimir Nazor influenced Croatian cultural life for many decades, and his influence extended beyond his death. The numerous literature on his works provides the best assessment of his literary significance for this nation. Although he was well known in neighbouring countries and translated into continental European languages, not only the Slavic ones, there is little recognition of his works and significance of his literary and public engagement in the English language area. It was considered necessary to discuss briefly the socio-political context that framed his literary and political engagement. Some of his major earlier

works are introduced with an attempt to indicate a poetical pathway leading to the moment when he made a clear and definite, not only political, but also poetical and symbolic stand towards the end of his life. At the age of 65, as a nationalist poet, he joined the liberation movement led by the communists in Croatia. He did not fight with a gun, but with pen, speeches and by mere presence among the Partisans. It is difficult to find another such example in the Second World War history. He never stopped writing, not even during the war hardships he experienced personally and produced a rare first hand war document, his Diary with the partisans. He saw his dream come true, a liberated Croatia. But was it what he expected? In the last segment of the text a focus is placed on his contemporaries, of whom one was a very close friend, who witnessed the drama that was revolving in his soul. The concluding question could be: was there something that Nazor did not write down after years of powerful symbolic messages projected in his myths, poems and stories and the pivotal role he had during the war.

7. Endnotes

1. I would like to thank Steven Kosovich for giving me access to his library and for helping me to improve the text with most valuable suggestions. I am grateful to the Croatian Studies Centre, Faculty of Arts, Macquarie University, Sydney for access to its library and to David Knowles for editing the final draft.
2. The title of Nazor's Presidential speech at the Third session of ZAVNOH (Anti-fascist Council of the National Liberation Movement of Croatia), 8.5.1944.

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Povijest, politika i rat u životu pjesnika otpora i državnika

Sažetak

Ovo poglavlje predstavlja velikog hrvatskog pjesnika Vladimira Nazora čitalačkoj publici engleskog jezičnog područja kojoj je ne samo slabo poznat njegov književni doprinos hrvatskoj kulturi već i njegov veliki moralni i simbolički značaj u antifašističkoj borbi. Vladimir Nazor je imao ključni utjecaj na hrvatsku nacionalnu svijest pjesmama, pričama i mitovima koji su odražavali sveprisutne političke i socijalne napetosti. Njegovi i danas popularni radovi uzdizali su nacionalni duh od samog početka njegovog aktivnog književnog rada, bili su vjeran odraz stremljenja jednog okovanog naroda. Tekst ukratko opisuje tisućljetna politička zbivanja na hrvatskom području nužna za predstavljanje Nazorova rada i njegove konačne političke odluke iskazane odlaskom u partizane. Nazor je učinio jednu od najspektakularnijih simboličkih gesta u Europi za vrijeme Drugog svjetskog rata kada je aktivno

pristupio antifašističkom narodno-oslobodilačkom pokretu postavši simbol otpora i nositelj najznačajnijih državničkih dužnosti Hrvatske. Borio se perom i govorima prošavši veliki dio oslobođenog teritorija i napisao rijedak dokument ratnog razdoblja, dnevnik S partizanima. Kroz to isto vrijeme svjedok je internih previranja i branitelj integriteta hrvatskog jezika. Njegova uloga cijenjenog starijeg državnika nastavlja se i za poratnih godina. Ali, zapažanja nekih suvremenika o pjesnikovom intimnom raspoloženju u trenucima vrhunca slave ostavljaju ipak mnogo toga otvorenim, postavlja se pitanje nije li nešto ostalo iza Nazora što on nije nikada zapisao.

Ključne riječi: Nazor, pjesnik, antifašista, otpor, državnik