FAN S. NOLI'S "AUTOBIOGRAPHY": A TRANSTEXTUAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract

Among the works of Fan S. Noli, his "Autobiography" holds a significant place. By first examining the nature of the narrative and briefly outlining its content, it becomes clear that the work is not merely non-fictional writing, but also contains elements of literary writing. Although this text has been analyzed in certain segments and has, in turn, aided the analysis of other works by the same author, this study aims to provide a more in-depth transtextual analysis. The study is grounded in the model of transtextuality, utilizing the classifications established in literary theory by Gérard Genette. Through examples drawn from the "Autobiography," this research demonstrates that every text functions and derives meaning in relation to other texts, as well as through extratextual connections. These relationships are manifested as intertext, architext, metatext, hypertext, and paratext. Within this framework, specific instances of allusion, pastiche, and commentary, among others, have been identified. Conversely, "autometatexts" and "sister-texts" are not present.

Keywords: "Autobiography", Fan S. Noli, transtextuality, non-fictional writing, literary text.

1. Introduction

There are several reasons why Noli's "Autobiography" is a suitable work for intertextual analysis. Unlike other works by this author, this text has been less studied. Furthermore, both the autobiography as a genre, a model of non-fictional prose and Noli's "Autobiography" specifically, are texts that reveal extratextual relationships, as well as, at the very least, metatextual ones. In one perspective on the autobiography as a genre, it is stated:

> The history of autobiography would be therefore, above all, a history of its mode of reading: comparative history where we would be able to bring into dialogue the reading contracts proposed by different types of texts (because it would be of no use to study autobiography all by itself, since contracts, like signs, make sense only through the play of opposition), and the different types of readings really practiced on these texts. (Lejeune, 1989).

Our research is determined, in part, by an insistence on examining pre-postmodern Albanian literary works through the lens of intertextuality. This approach stems from the objective of illustrating the premise that every text is an intertext. While various theoretical frameworks could serve as a basis for such an analysis, such as those proposed by Bloom, J. Kristeva, or Bakhtin, Gérard Genette's model appears the most practical for this purpose. Specifically, this study aims to identify, within the "Autobiography", the five types of transtextuality as defined by Genette: paratext, metatext, architext, intertext, and hypertext (Genette, 1997). Furthermore, when considering the internal classifications within each category, one must also account for elements such as citations, allusions, introductions, marginal notes, titles, subtitles, commentary on a text (without necessarily quoting it directly), and a secondary text written upon a primary text, among others.

Methodology

This paper presents a qualitative study of Fan S. Noli's work, "Autobiography," drawing upon the theory of intertextuality. Among existing models and typologies, the typology developed by Gérard Genette is employed. Utilizing these theoretical frameworks, the paper analyzes "Autobiography" by identifying examples of the five fundamental types and subtypes of transtextuality. Through this analytical approach, the study aims to demonstrate how the text

is constructed and how it functions as an open system, establishing relationships beyond the text itself.

"Autobiography" through the Lens of Transtextual Relations

The "Autobiography" recounts events from Noli's life, beginning with details about his birthplace, Ibrik Tepe, and his childhood. In describing his birthplace, the narrative focuses on Noli's childhood, presenting a bright picture; a significant portion is dedicated to figures such as his grandfather Mitrush, his uncle Tasi, his grandmother Sumba, and his mother Marija, as well as his own aversion to school. The inclusion of these details, and the manner in which they are presented, lends genuine literary value to the first part of the work, which centers on Noli's childhood.

From the very beginning, while discussing Ibrik Tepe, the author draws a parallel to Christ, noting a correspondence regarding the date of birth, as well as the fact that his birthplace would cease to exist after having brought forth a missionary. Although autobiographies are classified as non-fictional texts, this particular work contains elements that align it with a literary style of writing. In the opening sections, we read: "From the day when uncle Tasi gave him this lecture, Fan Noli, in his fantasy, holding the New Testament in one hand, jumped over his horse Rosinant and became a knight of Skenderbeg as a missionary of Christ among the Albanian people (Noli, 1968, p. 29).

In this context, we can also consider the use of the third person in the work, where Noli appears as both narrator and character. According to scholar Ymer Çiraku, drawing on the correspondence between Krist Maloku and Noli, it was upon Maloku's recommendation that Noli decided to write in the third person. Specifically, he chose to speak about himself using the third-person biographical model; this approach externally distanced the author from the character being depicted, who was, in fact, the author himself, while simultaneously granting him the freedom to immerse himself in both the real and fictional realms of his own life story, with the prerogative of an omniscient author (Çiraku).

After presenting a vivid picture of his childhood, the text describes his father's passions, such as church music, and his heroes. By providing details regarding his political activities, the work facilitates an analysis of the poems written after the Revolution. Furthermore, these details offer a clear insight into the intensity of Noli's hatred toward Ahmet Zogu. It allows us to understand who his heroes were, such as Christ, Skanderbeg, Napoleon, and others, as well as the reasons for his admiration for them.

In Avni Spahiu's monograph on Noli (Spahiu, 2007), it is stated that Noli's "Autobiography" was written in 1950, a time when Noli had already concluded his political, literary, and social activities. According to the scholar, the reason why Noli wrote his "Autobiography" in the third person, a style reminiscent of ancient texts concerning religious figures, should perhaps be sought in the need to present a clear image of Noli as a leader; specifically, because:

> "Distance in writing is achieved by adopting a perspective detached from historical viewpoints, a stance that enables an independent assessment of one's own work, rather than viewing it through the prism of God or eternity; concepts to which the author aspires and with which he identifies." (Spahiu, 2007, p. 39).

Based on transtextual relations, it is readily apparent that an architextual relationship is established as early as the title, given that the designation itself defines the genre. The reader is advised and encouraged to write an autobiography; Cervantes describes his own life in "Don Quixote", while Shakespeare writes his autobiography through his plays. Also mentioned are examples of autobiographical elements in the works of Edgar Allan Poe (specifically in "The Raven"), Paul Valéry, and the French poet Félix Arvers. In this way, the text directs our attention to the relationship between literature and the literary texts that preceded it. Thus, the

text under analysis functions, in certain parts, as a metatext, while simultaneously serving as a pastiche.

The figures with whom Noli identified, along with his command of several foreign languages, his ability to discern deeper significance within world masterpieces, and his yearning for democratic processes, all emerge as instances of intertextuality, specifically in the form of historical, cultural, and literary allusions. His identification with Christ establishes a connection between the text and biblical discourse, more precisely, with biblical motifs. The multi-layered nature of the "Autobiography" is achieved by linking biblical characters to the political event of the Revolution and to the turbulent developments of the era in which the author found himself. All of this is simultaneously interwoven with philosophical ideas.

Noli's identification with his heroes was not limited to his childhood. The title of one section of his work, "Daniel in the Lion's Den," is particularly interesting. This section describes Zogu and an assassination attempt against him, while simultaneously referencing the heroes Noli held up as examples. He concludes this section with the words:

> "During the perilous siege of the Parliament, which lasted about four hours, Fan Noli, for the first time in his life, did not ask himself: 'How would Napoleon, Skanderbeg, or Jesus act in such a situation?' He knew that the answer to this question could be found in the Old Testament, in the episodes that recount the story of Daniel in the lions' den." (Noli, 1968, p. 95).

Although the work in question is quite rich in specific details, it contains no reflections or factual data regarding the author's own literary works; in other words, there is no distinct section that serves as a form of auto-metatext. Instead, Noli simply classifies his works into the following categories: religious, historical (a category that includes his "Autobiography" itself), journalistic writings ("feuilletons"), musical compositions, and literary works. Within the scope of his literary works written in Albanian, he includes the drama "Israelites and Philistines", the poetry collected in "The Album" ("Albumi"), and his translations of literary works by foreign authors.

Given that autobiographies sometimes provide significant information concerning an author's specific literary works, this brings to mind the ideas explored by Ann Jefferson, who analyzes the relationship between autobiography and literary fiction within the framework of intertextuality. Although she approaches this subject by examining the distinctions between the novel and the autobiography, it is worth noting that she explicitly employs the terminology of Gérard Genette. She asserts that "...autobiographies create a metatext in relation to novels..." (Ann Jefferson, 2003, p. 324), although she does not manage to find a specific term to describe the relationships between one text and other texts within an author's creative corpus. Regarding these relationships, she states:

> "These relationships are not actively intertextual, as they do not involve any commentary, whether explicit or implicit, on one text through another, nor any transformation resulting from the rewriting of one text by another; ...Given that we are dealing here with texts that stem from the same 'trunk,' I have coined the term 'sister-text' to describe the relationships between one novel and another, as well as between a novel and an autobiography, when the latter is viewed as a continuation of the former." (Ann Jefferson, 2003).

Thus, notwithstanding the classification applied to his works, the "Autobiography" cannot be considered a "sister text," as Noli's writing focuses far more on other aspects of his life's journey. In general, throughout all of Noli's literary works, we encounter Noli's own life, his disappointments, the Revolution, because the prevailing connections between creative work and the socio-political context (which can be encompassed within a broader definition of "text") constitute the primary force influencing every aspect of the text (Wharton, 2003, p. 246).

Conclusion

From the very beginning of reading "Autobiography," one perceives the layering and the relationships that the text unfolds. The use of the third person and the distance established within the narrative clearly signal that this is not a purely non-fictional text; rather, it is infused with literary elements. Throughout the analysis, a significant number of transtextual relationships were identified. "Autobiography" allows for the highlighting of historical, cultural, and literary allusions, as well as architextual, intertextual (in the sense of pastiche), and metatextual elements. These emerge from a dialogue with the issues that preoccupied Noli, manifested through his identification with specific figures and his engagement with the political situation and social context. Thus, these transtextual relationships are the very foundation upon which the work is built. The meaning of the text arises where a life narrative intertwines with various voices, memories, and influences, reflecting an affirmative stance toward the tradition of autobiographical writing, both within our own literature and in literature more broadly. Facts are interwoven and mediated by artistic tones, resulting in a text that functions as a mosaic of fiction and non-fiction. This work represents a modest attempt to shed light on the tradition of writing autobiographies and the methods used to construct them. Furthermore, it opens up the possibility for future research into the development of the autobiography genre among Albanian literary figures. Such an approach would also prove highly fruitful for comparative studies within the broader context of world literature.

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