THE IMPACT OF LITERARY COMMUNICATION ON THE TRANSMISSION OF AESTHETIC AND PEDAGOGICAL FUNCTIONS: THE NOVEL "THE HISTORY OF SKANDERBEG"

Jehona RUSHIDI-REXHEPI[1], Bujar ADILI[2]

[1]Faculty of Pedagogy, University of Tetova, North Macedonia
2Faculty of Pedagogy, University of Tetova, North Macedonia
Corresponding Author: jehona.rushidi@unite.edu.mk

Abstract

The novel "The History of Skanderbeg" ("Historia e Skenderbeut") by Odhise Grillo is a recreation of Naim Frashëri's work of the same title. The general purpose behind Odhise Grillo's recreations is to adapt the material for child readers, thereby facilitating the interaction between the text and its audience. Since the creation of a new text based on a preceding one is an intertextual act, this study seeks to integrate the theory of intertextuality with the principles governing the writing of children's literature. Specifically, employing a deductive approach, the paper establishes a theoretical framework, synthesizing concepts of intertextuality and pedagogical principles, before proceeding to the practical application. In short, an examination of specific examples reveals that the process of transforming the original text makes it more accessible to the reader. By carefully balancing the portrayal of tragic elements, the cultivation of historical figures, and the inclusion of folkloric citations, the work successfully addresses criteria such as historical authenticity, the provision of information, patriotic education, the development of aesthetic taste, and the fostering of a positive attitude toward history and tradition, all while preserving the distinct flavor of the romantic discourse found in the source text (hypotext).

Keywords: intertextuality, pedagogical principles, literary communication, reception.

Introduction

Texts are surfaces that constantly intersect with other textual surfaces (Kristeva, 1980). The point where these axes intersect is communication, which unfolds in various directions. A new text may consciously draw upon a preceding one, or it may be composed based on memory, whether consciously or unconsciously. It is often linked to specific stylistic formations, and in many instances, it revives an earlier text. A text may provide explicit or implicit signals regarding the presence of an intertext, with these markers potentially belonging to either an external or an internal system of communication. The discovery of traces from a preceding text is not absolute; the reader may transform them into positive signals or, conversely, leave them undiscovered—latent (Riffaterre, 1978).

In children's literature, signals derived from antecedent material are often not explicitly "encoded"; consequently, approaches to literary analysis in this field are frequently non-hermeneutic. Considering the reader and the potential for these signals to be rendered "positive," it can be said that they are revealed through the title, paratextual notes, or architextual markers. In this study, we examine Odhise Grillo's novel "The History of Skanderbeg" as a hypertext (Genette, 1997a), a work that, beyond mere textual transformation, is infused with aesthetic elements tailored to pedagogical principles. As the author himself indicates, the intent behind this "re-creation" is to reimagine the work of the National Renaissance figure Naim Frashëri, which bears the same title. The objective of this paper is not to argue that every intertext serves a pedagogical function, but rather to demonstrate how such re-creations contribute to the fulfillment of specific pedagogical functions.

Methodology

This study is qualitative and interpretive, following a deductive approach: it begins with a theoretical framework, which is then applied to the specific text under examination. The framework draws upon two sources. The first is the theory of intertextuality, specifically Genette's (1997a) typology, from which we derive the concepts of hypotext, hypertext, and paratext. The second source consists of the pedagogical requirements and principles for children's literature, as outlined by Bishqemi (1997) and Berisha (2020).

The corpus comprises the novel "The History of Skanderbeg" (Historia e Skënderbeut) by Odhise Grillo (1999), analyzed in conjunction with Naim Frashëri's work of the same title. This specific case was selected because the connection to the antecedent text is explicitly signaled, beginning with the title itself and continuing through the chapter notes. Thus, rather than searching for hidden traces, we examine how the text is altered and how these modifications affect the reader.

The analysis proceeds in three stages. First, we identify the segments where an intertextual relationship manifests: the paratextual notes for the sixteen chapters, the inclusion of folk songs, added dialogues, rhetorical questions, and passages containing tragic elements. Second, we classify these segments according to the nature of the relationship: citation, amplification, or transformation. Thirdly, we evaluate each segment against five criteria: authenticity, informativeness, patriotic education, aesthetic taste, and the approach toward history and tradition.

The examples have been selected deliberately, without the intent of being exhaustive. As there has been no testing with child readers, the reception is treated solely as a potentiality inherent in the text. The findings apply to this specific recreation and may serve as a starting point for comparisons with other works.

Previous Studies

While studying the literary text as an open system, viewed from an intertextual perspective, is an increasingly relevant practice, the analysis of Albanian children's literature through this lens is still in its infancy. Specifically, Albanian children's literature has been examined within a theoretical framework. Furthermore, research has been conducted on the sources of children's literature and its history. Authors who have addressed this subject include Astrit Bishqemi, Anton Nikë Berisha, Agim Deva, Bedri Dedja, and others. Yet, studies on foreign children's literature are numerous and cover a diverse range of research foci (Wolf et al., 2011). Among other topics, these studies encompass the illustrated book, which in turn opens up the possibility for intermedial analysis (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2001). Regarding the specific focus of our own study, one analysis of foreign children's literature states:

> Intertextuality thus offers a renewal of the ways of relating to tradition and to the act of reading itself, overcoming an encyclopaedic model of teaching and making it possible to approach texts from the dialogue established between them, in line with the designs of textual itineraries included in the new academic curricula (Vouillamoz-Pajaro, 2024).

The study of intertextuality and recreations in Albanian children's literature has been addressed previously in some of our scholarly works. However, unlike those earlier, more general discussions—which focused on different works—this analysis centers specifically on the novel "The History of Skanderbeg"("Historia e Skënderbeut") by Odhise Grillo. Drawing upon insights from international scholarship and integrating them with the theory of intertextuality, the idea for a study of this nature emerged. Specifically, a given novel can be examined without being confined to rigid principles, allowing for the exploration of the text's multiple layers.

The open communication of the text is thus juxtaposed with the potential for aesthetic experience, while various reinterpretations bring traditional literature closer to the reader.

Theoretical Perspectives on Literary Communication

The issue presented by theories of intertextuality, including their various conceptualizations and the ways in which the term is applied, lies in the fact that intertextuality, in its general sense, is not a closed structure; rather, it is a structure that continuously generates reciprocal relationships. Indeed, literary texts do not communicate solely within the confines of literature; they extend into broader domains (Barthes, 1977). The manner in which these communications unfold, specifically, the variations in how these relationships are established, determines the distinctions and further concepts that arise from, and are linked to, intertextuality.[928]

The development of the theory of intertextuality is such that it cannot be explained through a single definition provided by any one specific theorist (Allen, 2011). It is only possible to derive a broad, comprehensive understanding that encompasses all these various definitions. Although most scholars in this field primarily associate the term "intertextuality" with the ideas, or, more precisely, the elaborations, of Julia Kristeva, Tzvetan Todorov, Mikhail Bakhtin, and Roland Barthes, they also engage extensively with the work of Gérard Genette, Ulrich Broich, Klaus Ulich, Ann Jefferson, Michael Riffaterre, Jonathan Culler, and others. The perspectives of these various theorists and scholars differ in several ways: ranging from the creation of specific terms to define relationships between texts, terms derived from broader, more general concepts to specify particular types of relationships, to the conceptualization of intertextuality itself as either a broader or a narrower term.

These approaches sometimes align and at other times diverge from one another. Regarding the roots of the term "intertextuality," the American theorist Graham Allen (Allen, 2022) suggests looking to the conclusions reached by de Saussure, Bakhtin, and Kristeva, while also taking into account, of course, Roland Barthes. Among other points, he notes that the foundation upon which the primary theories of intertextuality have been developed leads us back to de Saussure and the nature of the sign. If all meanings are distinct, then they can also be understood within the context of a variety of different relationships.

At this juncture, it is worth addressing the issue of the impossibility of deciphering works whose hidden meanings cannot be easily uncovered. For instance, Miroslav Beker (Allen, 2022) observes that when we lack the necessary intertextual knowledge regarding a work, we are confronted with a riddle, much like the challenge of translating something from a language we do not know well enough. He also distinguishes the concept of intertextuality from the notions of "influence" and "source," since intertextuality involves such a complex network of connections that it becomes impossible to clearly pinpoint a specific origin. Also highly significant and widely applied is the typology proposed by Gérard Genette (Genette, 1997), according to whom intertextuality is one of five types of transtextuality.

Defining Children's Literature: Requirements and Principles

It is abundantly clear that art knows no boundaries. One cannot dictate to literature "how it should be done"; however, in the case of children's literature, the "reader" factor carries significantly more weight (Nodelman, 2008). A more comprehensive definition views this body of literary work as "creations written for children" or, more specifically, as "the body of written works and accompanying illustrations produced in order to entertain or instruct young

[928] In this study, the term intertextuality is used in its broadest sense—specifically, in the sense given to it by Julia Kristeva. On the other hand, Gérard Genette uses the term transtextuality instead of intertextuality, treating intertextuality as one of the forms of transtextuality.

people. The genre encompasses a wide range of works, including acknowledged classics of world literature, picture books and easy-to-read stories written exclusively for children, and fairy tales, lullabies… and other primarily orally transmitted materials" (Encyclopaedia Britannica, n.d.).

Regarding the distinctions between children's literature and literature for adults, it has been noted that "what differentiates these two categories of written art is, above all, the approach to the poetic subject, the language, and the development of the text's structure, all of which are linked to the recipient, the reader, for whom the work is intended..." (Berisha, 2020). In the history of how this subject has been addressed (Bishqemi, 1997), there have also been attempts to categorize works by age group and to refine the terminology used to describe them. Thus, it is pedagogical requirements/principles that shape it (Shavit, 1986).

To proceed with the analysis of the text that serves as the subject of this study, we must necessarily outline several requirements and principles. These include: character traits, dialogues, titles, symmetry, elements of play and humor, the methods used to convey information and establish authenticity, the disproportionate use of certain stylistic devices compared to others, linear and parallel narrative structures, among others.

"The History of Skanderbeg" between Intertextuality and the Pedagogical Principles of Children's Literature

In the paratext of the novel "The History of Skanderbeg" Grillo, (1999) asserts that recreating a work is more difficult than creating one from scratch; among other reasons, this is because the style of the original text must be preserved without sacrificing the author's own identity. This observation leads us to consider the relationships between texts, specifically, between the source text (the referent) and the resulting text (the manifestation). "The History of Skanderbeg" is a work in which the markers of its derivation are explicit; therefore, analysis does not require the search for hidden cues. Instead, the inquiry focuses on the "second" text (a term used with some reservation, given that intertextual theory does not recognize any text as definitively "the first").

Recreations are among the topics examined by Astrit Bishqemi in his theoretical analysis of children's literature. According to Bishqemi (1997), a "recreation" is "a creative process that adheres to artistic criteria, resulting in a new work with its own distinct characteristics" (p. 134). The novel under study here represents a transformation of the source text, Naim Frashëri's "History of Skanderbeg", a connection signaled to the reader as early as the title. The text consists of sixteen chapters in total, all of which feature a paratextual note. These notes can be said to function as epigraphs. Beyond providing an overt orientation, they allow the reader to grasp the flavor of the hypotext while simultaneously guiding them toward the content of the specific chapter (Genette, 1997b).

The phenomenon of a "text within a text" (specifically, an intrasemiotic quotation) is highlighted by the inclusion of a folk song: "Karaxha, Karaxha Pasha! / You cannot defeat Skanderbeg" (Grillo, 1999, p. 118). In this way, the infiltration of various folk songs preserves a connection to Albanian folklore, while fostering an appreciation for and love of folkloric tradition (Stephens & McCallum, 2013). These epigraphs often function as quotations that point back to the hypotext, while also serving a paratextual purpose. The link to folklore is further established through the element of the "*vaj*" (lament), a staple of our folk literature, manifested here through the lament of Vojsava.

Since a prior text is supplemented and expanded primarily through added descriptions and dialogue, the resulting textual material can be described as an amplification. This is conveyed through emotional tensions and intensity, and through characters who embody moral qualities: "'No,' said Skanderbeg. 'We are not treacherous, and we do not lay hands on the

defenseless. Let them all go...'" (Grillo, 1999, p. 52). As real-world references, the characters provide the reader with knowledge; in this sense, there is an alignment between the literary work's informational aspect and the criterion of authenticity. Through the character of Skanderbeg, the reader encounters a model of an individual defined by courage and a sense of both personal and collective responsibility, demonstrating that *what matters is not merely what is told to children, but how it is told*.

Often, Naim's original text (the hypotext) is transformed into a narrative woven from dialogues, which are further deepened in the new textual material. These transformations result in a hypertext that features more dramatic episodes. Alongside the idealization of characters, there is also the inclusion of tragic elements, a common requirement in children's literature regarding narrative composition, as seen in this passage: "And when Skanderbeg descended from the mountain of Kruja, ravens, crows, and owls began to sing over the Ottoman camp..." (Grillo, 1999, p. 137). The use of hyperbole and personification aligns well with the integration of folk elements, particularly those rooted in superstitions.

The theme of patriotism is interwoven with a romantic discourse, expressed directly through the words of a character: "My sons, grow up to be good, upright, wise, and brave men, true "Arbërs". Study day and night so that you do not remain in darkness. Learn all the languages you can, but never forget the "Arbërisht" tongue!" (Grillo, 1999, p. 17). This constitutes the upbringing received by the protagonist. The moralizing, while explicit, remains subtle, as it unfolds naturally through the interactions between the characters.

Educational elements, such as heroism and patriotism, which are primarily manifested through Skanderbeg as a symbol of resistance, serve to activate the reader's prior knowledge about him. Specifically, the meaning of the new text does not emerge solely from the text itself; rather, it is unpacked through the aforementioned connections to history, folklore, and oral literature.

The rhetorical questions found in the novel (Grillo, 1999) also serve a didactic function, initiating an ongoing dialogue with history. The hypotext, a text shaped and imbued with Romantic concepts, reappears in the hypertext as a recreation that preserves key motifs, figures, and, above all, the patriotic spirit and the ethos of the "great era" of the National Renaissance (Hutcheon, 2006). Through its specific mode of elaboration, Grillo's new text becomes accessible to the reader precisely because of this textual transformation. This transformative approach, which accounts for pedagogical requirements, facilitates the reception of the text through clear extratextual communication, significantly reducing the risk of any negative connotations persisting.negative.

Conclusion

This study, through both its theoretical and practical components, highlights that the use of intertextual techniques in adaptations contributes significantly to fulfilling pedagogical functions. By incorporating extratextual references, the work engages collective memory, specifically historical and patriotic elements, structured according to the pedagogical principles that children's literature is expected to uphold. In short, this approach facilitates the transmission of moral values, as well as our traditions and national past. The use of direct quotations fosters a positive attitude toward historical heritage and tradition. Literary engagement shapes how young readers perceive our national historical legacy. Features such as character development, accessible prose, a gentle handling of tragic elements, a fairy-tale or romantic narrative style, dialogue, and the absence of long, tedious descriptions all serve to ease the interaction between the text and the reader. Therefore, it can be concluded that these are the points at which literary engagement aligns with the fulfillment of key functions required of children's literature.

Through its extratextual dialogue, the novel “History of Skanderbeg” maintains an affirmative stance toward traditional literature. In doing so, it preserves and cultivates aesthetic nuances while conveying moral messages. This is achieved by reviving Romantic discourse and incorporating themes of patriotism and authenticity. Simultaneously, the reader is invited into a cultural, historical, and ethical dialogue, thereby fulfilling pedagogical objectives. This study aims, in a modest way, to address a small part of the existing research gap in this field.

The results of this study should be viewed within certain limitations. The analysis focuses on a single novel and a specific hypotext–hypertext pair. Therefore, the conclusions cannot be generalized to other works by Grillo or to Albanian children’s literature as a whole. The examples have been selected purposefully to serve as illustrations rather than providing an exhaustive coverage of the text. The child reader is treated as a construct modeled by the text, rather than as an actual reader; in the absence of testing with children or teachers, the reception remains a hypothesis. Furthermore, this reading is interpretive and contingent upon the pedagogical criteria adopted as a framework. These limitations pave the way for future research involving a broader corpus and empirical data. Since every study inevitably raises new questions for further inquiry, it is worth noting that there remains both an opportunity and a challenge to deepen such analyses through comparative studies involving broader, general literature.

References

[1] Allen, G. (2011). *Intertextuality* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
[2] Allen, G. (2022). *Intertextuality* (3rd ed.). Routledge.
[3] Barthes, R. (1977). *Image, music, text* (S. Heath, Trans.). Hill and Wang.
[4] Berisha, A. N. (2020). *Poetika e letërsisë për fëmijë.* Gjakovë: Universiteti i Gjakovës "Fehmi Agani".
[5] Bishqemi, A. (1997). *Letërsia për fëmijë-Teoria.* SEJKO.
[6] *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. (n.d). Retrieved from https://www.britannica.com/art/childrens-literature
[7] Genette, G. (1997). *Palimpsests: literature in the second degree.Translated by Channa Newman and Claude Doubinsky.* Lncoln: University of Nebraska Press.
[8] Genette, G. (1997a). *Palimpsests: Literature in the second degree* (C. Newman & C. Doubinsky, Trans.). University of Nebraska Press.
[9] Genette, G. (1997b). *Paratexts: Thresholds of interpretation* (J. E. Lewin, Trans.). Cambridge University Press.
[10] Grillo, O. (1999). *Historia e Skenderbeut.* Tiranë: Sh.B. "Mësonjëtorja e Parë".
[11] Hutcheon, L. (2006). *A theory of adaptation*. Routledge.
[12] Kristeva, J. (1980). *Desire in language: A semiotic approach to literature and art* (L. S. Roudiez, Ed.; T. Gora, A. Jardine, & L. S. Roudiez, Trans.). Columbia University Press.
[13] Nikolajeva, M., & Scott, C. (2001). *How picturebooks work*. Garland Publishing.
[14] Nodelman, P. (2008). *The hidden adult: Defining children’s literature*. Johns Hopkins University Press.
[15] Riffaterre, M. (1978). *Semiotics of poetry*. Indiana University Press.
[16] Shavit, Z. (1986). *Poetics of children’s literature*. University of Georgia Press.
[17] Stephens, J., & McCallum, R. (2013). *Retelling stories, framing culture: traditional story and metanarratives in children's literature*. Routledge.
[18] Vouillamoz-Pajaro, N. (2024). Intertextuality and children’s literature. Dialogues between texts in the study of picture books. https://doi.org/10.18239/ocnos_2024.23.2.466
[19] Wolf, S. A., Coats, K., Enciso, P., & Jenkins, C. A. (Eds.). (2011). *Handbook of research on children’s and young adult literature*. Routledge.