


## A Biographical Narrative Study of *Nafsat-al-Masdur*

Ma'soomeh Ghayouri\*<sup>1</sup>  
Mohammad Ali Khazanehdarloo<sup>2</sup>

### Abstract

For its style and content, *Nafsat-al-Masdur*, the work of Shahab al-Din Mohammad Nasavi Khorandazi Zeydari, has always been considered as a canonical text in classical history and literature. In line with the new approaches in narratology and interdisciplinary studies, this work moves beyond the traditional classical studies of history and literature and enters into new domains of narratology and contemporary criticism. Genre and narratological studies of *Nafsat-al-Masdur* present different genres embedded in the work. These genres, such as autobiography, epistolary, and nonfiction, are intertextually intermingled in a historical context and problematize simplistic literary categorizations of *Nafsat-al-Masdur*. Also, different academic readings, in line with the narration and aesthetics tradition of the sixth century (S. H.), have degraded Nasavi's peculiar narration style in restating the events to an insignificant piece of literature and deformed his primary objectives. The present article studies the generic and narrative structure of *Nafsat-al-Masdur* in an attempt to categorize the work as Ekhvaniyat and claims that although it has earned historical recognition due to its treatment of important people and events in the Mongol era, it cannot and should not be regarded as a multi-generic work.

**Keywords:** Genre, Autobiography, Narration, First Person Point of View, and Ekhvaniyat

### Extended Abstract

#### 1. Introduction

*Nafsat-al-Masdur* is Shahab al-Din Nasavi Zeydari's narrative of his last years of service in Jalal-al-din's court, which coincides with his dismissal and his refuge

---

\*1. Assistant Professor of Persian Language and Literature, Guilan University, Rasht, Iran.

(Corresponding Author: [ghayoori\\_m@guilan.ac.ir](mailto:ghayoori_m@guilan.ac.ir))

2. Associate Professor of Persian Language and Literature, Guilan University, Rasht, Iran.  
([khazaneh@guilan.ac.ir](mailto:khazaneh@guilan.ac.ir))

in Malek Mozaffar Ayoubi's court. He narrates these events to Sa'd al-Dowleh in the form of letters. Nasavi affirms that his work covers only parts of his life. It implies that studying the book and the structure through which he narrates "his events" is only possible through the study of the genre it belongs to. Of note here is that this article regards genre as a process between the author and the reader, in which the reader regards the author as a reliable narrator. Although the author claims that this work is an autobiography, its epistolary form and its apostrophes categorize it as Ekhvaniyat, a subcategory of private correspondence. It must be added that the author deliberately disregards the categorization; this is also reflected in his purpose of writing his text.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

*Nafsat-al-Masdur*, which is the account of the narrator's pains and sorrows, raises a question in the reader's mind: What was Nasavi's purpose in narrating his personal sorrows? And why does he insist on preserving these painful memories in the form of a biographical chronicle and the style of a lengthy letter? The present article employs an elective approach that consists of typology, narratology, and historiography to answer these questions. The present study aims to show a new horizon in reading literary-historic works and discuss whether the classic historical works of literature can move beyond the subcategory of literature and become an independent genre in its own right. It takes into account whether or not the dominance of literary narration and its diverse structures, combined with presuppositions and expectations in reading literary texts, can prevent its generic autonomy.

## **3. Methodology**

The present article is a descriptive-analytical research with an integrative approach containing typology and narratology; it aims to probe into the necessity of re-reading the historical interpretations of *Nafsat-al-Masdur*.

## **4. Discussion and Analysis**

In line with narratological structures and characteristic features in typological and generic studies, this article reads *Nafsat-al-Masdur* as private letters or Ekhvaniyat. In other words, it looks at the work as the narrator's chronicle writing, in a process heavily influenced by personal conception of history. However, the author's private thoughts and ideas in chronicle writing gradually fade away and become insignificant. That is why this literary-narratological work can be viewed as a text that exemplifies an umbrella genre which incorporates sub-genres.

If we consider the dialogue between the author and the reader in a literary genre as a generic contract (Dubrow, 2012: 48), this typology, we can assume, interferes with the understanding of the author's primary intentions in the process of composition. The interaction between the author and the reader, designated only by the genre, has been underscored in the work by a number of influential academicians who have carefully studied and taught it. Most studies have regarded *Nafsat-al-Masdur* as a biographical, historical, or factional work; however, this study emphatically rejects its categorization as a biographical narrative. Also, narrative features such as point of view, characterization, chronology, centralization, etc., negate any categorization of the work as a manifestation of a specific literary genre. The last section of the study discusses the genre of epistolary novel and the subgenre of Ekhvaniyat.

## 5. Conclusion

Contrary to the author's intentions, scholars have regarded *Nafsat-al-Masdur* as a historical work. In *Sirat-e Jalal-al-Din*, Nasavi explicitly informs the reader of the historicity and the historical content of the work (Nasavi, 1986: 3-6). However, in *Nafsat-al-Masdur*, the writer employs the term 'Nafsat-al-Masdur' to address 'what is within.' In the work, disruptive content and narrative inconsistencies signify memory recollection, which thematically relate the title to the structure of the narrative. The improvised renderings of events divulge an attitude that can pass as authoritative or clerical. In fact, the aesthetic aspect of *Nafsat-al-Masdur* is not stimulated by diary or biography writing but by the genre, type of letter writing, and the Diwani schools of the author's tune. As a result, contrary to traditional autobiographies, it is devoid of confession or character development. Due to the multifaceted nature of the work, the real intentions of the author have been usually overlooked.

We should not fail to notice that this work uncovers a part of Iran's history. However, a narratological analysis of the historical discourse in *Nafsat-al-Masdur* proves that Nasavi has no intention of writing a historical chronicle. It is through Nasavi's narration and characterization that history and historical records gain significance. The author recreates history and hints at hypertextual references, so that the reader is presented with a history which is based on the author's personal events. Nevertheless, these renderings should not be limited to any generic categorization. Nasavi's memoir has now become a piece of history, through which we can acquire knowledge about the social structures and ideologies of the people of a particular era. And we can study our history from the narrator's social status and personal perspective, even though this reading was not recognized in Nasavi's era. This is partly due to the

fact that he had to rewrite a great part of *Nafsat-al-Masdur* in another book. Also, the historical readings of *Nafsat-al-Masdur* all took it for granted that it should be categorized as an academic text and subcategorized as a literary-historical book.

This categorization, one way or another, finds its way into the readings of *Nafsat-al-Masdur*. Of note here is that the literary and aesthetic qualities of the book are influenced by the conventions governing the genre of the epistolary novel, rather than by its historical or literary narrative structures. It must be added that the genius of the writer as well as his borrowings from other genres such as biography or history do not entail generic innovation or the introduction of a new genre.

### Select Bibliography

- Abbot, H.P. 1397 [2018]. *Savad-e Ravayat*. R. Poor Azar, N. Mahdi-Zadeh Ashrafi (trans.). Tehran: Atraf.  
(*The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*)
- Abrams, L. 1397 [2018]. *Nazaryieh-e Tarkih-e Shafahi*. A. Fat'hali Ashtiyani (trans.). Tehran: Sooreh-e Mehr.  
(*Oral History Theory*)
- Chandler, D. 1391 [2012]. "Moqadameh-yi Bar Nazaryieh-e Zhanr". Q. Qasemipoor (trans.). *Ketab-e Mah-e Adabiyat*. (183)69: 59-68.  
(*"An Introduction to Genre Theory"*)
- Debren, F. 1388 [2009]. "Naqd-e Zhanr". *Danesh-Nameh-e Nazaryie-ha-e Adabi*, I.R. Makaryk. M. Mohajer, M. Nabavi (trans.). Tehran: A'gah. 371-380.  
(*"Genre Criticism," Encyclopedia of Contemporary Literary Theory: Approaches, Scholars, Terms.*)
- Dubrow, H. 1389 [2010]. *Zhanr (No-e Adabi)*. F. Taheri (trans.). Tehran: Markaz.  
(*Genre (Routledge Revivals)*)
- Khatibi, H. 1375 [1996]. *Fann-e Nasr dar Adab-e Parsi; Tarikh-e Tatavvor va Mokhtas'at-e Nasr-e Parsi az Aqaz ta Payan-e Qarn-e Haftom*. Tehran: Zav'ar.  
(*The Art of Prose in Persian Literature*)
- Nasavi, S.M. 1365 [1986]. *Sirat-e Jalal-al-Din-e Menkoberni*. Translated from Arabic by an unknown translator in the seventh century, S.H. M. Minovi (intro.). Tehran: Elmi va Farhangi.  
(*The Jalal-al-Din Menkoberni Tradition*)
- Nasavi, S.M. 1385 [2006]. *Nafsat-al-Masdur*. A. Yazdgerdi (annotation.). Tehran: Tous.  
(*Nafsat-al-Masdur*)

- Shelston, A. 1390 [2011]. *Zendegi-Nameh*. H. Afshar (trans.). Tehran: Markaz. (Biography)
- Z. Mahdi, M. Qorbansabaq. 1395 [2016]. *Nazaryieh-e Zhanr (No-e Adabi) Roykard-e Tahlili-Tarikhi*. Tehran: Hermes. (Genre Theory)

**How to cite:**

Ghayouri, Ma'soomeh and Khazanehdarloo, Mohammad Ali.. 2023. "A Biographical Narrative Study of *Nafsat-al-Masdur*", *Naqd va Nazaryeh Adabi*, 14(2): 115-146. DOI:10.22124/NAQD.2023.22760.2398

**Copyright:**

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to *Naqd va Nazaryeh Adabi (Literary Theory and Criticism)*.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided that the original work is properly cited.

