Intertextuality of Rumi's Masnavi with Quran: Author's intentional effort and translators' negligence

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ABSTRACT: *The notion of intertextuality emphasized that all literary texts are related to or influenced by the texts prior them. However in some cases the intertextual relation between the former and the later text is specifically intentional. This specific intertextual relationship is the one that Gerad Genette called hypertextuality, which although like all intertextual relationships is depended on the relation between two concepts of the later text, hypertext and the earlier one, hypotext, pays special attention to the intentionality of the intertextual relationship. Being sensible toward this sort of deliberate relationships that the author of a hypertext crated in his/her work is one of the essentialities of translation practices. It seems that in some of the recent English translations of Rumi's poetry the noted sensitivity on the hypertextual relationships was totally neglected and caused the text to be located in a different context. This article by shedding light on the concept of intertextual relationship between Rumi's Masnavi and Quran, aimed to demonstrate the real context of Rumi's poetry to those Rumi's audiences who read his poetry in another language other than Persian.*
Keyword: *Intertextuality, Hypertextuality, Hypotext, Hypertext, Rumi's Masnavi, Translation*

I.   INTRODUCTION

Jalal al-Din Muhammad Balkhi (1207-1273), known as Rumi in the west, was one the most eminent Sufi's and literary figures of Iran, who set his Islamic mystical teachings in the mold of poetry. Rumi created three books, which two of them are poetry and one is prose. Among his poetry books, *Masvai e Manavi*, in short is known as *Masnavi*, has a greater connection with Quran and Islamic teachings. Although Rumi and his poetry was respected in Middle East for about eight hundred years, in recent decades an extraordinary wave of attention towards Rumi's poetry created in the west (1). The speed of this wave was in a manner that in 1997 Christian Science Monitor published a cover article announcing Rumi as the bestseller poet in America (2). However, in recent years different scholars discussed about recontextualization of Rumi's poetry in contemporary English translations of his poetry, and repeatedly claimed that in most of these translations the connection of Rumi's poetry with Islamic teachings and tradition was cut (3; 4; 5). Yet, little effort was made to clarify the concept of relationship between Rumi's poetry and Islamic tradition. The objective of this article is to review the intertextual relation between Rumi's poetry and Quran verses and clarify Rumi's approach in creating an hypertext of Quran in his *Masnavi*. Indeed highlighting this relationship can help the readers as well as the analysts of translations of Rumi's poetry to realize how artistically Rumi combined the concept of Quran verses with the stories and restated them in the poetry form.

To follow the objective of the study and to illustrate the intertextual relationship between Masnavi and Quran, the Islamic motifs of Rumi's Poetry, were examined by comparing them with the parallel verses of Quran. In this regard, the focus is on the concept of hypertextuality that Genette (6) introduced. The particularity of the concept of hypertextuality over the intertextuality is merely on the intentionality of the process of writing the hypertext (6). In another word, the author of a hypertext, consciously applied the hypertextuality as a form of literature to create an intentional relation between his work and the hypotext and as a result form an inter-text. The whole concept of hypertextuality runs based on the reader's background of the hypotext (7). To be more specific, when potential readers have the background knowledge of the hypotext and can easily comprehend the intended relation between hypotext and hypertext, the author achieved his/her goal of the hypertextuality. This theory works well in case of Rumi's poetry and the potential readers who were Persian Muslims. The link that Rumi's intentionally created between his Masnavi and Quran was two fold: from one hand Rumi applied poetry as an instrument to make the Islamic teachings more tangible for the public, and from the other hand, by having the majority of Muslims audiences Rumi was sure that they will realize the Islamic teachings between the lines. Both perspectives and the lateral in particular were based on the reader's knowledge of the hypotext and realizing the relationship of the hypertext and hypotext, and because of the presence of this knowledge Rumi's deliberate hypertext worked extremely successful in its context. However before going further to analysis of Rumi's poetry and its relationship with Quran, providing a brief review of the literature of intertextuality seems essential.

II.   NTERTEXTUALITY

Nowadays the fashionable term intertextuality is heard repeatedly in literary communities, however, it may be used or understood differently. Platt (8) simply defined it as a text between other texts. He mentioned that the whole definition is depends on the way we interpret the preposition "between". To Platt (8) both author and reader have a very important role in making the intertext visible and communicable. As Chaudhuri (9) mentioned intertextuality indicates on deconstruction as well as analysis. A translation draws out from within the work something other than itself, other than its original and recognized presence, yet something also within itself, something that it indeed is. It reconstitutes and relocates the original more radically than in any other form of 'afterlife'; thus it most openly challenges the terms of the source-text's being. Neubert and Shreve (10) highlighted the role of reader and stated that the reader has a set of implied expectations in mind which can analyzed the relationship between a given text and other relevant text encountered in prior experience. They believed the concept of intertextuality may be the most important aspect of textuality in global pattern, which the reader compares to preexisting cognitive templates abstracted from experience.

Although the idea of texts being related to one another was introduced by Mikhatil Bakhtin in 1930s in literary studies, in exploration of literary genres, the coinage of the term intertextuality is assigned to Julia Kristeva in 1980s (11). Kristeva (12) believed each text is built as a variety of quotations, each text is a combination and transformation of another. By being a part of the chain which endlessly links past, present and future texts together, each individual text simply is considered as an intertext, in another word each text is a successor to the past a creation of the present and a connection to the future. Diachronically it connected to previous texts and synchronically to all texts that are creating at the moment.

Indeed, intertextuailty study the notion of source and the originality. From intertextual point of view there is no original text (13). Jorge Luis Borges emphasized on such an idea as well, and stated that each viewer fabricates his ancestors. Each text can alter our perception of the past that the result will alter our perception of the future as well (as cited in 14). He implied that every original work can be considered as a re-creation of a re-creation, or as Gentzler (14) emphasized a translation of a translation of a translation. This continuous and eternal trend easily traps writers or translators in a labyrinth with no access to the real original. To Hatim & Mason (15), intertextuality became a big challenge particularly when cultural implications and structures of knowledge are integrated into an intertextual reference.

Besides all noted above, Genette's (6) indication of intertextuality had a specific characteristic. According to Genette (6), this concept was involved with "any relationship uniting a text B [hypertext] to an earlier text A [hypotext], upon which it is grafted in a manner that is not that of commentary" (p. 5). Allen (7) specified, what Ganette called the hypotext, is named the inter-text by other scholars, and indicated a text that can be surely considered as a main source of signification for a specific text. Gennet's main concern was with deliberate and self-conscious relationships between texts (7). Moreover, Gennete (6) emphasized that the concept hypertextual functions based on the readers' knowledge of the hypotext, which the hypertext imitates or satirically transformed with the motive of pastiche. Moreover Gennete (6) specified that his main objective was merely to study the relational reading of the texts (i.e. the ways that texts are read in relation to each other).

Considering the concept of intertextuality in general, and hypertextuality in a specific term, reading the text sensibly with concern of their relationship to other texts is a key point of comprehending the text precisely, specially if reading is for rewriting or translating the text.

III. MASNAVI AND QURAN

Few books in the history of literature are read and appreciated as Rumi's *Masnavi*. *Masnavi* significantly transcended its own precursors in scope, rank and conception. Evidently Rumi specified on the religious nature of *Masnavi*, as in the very first lines of it indicated: "This is the Book of *Masnavi*, which is the roots of the roots of the roots of Religion, in respect of its unveiling the mysteries of attainment (to the Truth) and of certainty, which is the greatest science of God" (as cited in 16).

When Sheikh Bahaii, described *Masnavi* as 'the Quran in Persian Language', he did not meant just glorifying the book thoughtlessly and for sure had seen the essence of Quran in it. *Masnavi* is deeply rooted in Islamic philosophy. In it Rumi explicitly referred to the 528 verses from Quran as well as more than 750 traditions (*hadith*) related to Prophet Mohammad (16). And when in the Arabic preface of Book One (chapter one), Rumi emphasized that one of the main functions of *Masnavi* is to be an expounder of the Quran, the fullness of Quran in all the senses has to be understood. To Rumi, expounding the Quran meant expressing the realities that directly revealed to him mystically through the Quran in his own way. This he did in *Masnavi*, as well as the correspondence he made between the Quran and the *Masnavi*, indicates that *Masnavi* too requires the opening of mystical consciousness to meet with the realities, the "haqiqah", which are contained therein (16).

IV. THE INTERTEXTUAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MASNAVI AND QURAN

This section demonstrated 6 examples of the intertextual references that clarify the intertextual relationship of *Masnavi* with Quran. In these examples the intertextual relationship between Rumi's poetry and verses of Quran were presented. The examples supported the presence of a particular connection between *Masnavi* and Quran. The correspondence between these two can be seen either explicitly or implicitly. Also the examples indirectly unveiled the fact that by way of parallel texts, the majority of the recent renderings of *Masnavi* were located in a different context simply by cutting the intertextual link between this book and Quran.

To trace the relationship of *Masnavi* with Quran, 6 tables were drawn in this section, and each one contains an example of *Masnavi* along with a specific verse of Quran. In *Massnavi*, each poetry line has its specific number; therefore, above each table the information about that specific line of *Masnavi* is provided. To make it more tangible the English translation of that piece of poetry as well as the English translation of the verses of Quran were provided in the same table. The English translations of Quran were collected from translation of Dr. Muhammad Taqi-ud-Din Al-Hilali and Dr. Muhammad Muhsin Khan (17), who are the most notable for their outstanding English translation of Quran (18). Also, English translations of Rumi's poetry are collected from Reynold Nicholson's (19) translation of *Masnavi*. Nicholson's translation of *Masnavi* is known as the most accurate translation of Rumi's poetry in English so far. After each table a brief explanation of the intertextual relationship between the textual segments was presented.

Table 1: *Masnavi, Book I: 81*

Original Persian Poetry & its English Translation	(But then), in the midst of the people of Moses, some persons spoke rudely: "Where (are) garlic and lentils?
	در میان قوم موسی چند کس بی ادب گفتند کو سیر و عدس
	منقطع شد نان و خوان از اسمان ماند رنج زرع و بیل و داسمان
Quran Reference & its English Translation	And (remember) when Musa (Moses) asked for water for his people, We said: "Strike the stone with your stick." Then gushed forth therefrom twelve springs. Each (group of) people knew its own place for water. "Eat and drink of that which Allah has provided and do not act corruptly, making mischief on the earth." (Surah 2. Al-Baqarah: V. 61)
	و إذ قُلْتُم یا موسی لن نصبر علی طعام واحد فادع منا ربک یخرج لنا مما تنبت الارض من بقلها و فومها و عدسها و بصلها قال اتستبدون الذی هو ادنی بالذی هو خیر اهبطوامصرا فان لکم ماسألتم و ضربت علیهم الذلهء و المسکنهء و باؤا بغضب من الله ذلک بانهم کانوا یکفرون بایات الله و یقتلون النبین بغیر الحق ذلک بما عصوا و کانوا یعتدون (بقره ـ ۶۱)

Verse 61 of the second surah of Quran, told the story of Moses and the way that with Divine help he provided food and water for his people. The story mentioned that after a while his people wanting more merits treated him disrespectfully. Rumi as a skillful storyteller, to attract the readers, retold the same story in more detailed way. He mentioned that some people from Moses tribe rudely asked him for more garlic and lentils. Here the trace of Quran story can be seen obviously in Rumi's poetry.

Table 2: Masnavi, Book I: 865

Original Persian Poetry & its English Translation	And Abraham from fire felt no alarm- God's chosen prophet bonfires couldn't harm
	آتش ابراهیم را دندان نزد چون گزیده حق بود چونش گزد
Quran Reference & its English Translation	We (Allah) said: "O fire! Be you coolness and safety for Ibrahim (Abraham)!" (Surah 21. Al-Anbiya, V. 69)
	قلنا یا رکونی بردا و سلاما علی ابراهیم (الانبیاء ـ ۶۹)

Another example of Quran stories in Rumi's *Masnavi* is the story of cooling the fire on Abraham when Pharaoh tried to burn him. Rumi retold the story in a very poetic manner and expressed that God ordered fire to did not harmed Abraham, as he was the one that God had chosen. How fire could harm God's chosen one?

Table 3: *Masnavi, Book II: 792*

Original Persian Poetry & its English Translation	Prophet-rejecters were their own worst foes: Upon themselves they thus inflicted blows. دشمن خود بوده اند آن منکران زخم بر خود میزدند ایشان چنان
Quran Reference & its English Translation	…and they not wrong us but they wronged themselves ... و ما ظلمونا ولکن کانوا انفسهم یظلمون (البقره ـ ۵۷)

These pieces of poetry like the rest of the examples indicated in the relationship between Rumi's poetry in *Masnavi* and verses of Quran. Rumi in these lines repeated a statement from verse 57 of Baghareh Surah, which said by rejecting God the people do not harm God but directly harm themselves.

Table 4: *Masnavi, Book IV: 3663*

Original Persian Poetry & its English Translation	O thou that hast torn the coat of (many) Josephs, thou wilt arise from this heavy slumber (in the form of) a wolf. ای دریده پوستین یوسفان گرگ برخیزی از این خواب گران
Quran Reference & its English Translation	They said: "O our father! We went racing with one another, and left Yusuf (Joseph) by our belongings and a wolf devoured him … (Surah 12. Yusuf, V. 17) قالوا یا ابانا ذهبنا نسبق و ترکنا یوسف عند متاعنا فاکله ذئب ... (یوسف ـ ۱۷)

Verse 12 of Yusuf Surah is another example of Quran verse which trace of it can be seen in Rumi's poetry. This verse explained how Joseph's brothers after throwing him into a well, came back to their father with a tore coat of Joseph and claimed a wolf attack them and devoured Joseph. Rumi used the elements of this story (tearing Joseph's coat and the wolf) as metaphor in his poetry to convey a meaning.

Table 5: *Masnavi, Book V: 1233*

Original Persian Poetry & its English Translation	Have not you read (the words) We *have given thee Kawthar*? Why, then are you dry and why have you remained thirsty? Or perchance you are (like) Pharaoh, and for you Kawthar, like the Nile, has turned to blood and (become) impure, O sick man. نه تو اعطیناک کوثر خوانده ای؟ پس چرا خشکی و تشنه مانده ای؟ یا مگر فرعونی و کوثر چو نیل بر تو خون گشته ست و ناخوش ای علیل
Quran Reference & its English Translation	Verily, We have granted you (O Muhammad صلی الله علیه و سلم) Al-Kauthar (a river in Paradise). (Surah 108. Al-Kauthar, V. 1) انا اعطیناک الکوثر (کوثر ـ۱) And (remember) when We separated the sea for you and saved you and drowned Fir'aun's (Pharaoh) people while you were looking (at them, when the sea-water covered them). (Surah 2. Al-Baqarah, V. 50) و اذ فرقنا بکم البحر فانجیناکم و اغرقنا آل فرعون و انتم تنظرون (بقره ـ ۵۰) And Verily, you (O Muhammad) are on an exalted (standard of) character. (Sueah 68. Al-Qalam, V. 4) وانک لعلی خلق عظیم (قلم ـ ۴)

In the above example, Rumi referred to two different Quran verses. First he not only mentioned Surah of Kawthar, but also he quoted the first Arabic expression of this Surah: "اعطیناک کوثر", which means "*We have given you Kawthar*". Moreover, Rumi denoted the Pharaoh's story, who drowned in river Nile while trying to cross it.

Table 6: *Masnavi, Book VI: 2082*

Original Persian Poetry & its English Translation	If anyone puffs at God's candle, how should the candle be extinguished? His jaws and nose will be burnt. هر که بر شمع خدا آرد پفو شمع کی میرد بسوزد پوز او
Quran Reference & its English Translation	They (the disbelievers, the Jews and Christians) want to extinguish Allah's light (with which Muhammad صلی الله علیه و سلم has been sent – Islamic Monotheism) with their mouth… یریدون آن یطفؤا نور الله بافراههم ... (توبه ـ ۳۲)

The above Quran verse specified that in early era of spreading Islam, those unbelievers who tried to extinguish God's light, were unsuccessful and instead of extinguishing that light they just burnt their mouth. The very same expression can be seen in Rumi's poetry, he charmingly illustrated God's light as God's candle and said nobody can extinguish this candle, and if someone does so, he just will burn his mouth. Therefore, the above example like the previous ones indicated on the tight relation between Quran and *Masnavi.*

Summing up the above examples, Rumi used the poetry as a vehicle to transfer the Islamic teachings of Quran into Persian language. The number of references of Quran in Masnavi is substantial, as indicated earlier, Safavi and Weightman (16) estimated 528 direct quotations from Quran in *Masnavi* and emphasized on the presence of many less obvious references from Quran.

V. CONCLUSION

The study of intertextual relationship of *Masnavi* with Quran illustrated a deep connection between these two texts. Referring to this finding, and considering the close relationship of a text and its translation, it is presumed that English translations of *Masnavi* should signify an intertextual relationship with Quran, but the reality about some of the recent English translations of Rumi's poetry reveals an opposite trend. To be specific, directing to the concepts of content and form in translation, the intertextual relationship between a translation and its original should be extremely tight. This fundamental fact is the point that some of the latest translators of Rumi's Masnavi either completely neglected or deliberately denied. The importance of this relation enhances when the author intentionally formed the intertextual relationship between the later and the former texts, the concept that Genette called it hypertextuality. Indeed paying attention to hypertextuality with a special focus on relational reading (the deliberate relation between the texts) can be considered as a valuable approach for Rumi scholars and critics as well as translators of Rumi's works, who specifically need to have a precise reading of these multilayer and ideologically loaded texts. To sum up the study of probable hypertextual relationship of the original text with its prior texts can be considered as a focal translating tactic to prevent incorrect readings of the text and as a result locating a translation in an incorrect context. Therefore, translator's sensibility in observing the noted intertextual/hypertextual correlations is a requirement.

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