

Analysis and adaptation of the character of the Companions and Elders in Masnavi traditions and its sources based on the theory of Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan

Sara Ahmadi-Rad¹ -  Alia Yousef Fam² 

۱. Master's degree, Department of Persian Language and Literature, Faculty of Literature and Humanities, Central Tehran Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran. (Responsible author) email ahmadirad.sara@gmail.com
۲. Assistant Professor, Department of Persian Language and Literature, Faculty of Literature and Humanities, Central Tehran Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran.

Article Info (۸۷-۱۱۱)

ABSTRACT

Article type:
Research Article

Article history:

Received:
۲۷ January 202۲

Accepted:
۹ April ۲۰۲۲

Keywords:
Character
Intertextuality
Rumi
Masnavi
Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan

In examining the elements of the story, the character has the greatest influence on the other elements. Rumi was also well aware of the effect of this element on the story and has made the best use of it in the development of his stories. He uses different types of characters of Companions and Elders according to the type of story and its message, which are present in Masnavi according to today's definitions. The purpose of this research, which has been done by descriptive-analytical method and using library resources, is to identify the abilities of Rumi in characterizing the stories related to the Sheikhs and Companions with regard to the new techniques of characterizing and story writing. Rumi is not very faithful to the sources in characterizing the stories of the Elders and Companions and telling the details of the stories, and he has made changes in the subtext narrations to suit his words and explain his mental intentions. The narrator of Masnavi narrations used the tools of characterization in the best way in the form of dialogue, description and action to reflect the characteristics of mystics and Companions, and usually, in this regard, he used all three direct, indirect and combined styles. Of course, indirect style and especially the element of speech and action, both habitual and non-habitual, are more useful.

Citation: Ahmadi-Rad Sara, Yousef Fam Alia (2022) Analysis and adaptation of the character of the Companions and Elders in Masnavi traditions and its sources based on the theory of Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan. Modern Literary Researches, 1(2) 87-111 Publisher: Association for the Promotion of Persian Language and Literature



© The Author (s).

DOI: [20.1001.1.28211413.1401.1.2.3.2](https://doi.org/10.28211/413.1401.1.2.3.2)

Introduction

Characterization is the cornerstone of narrative structure, as the coherence of a story relies heavily on the internal consistency and development of its characters. In the *Masnavi*, Rumi demonstrates a profound understanding of this element, employing complex characterization techniques to advance his didactic and mystical narratives. While historical and mystical figures (Companions of the Prophet and Sufi Elders) appear in the *Masnavi* as they do in source texts, Rumi often departs from these sources, transforming static figures into dynamic, multi-layered entities. This study aims to investigate Rumi's mastery in characterization by applying Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan's narrative theory. The research seeks to identify the specific tools Rumi employs to portray these figures, analyze the differences and similarities between Rumi's portrayals and their original sources, and demonstrate how these characterizations serve as bridges for conveying the poet's inner philosophical and mystical intentions.

Method

This research utilizes a descriptive-analytical methodology to examine approximately 1,922 verses from the *Masnavi* concerning the lives and interactions of Companions and Sufi Elders. The theoretical framework is based on Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan's theory of characterization, which categorizes character portrayal into two main modes:

١. **Direct Description:** Explicit portrayal using adjectives, names, and titles.
٢. **Indirect Description:** Implicit portrayal through four components: *Action* (habitual vs. non-habitual), *Speech* (dialogue and internal monologue), *Appearance* (physical features), and *Environment* (the setting and physical/social context).

The study performs a comparative analysis between the *Masnavi* narratives and their precursor texts (such as *Tazkirat al-Awliya*, *Asrar al-Tawhid*, and *Qushayri's Risalah*) to evaluate Rumi's creative interventions.

Results

The analysis reveals that Rumi utilizes both direct and indirect characterization, with a clear preference for indirect methods (accounting for approximately 88% of his techniques). Key findings include:

- **Methodological Preference:** While direct descriptions (titles, traits) provide initial identification, Rumi relies heavily on indirect methods—specifically speech and action—to bring characters to life. This aligns with modern narrative techniques where the reader discovers character depth through behavior rather than authorial exposition.
- **Transformation of Sources:** Rumi does not treat the source texts as sacred or immutable. He frequently alters the narrative by adding, deleting, or reassigning actions and dialogues to deepen the psychological and mystical impact. For example, he transforms static characters found in the source texts into dynamic agents who undergo development or spiritual awakening within the story.
- **Dialogue as a Central Tool:** Rumi utilizes dialogue not only for character portrayal but as a vehicle for his didactic teachings. He often blurs the line between his own voice and the character's voice, using monologues and dialogues to expose internal thoughts, psychological states, and moral conflicts.
- **Narrative Justification:** Rumi's deviations from the source texts—such as changing names, locations, or adding secondary characters—are calculated interventions to fix structural gaps, enhance causal relationships, and sharpen the story's didactic focus.

Conclusion

The research concludes that Rumi stands as a sophisticated narrative artist, far ahead of his contemporaries in his application of characterization techniques. By applying Rimmon-Kenan's model, it becomes evident that Rumi's *Masnavi* is not merely a collection of sermons but a structured narrative work where characterization is used to facilitate mystical understanding. While Rimmon-Kenan's model is effective, the researchers note a need for incorporating "motivation" as a critical factor in understanding the *reasons* behind a character's actions, which is essential

in a mystical context. Ultimately, Rumi's ability to weave indirect characterization through dialogue and action, combined with his psychological insight, creates a transformative experience for the reader, effectively elevating these historical figures into universal archetypes of spiritual development.