Aesthetics of the Literary Technique of Apostrophe and its Interpretive Function in Masnavi

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Extended Abstract

1. Introduction

Text interpretation depends on different text production elements such as language, rhetoric, literary structure, theme, and genre, and varies from text to text, and every text requires a unique interpretation method. Interpretive or non-interpretive simplicity or complexity, and consequently significance of a text is determined based on different factors and features, such that when approaching a text, a verdict cannot be easily passed on the simplicity or complexity of the text. The interpretive position of a text takes shape and gains significance where the interpretive complications of the text manifest. By considering the text production elements, the type of such interpretive complications and their place of occurrence will determine the degrees of explicitness and implicitness, or simplicity and complexity of the text. At times, the interpretive complications of a text occur due to its structural ambiguity. Familiarity with different *iltifāt* (Apostrophe) aspects and positions of a text and discovering the aesthetic role and function of each type of apostrophe is an important method in interpreting and understanding a text. Masnavi Manavi is a text whose most significant interpretive complication belongs to its apostrophe aspects, such that through understanding these apostrophic positions and explaining their semio-semantic function in the structure of a text, a reasonable interpretation of the text can be arrived at. The present research focuses on discovering different types of apostrophe in Masnavi and explaining the roles and functions of this rhetoric technique in the process of interpreting the text.

2. Theoretical Framework

Apostrophe and its definition have been the subject of much discussion in traditional and modern books on rhetoric. In traditional rhetorical texts, the

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semantic and conceptual domain of apostrophe is quite limited, encompassing only the change in the mode of address and shift of topic. Such a conceptual domain is also reflected in many of the more recent books on rhetoric. However, in some of the new studies, the semantic domain of apostrophe has been expanded to include any type of change occurring in the normal course of speech and resulting in deviation from the norm in language, defamiliarization, foregrounding, deconstruction, and coherence. Such a new perspective on apostrophe can be observed, with a slight fundamental difference, in the western rhetoric as well and considered as a type of literary semiotics. Research conducted by westerners in this area have been more extensive and have adopted various approaches to apostrophe, including the traditional approach to apostrophe, the cognitive approach, apostrophe in narrative theory, apostrophe in pragmatics, and apostrophe from a poststructuralist perspective. The poststructuralist approach to apostrophe was pioneered by Jonathan Culler. From a semiotic perspective, he regards apostrophe as a deflection and breaking of the message. The focus of the present research is on Masnavi Manavi. The literary technique of apostrophe in Masnavi, in addition to its aesthetic function, has semantic and semiotic functions as well. Masnavi's structure has been patterned on the expressive structure of the Quran. Considering the semiotics of types, Masnavi can be considered a type of spoken poetry or address, since the signs and codes of speech and address in the text are more frequent and prominent than the signs of the written text. One of the codes peculiar to speech or address in Masnavi is the literary technique of apostrophe and its high frequency and variety. Following the Quranic style and method in expressing *irfanic* (mystic/of true knowledge) secrets and epistemic concepts, Molavi (Rumi) has utilized a scattered yet semantic order, and through using different and varied movements manifesting in the form of semantic associations, narrations, allegories, and change in the points of view, has created an interwoven network of meanings in the entirety of the work. Apostrophic aspects in Masnavi are so abundant and varied that a proper understanding of the text cannot be achieved without discovering their semio-sematic position. Therefore, the most important function of apostrophe in Masnavi is its interpretive and epistemological function which conforms to the *irfanic* worldview of Molana (Rumi) and his epistemological method which is based on dialectics and evolutionary movement.

3. Method

The present research has a descriptive–analytic method and takes an interpretive approach; i.e. it takes a critical perspective, based on the literary

and aesthetic technique of apostrophe which is more commonly discussed in the rhetoric, on revisiting the conceptual domain of apostrophe, and instead of following the traditional approach in which apostrophe was considered as merely a rhetorical device thus rendering a reductionist definition of apostrophe, we have adopted a broader definition of apostrophe here where apostrophe includes any type of change and deviation from norms in the normal course of speech. Moreover, in our method, we have given consideration to the semantic and semiotic function of apostrophe in the interpretation of literary texts, particularly Masnavi Manavi.

4. Results and Discussion

The literary technique of apostrophe in Masnavi is different from other texts and has various types and functions. In our new approach to apostrophe, this literary technique incorporates the syntagmatic and paradigmatic axes of the text, some of the most important of which are as follows: linguistic apostrophe, aesthetic apostrophe, symbolic apostrophe, cognitive apostrophe, interpretive apostrophe, intertextual apostrophe, narrative apostrophe, ontological apostrophe, discoursal apostrophe, contextual apostrophe, among others. Illustration of any of these apostrophic aspects, aesthetic analysis of the frequency and role of any of these types, and analysis of their interpretive function in Masnavi is a topic worthy of a separate, extensive research of its own since apostrophic aspects and intratextual movements and changes in different texts vary considering the literary genre, artistic goal of the text, cultural and social geography of the era of production of the work of art, dominant discourses of the era, among other factors, and every text requires a separate, particular interpretive basis. One of the main functions of apostrophe in Masnavi is its interpretive apostrophe. In contrast to Hindi style of *ghazal* (~sonnet) in which the function of apostrophe influenced by the ontological discourse dominating the art in the era (Molla Sadra's integrated and ontological philosophy) is mainly ontological rather than epistemological, and 'equation style' (*oslūbe moādeleh)*, 'thematization' (*mazmūnpardāzi*) and 'verse-centeredness' (*beytmehvari*) as its dominant elements clearly reflect such a mentality, Molana's purpose in simultaneously expressing the various aspects of one or several phenomena using the technique of apostrophe is mostly epistemological rather than semantical or ontological. Another difference of the apostrophic aspect in Masnavi and Hindi style of *ghazal* lies in the type of movement in the two forms. In Masnavi, we mostly observe movement from the exterior (appearance) to the interior (core/reality) which sometimes does not stop in one realm of meaning but rather penetrates the cores of a phenomenon; however, in Hindi style of

ghazal, we mostly observe movement from the interior (core/reality) to the exterior (appearance), or the subjective to the objective. In fact, the structure of 'equation style' is based on such a logic.

5. Conclusion

One of the difficulties in interpreting a text is the lack of an understanding of its semio-semantic positions and structural features, and unfamiliarity with an interpretive method appropriate to the text. In other words, the first step in interpreting a text is understanding its interpretive complications. Considering its interpretive position, Masnavi Manavi can be regarded as an instance of a complicated text. Such a complexity which results in difficulty in interpreting Masnavi stems from its structural features. The main structural feature of Masnavi, which is considered its most prominent interpretive complication, is its apostrophic aspect. The difficulty in interpreting this *irfanic* (~mystic) text lies in the apostrophes and different movements that are employed in various ways in the text. Disregarding such movements will hinder an accurate, thorough understanding by the reader. The most important function of the literary technique of apostrophe in Masnavi, in addition to the aesthetic function, is the semio-semantic function of apostrophe in the text. Apostrophe in Masnavi forms a kind of structural paradox which serves to both complicate the understanding of the text and to pave the way for its interpretation. This literary technique in Masnavi has surpassed being a device serving to embellish the speech to become an epistemological element portraying the main characteristic of Molavi's system of thought. This means that apostrophe in Masnavi serves as a sign of signifying the dialectic and ontological principles of Molavi's thought. The most prominent type of apostrophe in the text is the interpretive apostrophe which occurs through the process of interpretation and has an epistemological function.

Keywords: Literary Apostrophe, Masnavi Manavi, Interpretive Node

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