

Hypertextuality and Transformation in the *Rostam and Sohrab* episode: A Diachronic Study

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Abstract

This study investigated the hypertextual evolution of the *Rostam and Sohrab* episode from Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh* across five Persian Editions and thirteen English translations spanning 202 years (1811–2013). Drawing on the “hypertextual” relationship from Genette's theory of transtextuality, the research implemented a new “Micro-Episode” (ME) methodology to quantitatively identify and categorize the various patterns of narrative repetition and transformation. The analysis revealed a distinct paradigm shift in translation norms: The translators in nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, perhaps seeking to legitimize the epic for Western audiences, adhered to a norm of comprehensive translation, achieving near-total narrative repetition and very few modifications. In contrast, late 20th-century scholarly translators established a new norm of strategic abridgment, systematically tailoring the episode for the modern readership and omitting didactic commentary to enhance the suspense and align with modern “Show, Don't Tell” aesthetics. Arnold's 1853 adaptation emerged as a radical outlier with an 80% omission rate. Ultimately, it is argued that the survival of world literature depends on translators' agency in reshaping the text for evolving cultural contexts.

Keywords: Gerard Genette, Hypertextuality, Literary translation norms, Micro-Episode, *Rostam and Sohrab* episode, *Shahnameh*.

1. Introduction

Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*, or the *Book of Kings*, stands as a monumental pillar of Persian culture and a cornerstone of World Literature. Comprising approximately 50,000 couplets, the epic has been positioned by scholars such as Lewis (2015) and Dabashi (2019) among the World Literary canon, alongside the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Since its introduction to the Anglophone world in the late 18th century, most notably through the writings of Sir William Jones, who likened Ferdowsi to Homer (Teignmouth, 2013), the *Shahnameh* has undergone a continuous retranslation process.

Despite the epic's canonical status and numerous translations, however, the specific textual mechanisms through which it has been mediated for Western audiences remain under-examined. Claiming that "no text exists in isolation," hence portraying different texts, including translations, as complex acts of negotiation within a vast network of textual relations, Intertextuality Theory appears to be a powerful toolkit for addressing this area of enquiry. There are numerous theoretical discussions about intertextuality within Translation Studies (TS) (see Littau 1997; Hermans 2007; Farahzad 2009; Venuti 2009, among others). However, a significant gap exists between theoretical discussions of intertextuality and its empirical application within TS, as much of the discussions on intertextuality in TS remain at a definitional or classificatory level, lacking diachronic case studies that trace specific intertextual analyses within translated texts.

The gap is particularly visible in the study of the English translations of Persian literary classics, most notably the *Shahnameh*. While there are isolated critiques of individual translations as well as studies which have addressed, through a post-structural lens, the "impact" of the *Shahnameh* on Western literary works (see Tamimdari 1388), there has been no attempt, to the researcher's knowledge, to map the "hypertextual" evolution of the epic in the English language. There are also numerous studies which have addressed the hypertextual evolution of various literary texts outside the translation sphere (see Pirhayati & Heyday, 2022;

Rostami, 2016; Abdollahifard et al., 2023; Pourkhaleghi et al., 2016). In the most relevant study, Shariatifar (2021) has investigated hypertextuality in the Alexander story from Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh* as compared to *Sharafnameh*, but it is still outside the TS sphere, as it has studied the Persian text itself.

The present research has tried to fill this gap in the area of literary and translation studies. To this aim, this study adopts Genette's Theory of Transtextuality (1997), specifically the "hypertextual" relationship, as its primary theoretical lens. Genette defines hypertextuality as "any relationship uniting a text B (which I shall call the *hypertext*) to an earlier text A (I shall, of course, call it the *hypotext*) upon which it is grafted in a manner that is not that of commentary" (1997, p. 5). More specifically, hypertextuality is centered on the ideas of "imitation" and "transformation," and the present study attempts to trace the evolution of the Persian epic since the publication of the first print edition until the release of its latest English translation (1811-2013).

Owing to the immense length of the *Shahnameh*, which comprises over fifty thousand couplets (i.e. more than 100 thousand lines, which counts as more than the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* together), no single empirical enquiry has the capacity to address the epic in its entirety. Thus, the *Rostam and Sohrab* episode was selected as it is the episode most frequently translated into English throughout history. To guide this inquiry, the study poses the following three research questions:

1. To what extent did the thirteen English translators repeat, omit and modify the MEs in *Rostam and Sohrab* episode?
2. How have the English translators transformed the *Rostam and Sohrab* episode through adding contents to the episode?
3. How have the Persian editions transformed the *Rostam and Sohrab* episode within the Persian tradition?

2. Theoretical Framework

While the broader concept of intertextuality, which was rooted in Aristotle's "mimesis," later discussed by Bakhtin through "dialogism" and

“polyphony,” and officially introduced by Kristeva (1980) as a “mosaic of quotations,” has long been acknowledged in literary and translation studies, its application to translated texts has often remained under-examined. Intertextuality has a considerable potential in TS, and scholars like Venuti (2009) have argued that “every text is... fundamentally an intertext,” and that intertextuality “enables and complicates translation, preventing it from being an untroubled communication and opening the translated text to interpretive possibilities that vary with cultural constituencies in the receiving situation” (p. 157). Similarly, Hermans (2007) posits that translation is inherently intertextual because it always refers to a pre-existing text which it claims to represent. However, notwithstanding the popularity of post-structuralist approaches to intertextuality, to conduct an empirical analysis of the narrative evolution of a text over two centuries, a structuralist approach might provide a better toolkit, as the structuralist approach reserves a space for the existence of a more or less stable “meaning” in texts. Accordingly, this study opted to draw on Genette’s framework introduced in *Palimpsests* (1997) as it offers a precise typology that moves beyond the fluid metaphors of post-structuralism.

Genette defines transtextuality as the “textual transcendence of the text,” or “all that sets the text in a relationship, whether obvious or concealed, with other texts” (1997, p. 1). Within his theory, he defines five types of relationships: Intertextuality (a “relationship of co-presence”); Paratextuality (The elements surrounding the main text); Metatextuality (The explicit or implicit commentary of one text on another); Architextuality (the genre of a text); and Hypertextuality. Of the five, this study focuses exclusively on “hypertextuality,” as it most suitably defines the potential for investigating the thematic transformations a source text undergoes during the translation process. Genette defines Hypertextuality as any “relationship uniting a text B (which I shall call the hypertext) to an earlier text A (I shall, of course, call it the hypotext) upon which it is grafted in a manner that is not that of commentary” (1997, p. 5).

Crucially, when formulating his “hypertextual” relationship, Genette elaborated on the concept in terms of non-translated works. The present study is the first published research in TS, to the researcher’s knowledge, which has applied hypertextuality in its Genettian sense to the translation

process: Here, a source text (here the *hypotext*) undergoes translation, which is a hypertextual process, and the outcome is a more-or-less transformed version of the hypotext in the target language. From this standpoint, confirming Lefevere (1992), every translation is a rewriting, and the target text always includes different sorts of thematic transformation.

2.1 Hypertextual Transformation

This study draws on Genette's distinction between two fundamental operations occurring between a hypotext and its subsequent hypertext(s): imitation and transformation: Imitation is reserved for instances where a hypertext imitates (or preserves) some formal or thematic features from its hypotext. Transformation, on the other hand, signifies the instances where the later text changes some features already present in the previous text. As the present study tries to operationalize the theory in TS, the source and target texts are considered as instances of hypo- and hypertext, respectively. Moreover, since changes in *form* are indispensable in every translation, this study has only dealt with the *content*. In this way, those parts of the source text which are retained, preserved or imitated in the target text are considered as Imitations, while the contents which undergo changes are identified as instances of Transformation. Additionally, to adopt terms more fitted to translation sphere, this study uses "Repetition" in place of "Imitation." Farahzad (2009) has used "repetition" in the context of intertextual theory, as in translation, the ST contents are repeated, rather than imitated in the target text.

Following a preliminary analysis of the corpus, the following three operations were identified as the various types of Transformation:

- **Omission:** Operating at macro-level, Omission concerns the complete removal of a single narrative unit (here a Micro-Episode) from the hypotext while producing the hypertext;
- **Modification:** Operating at micro-level, this is where a narrative unit is repeated from the hypotext but certain details are altered *within* its content (e.g., changing a character's name, motivation, or action);

- **Addition:** Operating at macro-level, this concerns the cases where a totally new narrative unit is inserted in the hypertext which was absent from the hypotext.

By mapping these operations, the study tries to provide a descriptive account of how the *Rostam and Sohrab* episode has been rewritten through specific operations of transformation over the last two centuries.

3. The Corpus

The corpus comprises both Persian editions (hypotexts) and English translations (hypertexts) of the *Rostam and Sohrab* episode. The hypotextual component consists of five major Persian editions, including the editions by Lumsden (1811), Macan (1829), Vullers (1877), the Bertels et al. (1960–1971), and the critical edition by Djalal Khaleghi-Motlagh (1987–2007). The inclusion of this range of source texts is crucial as it allows the study to distinguish between omissions made by the translator and variations inherent in the Persian manuscript tradition. There are, of course, numerous other Persian editions, but the present study has only included those Persian editions which the English translators had used as their source texts for translating the *Rostam and Sohrab* episode.

The hypertextual part of the corpus comprises thirteen English translations of the episode published between 1828 and 2013. This selection represents the complete available history of the episode in English, excluding only minor excerpts or inaccessible manuscripts. The English translations investigated are presented in Table 1:

Table 1. Bibliographic Details about Thirteen English Translations of the *Rostam and Sohrab* episode

No.	English Translator	Year	Scope	Source Text	Source Language	Prose / Verse
1	J. Atkinson	1828	<i>Rostam and Sohrab</i> Episode	M. Lumsden (1811)	Persian	Verse
2	W. T. Robertson	1829	<i>Rostam and Sohrab</i> Episode	T. Macan (1829)	Persian	Verse
3	J. Atkinson	1832	The Whole <i>Shahnameh</i>	Not Specified	--	Prose, with some verse

4	M. Arnold	1853	<i>Rostam and Sohrab</i> episode	Not Specified	--	Verse
5	H. Zimmern	1883	From the beginning to Rostam's death	J. Mohl (1838)	French	Prose
6	E. Sykes	1901	Selective: From Jamshid to the battle of Rostam and Esfandiyar	Not Specified	English	Prose
7	A.G. Warner & E. Warner	1906	The Whole <i>Shahnameh</i>	J. A. Vullers (1877)	Persian	Verse
8	A. Rogers	1907	The Whole <i>Shahnameh</i>	T. Macan (1829)	Persian	Prose (MEs 1- 36); Verse (MEs 37- 60)
9	E. Renninger	1909	From the beginning to Rostam's death	J. Atkinson, H. Zimmern, J. Mohl, M. Arnold, S. G. Benjamin	English	Prose
10	R. Levy	1967	The Whole <i>Shahnameh</i>	J. A. Vullers (1877)	Persian	Prose
11	D. Davis	1997	The Whole <i>Shahnameh</i>	Dj. Khaleghi- Motlagh (1990)	Persian	First 23 MEs in prose, later 12 in verse
12	B. W. Robinson	2002	The Whole <i>Shahnameh</i>	A.G. Warner & E. Warner (1906)	English	Prose
13	A. Sadri	2013	The Whole <i>Shahnameh</i>	Bertles et al. (1962)	Persian	Prose (38 MEs); Verse (3MEs)

4. Analysis, Results, and Discussion

Given the great length of the *Rostam and Sohrab* episode (ranging from 2,000 to 3,400 couplets depending on the Persian edition), a line-by-line comparative analysis would yield an unmanageable dataset. Thus, the study opted to divide the whole *Rostam and Sohrab* episode into smaller functional units here termed as “Micro-Episodes” (MEs). Apart from its innovation in operationalizing hypertextuality in translation sphere, using the ME approach is the second methodological value added and proposed by the present study. In this research, an ME is defined as a distinct sequence of narrative events that possesses internal unity (e.g., “Rostam

feels depressed and goes hunting; he hunts an onager and goes to sleep,” “Tahmineh visits Rostam at night and reveals her age-old love for Rostam,” or “The first battle begins between Rostam and Sohrab, they use various weapons and are finally exhausted”).

The Khaleghi-Motlagh edition, considered by *Shahnameh* scholars as the most scholarly, authoritative edition, was used as the structural baseline due to its authority and clear demarcation of narrative units. Following a preliminary analysis of the edition, the episode was decomposed into a total of 40 MEs. Afterwards, the other four Persian editions were scrutinized in terms of their narrative content, leading to the identification of an extra eleven MEs. Next, the thirteen English translations were carefully scanned, yielding an additional nine MEs which were only present in the English translations (and not in the Persian hypotexts). The three-step text analysis process resulted in 60 MEs. Finally, as each ME contained an average of 45 couplets (90 lines), the essence of each ME was summarized into a brief “synopsis,” consisting of the thematic essence of the lines within the ME, to make the analyses more manageable. The ME synopses were then used to compare the flow of narrative content across the eighteen texts.

As not *all* the 60 MEs were present in every Persian edition, it was necessary to establish a stable hypotextual core. Therefore, the study isolated the 40 MEs present in and shared by *all five* Persian editions. The exclusion of 20 MEs ensured that a translator was not critiqued for “omitting” a segment that had been likely *absent* from the specific Persian manuscript they consulted. The 40 MEs shared across all Persian hypotexts are available in Appendix 1.

The 40 shared MEs represent the undisputed narrative backbone of the episode. The remaining 20 MEs are also separately investigated as the ones either added by the English translators or revealing variations among different Persian editions. To address the three research questions, sections 4.1 to 4.3 below focus on (1) how the English translators repeated / omitted / modified the 40 shared units; (2) how the English translators transformed the episode through adding MEs; and (3) how the episode underwent thematic transformation across the five Persian editions.

4.1 Repetitions, Omissions, and Modifications across the 40 Shared MEs

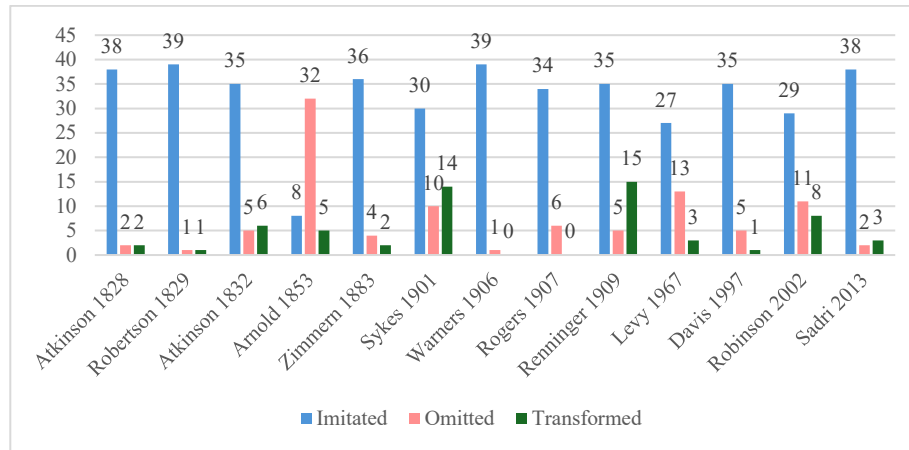
In this section, the analysis of the 40 shared Micro-Episodes (MEs) across the thirteen English translations yielded a dataset of 520 distinct hypertextual operations (40 MEs $\times$ 13 English translations). By categorizing each translators’ treatment of these narrative units into the three categories of Repetition, Omission, and Modification, distinct diachronic patterns emerged.

The data obtained from investigating the English translations revealed that four MEs 37, 38, 44, and 55 (Rostam’s denial of his identity, the fatal battle, Sohrab’s suggestion for truce and reconciliation, and Sohrab’s death) were repeated by all the thirteen English translators. Table 2 and Figure 1 summarize the frequency of Repetitions, Omissions and Modifications identified in each translation.

Table 2. Frequency and Percentage of Repetitions, Omissions and Modifications across the 40 Shared MEs

	Atkinson 1828	Robertson 1829	Atkinson 1832	Arnold 1853	Zimmern 1883	Sykes 1901	Warner and Warner 1906	Rogers 1907	Renninger 1909	Levy 1967	Davis 1997	Robinson 2002	Sadri 2013
Repetition	38 (95%)	39 (98%)	35 (88%)	8 (20%)	36 (90%)	30 (75%)	39 (98%)	34 (85%)	35 (88%)	27 (68%)	35 (88%)	29 (73%)	38 (95%)
Omission	2 (5%)	1 (2%)	5 (12%)	32 (80%)	4 (10%)	10 (25%)	1 (2%)	6 (15%)	5 (12%)	13 (32%)	5 (12%)	11 (27%)	2 (5%)
Modification	2 (5%)	1 (3%)	6 (17%)	5 (63%)	2 (5%)	14 (47%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	15 (43%)	3 (11%)	1 (3%)	8 (27%)	3 (8%)

Figure 1. Repetition, Omission, and Modification Trends across the English Translations



As shown in Table 2, there is a general predominance of Repetition across the majority of the translations: Eleven translators chose to repeat a significant majority of the shared MEs (between 73% and 98%), which indicates a prevailing commitment to presenting a comprehensive rendering of the episode's essential narrative. At the beginning of the English tradition, translators like Atkinson (1828), Robertson (1829) and Warner and Warner (1906) exhibited the highest degree of narrative completeness, repeating 38 (95%), 39 (98%) and 39 (98%) of the 40 shared MEs, respectively. It demonstrates a clear translation philosophy in these periods focused on maximum preservation of the source narrative.

In the 19th and early 20th centuries, translators were operating within a legitimization paradigm. As early Orientalists introduced Persian literature to a mostly skeptical Western audience, the primary burden was to prove that Ferdowsi was a monumental epic poet comparable to Homer. During this era, the epic was still relatively new in the West, and translators likely viewed their primary function as introducing a monumental, culturally distant epic to an Anglophone audience. In this context, to omit sections from the text would be to admit that the work was imperfect or unworthy of *full* attention. Therefore, translators like Robertson (1829) and Warner and Warner (1906) presented the Anglophone reader with as complete and untransformed a version of the Persian epic as possible. The high repetition of narrative units, even those considered repetitive by Western standards, served to construct the *Shahnameh* as an immutable monument of World Literature.

At the opposite extreme stands Arnold's (1853), which functions as a radical outlier. Omitting 80% of the MEs, Arnold's version is less a translation than a severe abridgment. It might even be claimed to be an instance of Drydenian "imitation." Arnold omitted vast details from the narrative, including the romantic interlude between Rostam and Tahmineh, the political plots by Afrasiyab, the preliminary battles with minor heroes like Hojir and Gordafarid, and the long aftermath of mourning. Instead, he focused exclusively on the father-son battle. Furthermore, even among this small number of repeated MEs, Arnold engaged in a high degree of modifications (63%).

Rather than a "translator," Arnold was a poet. Lacking direct access to the Persian text and relying on secondary summaries, Arnold sought to extract the tragic kernel of the epic and reshape it according to the Aristotelian unities of time and action. In this way, Arnold transformed the Persian epic poem into a Western tragedy, prioritizing dramatic unity over textual accuracy. His approach might be compared to FitzGerald's extremely free translation of Khayyam's *Rubaiyyat*. As expressed in the introduction to his works later published by Karlin (2009), FitzGerald did not intend to produce a mere "stuffed Eagle," (i.e. a lifeless but technically accurate translation), but a "live Sparrow," a translation with poetic qualities (p. xliii). So numerous are Arnold's omissions that by excluding his version from the dataset, the number of universally-repeated MEs increases from 4 to fifteen MEs, constituting 38% of the whole 40 MEs. The fifteen MEs represent the indispensable parts of the episode.

However, a significant trend toward abridgment and readability emerged in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. By the time, the *Shahnameh's* status as a canonical masterpiece was secure. Enjoying a heritage of previous English translations, modern translators like Davis and Levy were no longer burdened with proving the epic's existence or worth. Instead, they were tasked with ensuring its *readability* for a non-specialist, global audience. Accordingly, Davis (1997) has chosen to translate the classic, metered, rhymed and archaic poem into a modern language and prosimetric form similar to the one used by *naqqals* (ancient Persian story-tellers or rhapsodists). Thus, the drop in Repetition rates signals a scholarly recognition that for an ancient text to "survive" (cf.

Benjamin 1923/2000) in a modern literary marketplace, it must be streamlined.

Concerning the micro-level interventions (Modifications), the English translators can be classified into three groups: The first group showed a near-total refusal to modify the repeated narrative content. The group is led by Rogers (1907) and Warner and Warner (1906), both of whom have zero modified MEs. They are closely followed by Robertson (1829) who modified only a single ME out of 39 repeated MEs. This demonstrates an exceptionally strong commitment to preserving the textual integrity of the hypotext's key narrative elements.

In contrast, the second group is highly interventionist. Arnold (1853) is the most radical, modifying 5 repeated MEs (63%). This extremely high percentage confirms his position as an adapter rather than a conventional translator, as he modified the majority of repeated MEs. He is followed by two key figures from the early 20th century: Sykes (1901) and Renninger (1909), modifying 47% and 43% of their repeated MEs. These figures point to a translation philosophy that is less inclined toward presenting an intact version of the narrative for the target audience.

The translators in the third group show a middle-ground of moderate intervention. Robinson (27%), Atkinson's second translation (17%), Levy (11%), and Sadri (8%) are categorized within this group. Overall, the identified modifications reveal a spectrum of translator intervention and creativity, ranging from those translators who avoided modifying narrative details and those who assumed a more authorial role, actively transforming the narrative content to suit their interpretive goals and the perceived needs of their audience.

4.2 The MEs Added by the English Translators

As a macro-level transformation, in this study Addition is reserved for the cases where a translator introduces an entirely new ME that was not present in any of the Persian hypotexts. This practice perhaps represents the highest degree of translator agency, where the translator acts as a co-author, creating new narrative content. Following the analyses, the study identified nine distinct MEs added by the English translators. As shown

in Table 3, the practice of adding new MEs is highly concentrated among a small group of translators: Renninger, Arnold, and Sykes. This pattern confirms their status as the most interventionist translators within the corpus.

Table 3. The Nine MEs Added by English Translators

ME. No.	ME Synopsis	Translator(s)
1	Kavus' past troubles and flaws	Sykes
2	Background information on Tahmineh's character and motivations.	Renninger
9	Tahmineh's strategic plot to have Rakhsh stolen.	Atkinson (1832), Sykes, Renninger
31	Sohrab and Piran Wisch plot to challenge the Iranians.	Arnold, Renninger
32	Piran Wisch formally challenges the Iranian host.	Arnold, Renninger
36	Rostam suggests Sohrab surrender and join him, sometimes "as a son."	Arnold, Renninger, Zimmern, Sykes, Rogers
39	Sohrab spares Rostam's life after he falls in the first duel.	Arnold, Renninger
47	The dramatic recognition sequence: Rostam shouts his name, Sohrab drops his shield.	Arnold, Renninger
50	Sohrab speaks to Rostam's horse, Rakhsh, as he dies.	Arnold, Renninger

Accordingly, within the larger 60-ME corpus, nine MEs have been added to the episode by the English translators. In two cases (MEs 1 and 2), only one translator has added the contents, while in other MEs, the identified additions were made by more than one translator. This can offer powerful evidence about the “intertextual” relations among the English translations. For instance, in MEs 31, 32, 36, 39, 47, and 50, Renninger (1909) has included the same contents which had formerly been added by Arnold (1853). This shows clearly that Arnold's version has been a major source for Renninger. The same is true for ME 9 where Atkinson (1832) has been a major inspiration for Sykes and Renninger.

As regards their function, some additions have sought to provide background and strengthen the causal aspects of the narrative. Examples

include ME 1, where Sykes provided details on Kavus's past troubles and flaws, and ME 2, where Renninger provided background information on Tahmineh's character and motivations. As opposed to the standard process where translators tend to provide the necessary background information within the paratext, in the cases introduced in this section the translators have added the background information inside the *text*. Moreover, ME 9, discussing Tahmineh's plot to have Rakhsh stolen, is a particularly significant causal addition: Tahmineh's confession that she had arranged for the theft of Rakhsh provides a rationale for Rostam's arrival in Samangan. Similarly, MEs 31 and 32, added by Arnold and Renninger and discussing the dialogues between Sohrab and Piran Wised, create a more deliberate and logical progression toward the final battles. These MEs act as the opening lines in Arnold's version where Arnold has chosen to start *in medias res*, a major epic convention according to Horace. In this way, Arnold has tried to place his work within the Western epic tradition in terms of formal and generic conventions.

Second, several additions are designed to increase the dramatic irony and tragic effect, often by importing Western literary concepts. ME 39, where Sohrab chivalrously spares the fallen Rostam, adds a layer of tragic nobility that makes Rostam's subsequent killing of his son even more tragic. However, in ME 36, where several translators presented Rostam as suggesting Sohrab to surrender, Arnold and Renninger take a step further, with Rostam asking Sohrab to join him "as a son." This adds a moment of dramatic irony that is absent from the Persian original, hence a clear instance of translators transforming the narrative to conform to an Aristotelian model of tragedy.

Finally, some additions serve to amplify the emotional aspects of the narrative. ME 50, where the dying Sohrab has a final dialogue with the crying Rakhsh, is a sentimental addition designed to increase the emotional weight of the climax. Such choices show a translation philosophy where translators try to evoke strong emotional response from the reader, which is a major characteristic of the romantic literary traditions. Addition, as a macro-level transformation, provides clear evidence of the translator as a

creative agent. The additions are systematic and purposeful interventions, revealing a strategy among a group of translators to reshape the *Shahnameh*, transforming it into a narrative that aligns more closely with the Western tragic conventions.

4.3 Variations as Instances of Transformation Within the Persian Tradition

Apart from the hypertextual relationship between Persian and English versions of the episode, a comparative analysis of the five Persian editions reveals that the Persian tradition itself is not static but has its own history of thematic transformations. Of the 60 MEs, eleven are the ones appearing in some historical editions and not in later, more scholarly editions. In other words, the earlier editions of the episode include considerably larger number of MEs, while the later editions have each omitted a number of MEs. The reason behind the omissions has been the later editors' recognition that those MEs have been interpolations.

There are however further potential reasons for the omission of verses and contents in subsequent scholarly editions. MEs 11 and 23, including the descriptions of Rostam and Tahmineh's union and Sohrab's love for Gordafarid, are present only in Lumsden (1811) and Macan (1829). Their subsequent removal from Vullers, Moscow, and Khaleghi-Motlagh editions suggests a potential editorial tendency to tone down romantic and sexual content to create a more formal or moral version of the epic. Another group of variations, including MEs 5 (Rakhsh's violent resistance), 16 (Finding a noble horse for Sohrab), and 17 (Sohrab gathering his army), are only included in the three 19th-century editions (Lumsden, Macan, Vullers). In ME 16, for instance, which relates the finding of a steed worthy of Sohrab, the decision to include or exclude the content is significant, since in heroic epics, the bond between a warrior and his horse is of critical importance (as with Rostam and Rakhsh). As the ME serves to establish Sohrab's heroic character, its removal in modern editions comes at the cost of losing this important point.

Finally, a major significant variation concerns Ferdowsi's (the poet's) authorial voice. Ferdowsi's narrative style is characterized by a visible authorial presence: He frequently pauses the heroic action to address the reader directly, offering wisdom on the transience of life or the cruelty of fate. This sage-like voice is intrinsic to the text's identity as a mirror for princes and a book of wisdom. The two key didactic MEs, ME 3 (Ferdowsi's introductory proem) and ME 60 (Ferdowsi's closing words on fate), are absent from Lumsden's edition (1811). However, their inclusion in all subsequent critical editions signals a scholarly consensus on their authenticity and importance. This has a sharp contrast with the frequent omission of these MEs by the English translators. The shift likely reflects a change in Western literary aesthetics, moving away from the explicit authorial intrusion popular in the Victorian era toward the modernist "Show, Don't Tell" principle, typified by Hemingway's "Iceberg Theory." In other words, modern translators appear to have viewed Ferdowsi's moralizing as "redundant" interruptions that slow the narrative pace for a contemporary reader. Moreover, in this way, they have perhaps chosen to increase the suspense in the episode, leaving the audience alone in tasting the bitterness and tragic sense of the episode. However, their decision has led to rendering Ferdowsi's authorial voice invisible. In the end, the identified variations among the Persian editions demonstrate that a hypotext is itself a dynamic product of editorial transformation. Thus, thematic transformation does not begin with *translation*; it is inherent in the long life of the text itself.

5. Conclusion

This study set out to map the hypertextual evolution of Ferdowsi's *Rostam and Sohrab* episode across the five Persian editions and thirteen English translations spanning nearly two centuries (1811-2013). Trying to implement Genette's hypertextual relationship to TS, the research uncovered a distinct historical trajectory in the hypertextual transformations of the *Rostam and Sohrab* episode, revealing that the English translation history of the epic is defined by a paradigm shift from

Victorian comprehensiveness to modern abridgment. The early translators of the 19th and early 20th centuries operated under a norm of comprehensive transmission and legitimization. Achieving repetition rates as high as 98%, their primary objective was to legitimize the narrative as a masterpiece of World Literature by presenting it in its entirety, preserving its episodic structure as a testament to its epic grandeur. In contrast, the late 20th and early 21st centuries showed to be eras of scholarly abridgment. Modern translators like Levy, Robinson, Davis, and Sadri have shifted the priority from exhaustive completeness to narrative fluidity, trying to reshape the epic to align with modern readership's tastes and expectations. Most importantly, it was identified that a part of the abridgment has specifically targeted Ferdowsi's didactic and moralizing commentary. The omission reflects a profound aesthetic shift in the receiving culture: A move away from the explicit authorial interventions of pre-modern and Victorian literature toward the modernist "Show, Don't Tell" aesthetic that favors implicit action over explicit wisdom.

The research confirmed that the *Rostam and Sohrab* episode in English is not a static artifact but a dynamic, evolving hypertext. Each translation functions as a "palimpsest," writing over the Persian hypotext to accommodate the literary values and aesthetic preferences of a specific historical moment in the Anglophone world. Arnold's adaptation stands as the most extreme example, proving that a text can survive and even thrive through radical transformation. In this sense, translators act as co-authors or critical editors. By exercising the power to add, omit, and modify considerable parts of a narrative, translators appear to have rewritten the hypotext.

Classifying translation as a rewriting act, Lefevere (1992) posits that literary "fame" and "canonization" are fundamentally driven by "rewriting." Despite the reshaping of the source text and seemingly jeopardizing its author's "fame," the survival of a literary work is determined less by intrinsic value and more by the continuous willingness of professionals, including translators, to rewrite the work until it aligns with the prevailing ideology and poetics in the target culture. Fitzgerald's

translation of Khayyam's *Rubaiyyat* and Arnold's *Sobrab and Rustum* are clear examples of how a manipulative translation might eventually lead to the canonization and popularization of a literary work in the Anglophone world. According to Bloom (1973), this is a "misreading" act where, out of an "anxiety of influence," "great poets" perform an intentional misreading of a previous poem to reserve a space for themselves. Thus, it might be claimed that "great translators," like Fitzgerald and Arnold, can also perform an intentional misreading of the source text, although it leads to the further popularization of the source text in the West.

Methodologically, the study validated the Micro-Episode (ME) as a powerful unit of analysis for diachronic, descriptive translation research. By decomposing the narrative into functional semantic units rather than linguistic segments, the ME approach allows for a standard comparison of texts that are formally disparate. This methodology offers a replicable framework for future researchers studying the translation history of other monumental epics, like the *Mahabharata*, the *Iliad*, or the *Divine Comedy*, where the sheer volume of the text often resists systematic analysis.

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