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The Effect of Ideology on the Form and Content of Edward FitzGerald's Translation of Khayyam's Rubaiyat

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Abstract:

The present study attempted to examine Edward FitzGerald, who would translate Omar Khayyam's Rubaiyat (1859), was interested in Persian poetry. Translation deals with power and authority and most of the time the ideology of source text changes in favor of the dominant ideology of target text. Victorian people's scornful outlook toward East led to ideological manipulation of source texts by translators such as Fitzgerald. His strange reduction in his translations, especially in Khayyam's Rubaiyat results in the necessity of investigating his translation from ideological point of view. Surprisingly translation of Khayyam's Rubaiyat has never been studied from ideological perspective and is unknown for many literary scholars. Victorian issues had a strong effect on FitzGerald's selection of some Khayyam's Rubaiyat.

Keywords:
FitzGerald; Ideology; Rubaiyat; translation; Victorian Period; aesthetic

I. Introduction

Edward FitzGerald (1809-1883) often described his translation of Omar Khayyam's Rubaiyat, which he produced in four versions ranging from 75 to 101 stanzas, as centered on the theme of carpe diem. In musical terms, the poem might be described as variations on that theme; in visual terms, as a kaleidoscopic exploration of it. Following the lead of Omar Khayyam (1048-1131), a Persian poet and scientist, FitzGerald made his Rubaiyat elaborate a philosophy of "seizing the day": through lamentation, through the recounting of personal experience, through bald assertions of defiance against conventional piety, through metaphorical representations of a world in which human beings lack all meaningful volition, and through vignettes - especially the longest, most fanciful one (the "book of pots"), in which the poem's speaker overhears a group of pots speculating about their creator.

FitzGerald himself was an eccentric figure, and like most translations, his involves telling idiosyncrasies. Despite his reasonably good knowledge of Persian, he resorted to a range of strategies to render the poem in English, the most important being the seeking of a poetic voice through radical reduction and re-forming of the original, and through improvisation upon it. The resulting translation influenced his contemporaries, particularly Algernon Charles Swinburne, and was adopted by celebrators of British imperialism although FitzGerald, a melancholy character who liked to keep things small, never was one himself. While scholars often describe the Rubaiyat as Orientalist literature, the rubric of Orientalism, as defined by Edward Said, fails fully to characterize the poem, which is deeply inflected by FitzGerald's ethos of translation.

II. Research Methods

Many scholars and biographers have written accounts of how FitzGerald came to translate the Rubaiyat and of his personal circumstances during the period of translation. In July 1856, FitzGerald received from Edward Byles Cowell, his friend and tutor in Persian, a copy of Sir William Ouseley's manuscript of the Rubaiyat, which had recently been discovered in the Bodleian Library. FitzGerald pored over its 158 stanzas intermittently. Cowell departed for India a short while later, and in June 1857 he sent FitzGerald a copy of the Rubaiyat manuscript held by the Asiatic Society of Bengal, which is now commonly called the Calcutta manuscript; with 516 stanzas and with much vocabulary unfamiliar to FitzGerald, it presented more challenges than the Ouseley. In the summer of 1857, FitzGerald worked slowly on translating the quatrains. He used both the Ouseley and Calcutta manuscripts, basing his translation on his imperfect knowledge of Persian and on comments Cowell sent in answer to his queries. Although his pace was leisurely, the translation was an important occupation for him in the wake of his mother's death in 1855 and his disastrous marriage to Lucy Barton in 1856, which ended with separation by sometime in September 1857. He translated the quatrains first into Latin, then into English. The resort to Latin was not a standard practice for FitzGerald, but in this instance the Latin rendering became a foundation for the English translation. Arthur Arberry explains: "The Latin paraphrases were all based upon Ouseley; the English poem rests equally upon Ouseley and Calcutta, and there is abundant proof that FitzGerald collated the two manuscripts before composing his Rubaiyat."

In 1858, FitzGerald submitted 75 stanzas to Fraser's Magazine, which neither acknowledged nor printed them. In 1859, the Rubaiyat appeared, unsigned, after FitzGerald paid for its publication himself, choosing G. Norman, in Covent Garden, as his printer. He sent most of the 250 copies to Bernard Quaritch, a London bookseller. The Athenaeum remarked cursorily on the poem in June of that year, praising an "abundance of gorgeous imagery," and in October the Literary Gazette - a periodical still influential, although in its decline - carried a review; the reviewer remarks on the "repulsive theories" and "crushing fatalism" the poem espouses but praises the "richness and depth of feeling" of Khayyam's writing and the competence of the Rubaiyat's "modest translator." No other notice came, however, and few copies sold. In 1861 Algernon Charles Swinburne and Dante Gabriel Rossetti discovered FitzGerald's translation, and they began to talk of the Rubaiyat in literary circles. In 1868, a second edition was published. Charles Eliot Norton reviewed it in the North American Review of October 1869, and this time reception was enthusiastic. FitzGerald's Rubaiyat "is the work of a poet inspired by the work of a poet," Norton writes, "not a copy, but a reproduction, not a translation, but the redelivery of a poetic inspiration."(4) Overall, The Rubaiyat, as he acknowledged to Cowell, was "very unliteral. Creating the passionate monologue" was FitzGerald's main achievement in translating the Rubaiyat.

III. Results and Discussion

3.1 Fitzgerald's Aesthetic of Accident

In the mid-1850s, FitzGerald wrote to Cowell about their efforts to translate Persian. He had decided that Persian poetry in English should seem Persian still. "I am more & more convinced of the Necessity of keeping as much as possible to the Oriental Forms, & carefully avoiding any that bring one back to Europe and the nineteenth Century," he announces. "It is better to be orientally obscure than Europeanly clear."(37) The remark suggests FitzGerald's investment in a stereotypical dichotomy: transparent and intelligible Europe versus the mysterious East. This thinking, unoriginal and not particularly attractive, reflects prejudices

associated with Orientalism, and indeed scholars often assume FitzGerald's most esteemed translation from the Persian, his Rubaiyat, to be an Orientalist text. (38).

Edward Said identifies the poem as part of a secondary tier of Orientalist writing, a genre created by "Oriental enthusiasts." Such work involves "a kind of free-floating mythology of the Orient" that has foundations in "the conceit of nations and of scholars." Understood in these terms, the Rubaiyat reflects the hubris of imperial Britain, reinforcing imperialist prejudices and bolstering imperialist aims. Iran B. Hassani Jewett advances a similar view in her study of FitzGerald, positing that FitzGerald's British arrogance, his "belief in his inherent English superiority" allowed him to think that his very limited knowledge of Persian would suffice for his translation project. That misguided hubris, she contends, "enabled FitzGerald to compose his masterpiece in his own way, unhampered by any bothersome doubts."(40) Barbara Black extends Said's argument in her discussion of the Rubaiyat as a fetishizing collection, explicitly connecting FitzGerald's Orientalism to his translation practice. "A member of what translation theorists label the hegemonic language and culture, Fitzgerald assumes a paternalistic pose as the civilizer or improver of the dominated language and culture, Khayyam's Persian," Black writes.(41)

In this interpretation, translation becomes FitzGerald's means towards an Orientalist end. Such approaches to the Rubaiyat have valid elements, as remarks from FitzGerald's own pen attest. But I suggest that they fail fully to capture the character of the poem, because they misconstrue FitzGerald's translation ethos and its role in shaping the Rubaiyat. This ethos, deeply individual and individualistic, influences the thematics of the Rubaiyat and the attitude of the poem's lyric speaker. FitzGerald was attracted by the idea of genuine imitation being achieved by an accidental imitator, a writer who hasn't set imitation as a primary goal. Recognizing his own limits as a translator, and convinced of the severe limitations of translation as an enterprise, he nurtured a vision of good translation as imperfect re-creation that was governed largely by fortune. (42)

The Rubaiyat aesthetic of accident privileges chance and randomness over predictability and determinacy and prizes interruption and rapid metamorphosis over continuity. Khayyam's quatrains, which are self-contained and often epigrammatic, gave Fitzgerald a good foundation for a poem that espouses vicissitude and chance; one stanza typically offers little hint of what the next may contain. FitzGerald nurtured the sense of surprise when he assembled the Rubaiyat from a selection of the quatrains. By opening with dawn, an obvious beginning, and by allowing occasional segments of continuity, notably the vignette of the pots, he installs sufficient suggestion of development to make his Rubaiyat many shifts, fits, and starts resonate in contrast. Upon this foundation of changeability, he constructs a poem that manifests his aesthetic of accident formally and thematically. FitzGerald's aesthetic of accident is reflected in the unpredictable third-line endings of the Rubaiyat quatrains, which vary across the poem, regulated only by the translator's choice. The famous "beneath the bough" stanza reads as follows:

Here with a Loaf of Bread beneath the Bough,
A Flask of Wine, a Book of Verse - and Thou
Beside me singing in the Wilderness -
And Wilderness is Paradise enow. (1859; XI). (48)

This stanza starts with two lines that contain no sonic clue that "Wilderness" might end the third, and "Wilderness" slips the bounds established by surrounding lines in various ways. It has no rhyme; its dactylic syllabic structure contrasts the structure of the monosyllabic "ow" words (and means that were it to be rhymed, its rhymes could never be as crisp as theirs); and it situates the two who sit "beneath the Bough" in an untamed place, disturbing the pastoral scene

that the stanza's first two lines evoke. Like other third-line endings in the Rubaiyat, "Wilderness" is an interloper word that sends its stanza in new directions. Occasionally, in a moment suggestive of interlocking stanzaic patterns, one stanza's third line ends with the sound that governs rhyme in its successor. This happens in the 1859 edition from stanzas seven to eight, for example, which remark on fleeting time:

Come, fill the Cup, and in the Fire of Spring
The Winter Garment of Repentance fling:
The Bird of Time has but a little way
To fly - and Lo! The Bird is on the Wing.
And look - a thousand Blossoms with the Day
Woke - and a thousand scatter'd into Clay:
And this first Summer Month that brings the Rose
Shall take Jamshyd and Kaikobad away. (1859; VII-VIII)

The rhymes on "Day" in the "thousand Blossoms" stanza pick up on the "way" in the The next quatrain fails to develop the pattern, however. Instead, in the ninth stanza, rhymes on "lot" reestablish the primacy of accident; and the speaker, in accordance with this sonic rebuke, abandons the momentarily elegiac tones of the "thousand Blossoms" stanza to advocate impetuosity:

But come with old Khayyam, and leave the Lot
Of Kaikobad and Kaikhosru forgot:
Let Rustum lay about him as he will,
Or Hatim Tai cry Supper - heed them not. (1859; IX)

Similar flickerings of inter-stanzaic pattern occur elsewhere, but each serves ultimately as a reminder of pattern's absence and the predominance of chance. Thematically, the aesthetic of accident emerges in the poem's persistent images of flinging, throwing, and blowing, which occur so frequently as to suggest their involvement in a governing ideal. The opening of the Rubaiyat introduces the tossing motif with "flung," which forms half of an alliterative pair in the second line: "Awake! For Morning in the Bowl of Night/ Has flung the stone that puts the stars to Flight" (I. 1- 2). It is an emblematic moment; the flung stone injects an element of accident into the poem's origins and day's origins alike. The motif returns in the seventh stanza, where the speaker urges his audience to repudiate piety and join in revelry: "Come, fill the Cup, and in the Fire of Spring/The Winter Garment of Repentance fling" (VII. 1-2). It is picked up in the thirteenth stanza, when a personified rose speaks of willingly tossing her handsome petals to the ground:

Look to the Rose that blows about us - "Lo,
"Laughing," she says, "into the World I blow:
"At once the silken Tassel of my Purse
"Tear, and its Treasure on the Garden throw." (1859; IX)

The Rubaiyat reiterates an image of the blowing flower several more times, in the eighteenth stanza ("I sometimes think that never blows so red/The Rose as where some buried Caesar bled"), the twenty-sixth ("The Flower that once has blown forever dies"), and the forty-eighth ("While the Rose blows along the River Brink,/With old Khayyam the Ruby Vintage drink"). In these latter instances, the primary meaning of "blow" is "bloom," rather than "scud before the wind" as in the thirteenth stanza. Yet the earlier image of the rose tossing down her petals and the poem's other imagery of blowing and flinging inflect this imagery of the blooming flowers, so that we understand the roses as subject not only to nature, but to chance. Each "blowing" rose evokes a sense of fleeting beauty yielding willingly to the winds and suggests, by

implication, the seemliness of abandoning oneself to arbitrary fortune The imagery comes to a thematic culmination in the twenty-ninth stanza, one of the most cryptic passages in the Rubaiyat, where "blowing" diction articulates the poem's denial of divine providence. In the preceding stanza, the poem's speaker professes to have gained little from visits to "Doctor and Saint" except a sense of life's mystifying brevity: "And this was all the Harvest that I reap'd -/'I came like Water, and like Wind I go' " (XXVIII.3-4). The twenty-ninth stanza draws on this idea of obscure swiftness, asserting that human existence entails profound arbitrariness. Chance, this quatrain asserts, controls the world:

Into this Universe, and why not knowing,
Nor whence, like Water willy-nilly flowing:
And out of it, as Wind along the Waste,
I know not whither, willy-nilly blowing. (1859; XXIX)

The boldness of this statement becomes evident in the next quatrain, where the speaker calls for "Another and another Cup to drown/The Memory of this Impertinence!" (XXX. 3-4). FitzGerald here emphasizes the "Impertinence" of a divinity who allows the world to be governed by chance. His translation (and not Khayyam, whose words FitzGerald first misunderstood and, as we have noted, subsequently misrepresented by choice). (49)

Holds God responsible for creating a world ruled by arbitrary fortune. This blasphemous repudiation of divine providence uses the "blowing" diction associated with the rose, thematizing the aesthetic of accident that the poem's first stanza introduces. The blasphemous "willy-nilly blowing" passage suggests how motivated FitzGerald was by the notion of chance and indirection controlling things, including his translation, and how far he was willing see the role of chance extend. Again and again, the poem's imagery of flinging and tossing, reiterated in diverse tones and contexts, insists that accident governs human existence. The fifteenth stanza reminds us that careful people ("those who husbanded the Golden Grain") and careless people ("those who flung it to the Winds like Rain") alike meet the same end in death.

The motif is important in the fiftieth stanza, one of a series that describes human beings as ruled by arbitrary whims. Here the poem's speaker likens his listener to a ball on a playing field:

The Ball no Question makes of Ayes and Noes,
But Right or Left as strikes the Player goes;
And He that toss'd Thee down into the Field,
He knows about it all - HE knows - HE knows! (1859; L)

The phrase "toss'd Thee down into the Field" conveys the omniscience and dispassion of divine power in the Rubaiyat and suggests the signal role of arbitrary fortune in the poem's world. We also encounter the tossing motif in a lyrical moment at the close of the Rubaiyat, as the speaker asks for commemoration after his death. He imagines his listener crossing the "same Garden" (LXXIV.4) where he and his friends once drank and coming to the space "among the Guests Star-scatter'd on the Grass" (LXXV.2) that the speaker would occupy were he still alive. The image of the "Star-scatter'd" friends extends the flinging motif, with its insistence on the determinant force of chance, to the end of the poem; and the speaker's idea of his own death manifesting itself as an absence within a "scatter'd" group of revelers implies that accident's governance extends even to one's death and its aftermath among one's living friends. The imagery of flinging, throwing, and blowing, reiterated in tones of exhortation, lamentation, exasperation, and acceptance, signals the aesthetic that guides FitzGerald's practice: an aesthetic that holds chance and indirection to be preeminent in artistic creation, as in any sphere that

human beings may experience or envision. Raoufzadeh etal (2020) in article entitled "A Foucauldian Reading: Power in Awakening by Kate Chopin "reinforces Although Foucault believes that the subject is constituted by power, he does not reject the idea of resistance to this power. Foucault argues that resistance is not outside power, and it depends on it. In his view, resistance grows out of the power against which it struggles. Therefore, resistance is internal to power. It happens when they deliberately challenge the expectations of those who are in the position of power. By this rebellion they refute the stability of their identity within the expected bounds, when this rebellion continues; it produces some possibilities of change and therefore effective resistance. (160)

Accounts of the Rubaiyat as an Orientalist text tend to disregard FitzGerald's conflicted views of Persian poetry and of empire, which fail to accord with an interpretation of the poem as a manifestation of popular imperialist attitudes. FitzGerald infamously wrote with disdain of writers whose work he endeavored to render with his imperfect Persian: "It is an amusement to me to take what liberties I like" with them, he told Cowell in March of 1857, as they "are not Poets enough to frighten one from such excursions." But he is careful to set Omar Khayyam (along with the Sufi poet Hafiz) apart from others towards whom he directs his unpropitious scorn: "To be sure their Roses and Nightingales are repeated enough; but Hafiz and old Omar Khayyam ring like true Metal. The Philosophy of the Latter is, alas! One that never fails in the World! 'Today is ours' etc."(52)

He writes similarly of Khayyam later that year to Tennyson, but also I have really got hold of an old Epicurean so desperately impious in his recommendations to live only for Today that the good Mahometans have scarce dared to multiply MSS of him. He writes in little Quatrains, and has scarce any of the iterations and conceits to which his People are given. One of the last things I remember of him is that - "God gave me this turn for Drink, perhaps God was drunk when he made me" - which is not strictly pious. But he is very tender about his Roses and Wine, and making the most of this poor little Life. (53)

FitzGerald's disparagement of Persian literature involved prejudiced views that were common in Victorian Britain and that have a place in Orientalism as Said describes it: ideas that the poetry could be understood with an incomplete knowledge of Persian, that it would benefit from European rewriting, that it was minor literature, "little," and childishly devoted to simplistic and repetitive motifs. Yet FitzGerald's love of Khayyam involved something else: appreciation for what he understood as Khayyam's carpe diem philosophy and for Khayyam's poetic style. It also entailed a belief that he had a special affinity with the astronomer poet. At the end of 1857, he referred to his kinship with Khayyam in a letter to Cowell. "But in truth I take old Omar rather more as my property than yours: he and I are more akin, are we not? You see all [his] beauty, but you can't feel with him in some respects as I do."(54) This belief bordered at times on obsession, but it was not a symptom of FitzGerald's disparagement or of a specifically Orientalist appropriation or domination of Khayyam's identity; it was born of literary attraction. (55)

FitzGerald did not confine his efforts to "improve" literature to Persian poetry alone. He liberally cut and revised the poems of George Crabbe, whom he greatly admired, referring in a letter to his hope of publishing "my Edition of Tales of the Hall, edited by means of Scissors and Paste, with a few words of plain Prose to bridge over whole tracts of bad Verse."(56) The liberties he took with verse of the Quaker poet Bernard Barton also resemble those he took with Khayyam. "Some of the poems I take entire - some half- some only a few stanzas, and these dovetailed together - with a change of a word, or even of a line here and there, to give them logic and fluency," he explained.

3.2 The Rubaiyat and Late Victorian Poetry

Various scholars have discussed the Rubaiyat significance to Victorian and modernist poets. Norman Page explores how FitzGerald's translation takes up themes of memory in Tennyson's In Memoriam; the Rubdiydt, he argues, shadows closely the concerns and even the circumstances of composition of Tennyson's poem: "FitzGerald's own masterpiece is, less overtly, itself the commemoration of an intense friendship and the expression of a sense of loss, and that in some respects its origins curiously resemble the ones of Tennyson's poem."(74)

FitzGerald's influence on Swinburne deserves extra attention, because it shows us how the influence of the Rubdiydt in English poetry extends beyond form to a broader poetic ethos. Here Omar AM Shah's remark about "frissons of trepidation" becomes valuable. One of the major Persian works has been translated into English by a few translators. Those few translations which are available in English are invariably incomplete, often written in poor and on rare occasions in tediously pompous English. It is against this background of a relative neglect that FitzGerald‘s achievement should be judged. Although FitzGerald‘s version of the poem was one of the earliest, and although he translated only a part of the poem, it is still the best version available. It is interesting that although FitzGerald tries to take liberties in his work; his translation reveals the spirit of the original. His unique method of translating which has been the subject of many criticisms derived from his special ideology. He distanced himself from conventional and dominant ideologies. Separation from conventional ideology in the Victorian period paved the way for beginning a national movement. Edward FitzGerald was an excellent translator and supporter of a magnificent national movement which resulted in separating religion from politics. However, he was an advocator of separatism, morality meant a lot to him.

IV. Conclusion

Influence of the Rubaiyat has been tremendous. A. C. Benson presents us with what is probably the best basic view of FitzGerald's influence, The Omar cannot be said to have affected the stream of English poetry very deeply; it has not turned the current of poetical thought in the direction of Oriental verse; moreover, the language of the Omar, stately and beautiful as it is, has no modernity about it; it is not a development, but a reverting to older traditions, a memorable graft. After discovering the Rubaiyat, made FitzGerald into something of an Oriental deity. He always speaks as if his Omar were the real Omar. Others have seen a different Omar, and more than a few critics have claimed that FitzGerald was ignorant of how free his version really was. FitzGerald, however, was fully aware that he was not being literal. Whether FitzGerald understood Omar or not, or whether Omar was a Sufi poet or not, is altogether irrelevant to a consideration of the Rubaiyat as a poem. The Rubáiyát should be read as a revolt against general Victorian values: optimism, earnestness, Puritanism, and science development.

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