

# FitzGerald's Approach to Translation

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## **Abstract**

The present paper attempts to explore FitzGerald's overall approach to translation by examining his translated works and particularly by focusing on his translation of Khayyam's Rubaiyat. Khayyam Rubaiyat is selected as the text to gather data and it is compared to its English translation by FitzGerald in order to identify the strategies he used in translating it into English. In order to do so, first this paper traces translation theories common in Victorian era and the extent FitzGerald adheres to them. Second it discusses translation of poetry and potential obstacles inherent in it according to form, meaning, culture-specific terms and the role of interpretation in poetry translation. Then it focuses on Khayyam Rubaiyat translation and identifies strategies used in its translation which ranged from addition, selection, omission, domestication to foreignization, all of which transformed Khayyam into a Epicurean western-poet philosopher. It further concludes that FitzGerald has employed the same strategies and theory in all of his translated works. In addition to Persian language and literature, It is useful to examine his approach to translation in his non-Persian translated works like Greek literature and make a comparison among Persian and non-Persian translations.

**KeyWords:** VictorianEra, FitzGerald, Khayyam, Translation, Translation Theory, Translation Strategies.

## **Introduction**

Throughout history, written and spoken translations have played a crucial role in interhuman communication especially in providing access to important texts for scholarship and religious purposes; therefore, translation has a key role in transferring the cultural heritage of one nation to the other one and in the development of cultural and intellectual life. Although there is somehow consensus among the scholars about the importance of

translation in this respect, studying the history of translation from Cicero up to now shows the main fact that there has not been any agreement among scholars on how to translate (literal, faithful, sense-for sense). Because of this discrepancy among the scholars' viewpoints on translation methods, here it is important to notice that in some periods, one method of translation is more dominant although there are some exceptions. From the chronological point of view, the viewpoints on translation and the approaches exerted by translators in nineteenth century were different from the previous and next centuries. With a hindsight to the Victorian views on translation in nineteenth century, we try to explore the FitzGerald approach to translation in general and then examine his approach to translation in Khayyam Rubaiyat and find out strategies he used in translating it.

### **Methodology**

In order to do this study, the book entitled *The Wine of Nishapour* by Shahrokh Golestan, the collection of Khayyam Rubaiyat, and its equivalent translation by Edward FitzGerald (1859) has been selected to explore FitzGerald's approach to translation and strategies he exerted in translating it. Since I am not competent in other languages like Greek and I know only English and Persian as my native language, I used only Persian translated works by FitzGerald. To do this study, I made one-to-one comparison between Persian quatrains of Khayyam and FitzGerald translation and in each case, the strategy used in translation has been identified. In addition to this type of work, I looked through the articles and books both Persian and English to use other ideas about FitzGerald's approach to the translation of texts from other languages, namely, Greek language.

### **Victorian Era and Translation**

The Victorian Era of the United Kingdom was the period of Queen Victoria's rule from June 1837 to January 1907. This was a long period of prosperity for the British people, as profits gained from the overseas British Empire, as well as from industrial improvements at home. The era was preceded by the Georgian period and succeeded by the Edwardian period. The era is

often characterized as a long period of peace and economic, colonial and industrial consolidation. At that time, Iran was under the Empire of British which had a direct effect on the status British people devoted to the Persian literature. They regarded it as an inferior and poor literature which needs to be enriched by British scholars and we can see how this view impacts on the way they translate Persian literature at that time. The main principle of translation common in this era is the need to convey the remoteness of the original in time and place. It means that the original text is perceived as property, as an item of beauty to be added to a collection, with no concessions to the taste or expectations of contemporary life; so, it leads to archaic translation which satisfy the minority group; the translator focuses on the SL text; the TL reader is brought to the SL text. The nineteenth century brought new standard of accuracy and style in translation.

Regarding the style, the Victorian aim achieved through far-reaching metaphrase (literality) or pseudo-metaphrase was to constantly remind readers that they were reading a foreign classic. An exception was the outstanding translation of Khayyam Rubaiyat by FitzGerald in these periods which achieved its oriental flavor largely by using Persian names and discrete Biblical echoes and actually drew little of its material from the Persian original. In this period people were interested in theatre, arts, music, drama and opera as well as gambling, drinking and prostitution. In terms of technology and natural sciences the book entitled '*on the origins of species*' by Charles Darwin was written and published in this era. All of these events had a direct effect on the reception of the translation of Khayyam Rubaiyat and the strategies FitzGerald used in its translation. Before moving on FitzGerald overall approach to translation, it is appropriate to mention some factors important in poetry and hindrances in its translation.

### **Translation of poetry**

Poetry presents special challenges to translators given the importance of a text's formal aspects in addition to its content. In his influential 1959 paper "on Linguistic Aspects of Translation", the Russian-born linguist and semiotician, Roman Jakobson went so far as to declare that

poetry by definition is untranslatable. In 1974 the American poet James Merrill wrote a poem "Lost in Translation" which in part explore this idea. So a good translation of a poem must convey as much as possible not only of its literal meaning but of its form and structure (meter, rhyme, alliteration, scheme, etc). Here we are going to discuss translation of poetry from three aspects: Form and meaning, culture-specific terms and interpretation of poetry.

1) **Form and meaning:** Translation of poetry is probably the subject in translation that triggers the strongest polemics. The problems originate from the multiplicity of meaning in a literary text also from the integration of form and meaning. Since the form and style of poetry is very imaginative and complex, it is very difficult, sometimes impossible to transfer all the linguistic features of a poem from one language to another. The form contains part of the meaning so that a loss in transferring the form leads to a loss in transferring the total meaning. So translator should be aware of all these features and integrity of form and meaning and should be competent to transfer or reproduce all these features in the target text.

2) **Culture – specific terms:** Cultural elements in translation of poetry have significant role. Thorough knowledge of a foreign language, its vocabulary, grammar is not sufficient to make one competent as a translator. One should be familiar with ones own culture and be aware of the source-language culture before attempting to build any bridge between them.

Nida(1964:55) classifies the cultural references in five groups:

1. Material, related to every day objects.
2. Ecological, related to differences in the places, weather...
3. Social related to social organization and its artistic manifestation in the arts or literature and history.
4. Religious
5. Linguistic, the tool which is needed to express the previous types of reference.

Based on Newmark, culture is the way of life and its manifestation that is peculiar to a community that uses a particular language as its means of expression (1988:94); furthermore, Hatim and Mason (1990:2) say "poetry is an act of self expression and not of communication".

Regarding these remarks, we can conclude that there may be all kinds of constraints and problems in the translation of poetry as a cultural heritage of one nation full of cultural terms. Totally, in poetry every word is a symbol which represents an area of experience or part of one's environment. So it requires the cultural competence of a translator in order to overcome the problems originating from culture- specific terms in the translation of poetry.

**3-The Role of Interpretation:** Translator's influence of the poem he reads affects the output. In other words, the translator's knowledge about the poem and his understanding of it can be considered as the most important factor in translating poetry. It may be proper to say that some poems need to be interpreted in order to be more understandable for the target language readers. So literal translation in some cases leads into bad results. But interpretation should not be so far from the main point presented by poet. The translator should not change the poem in his own taste. He have to be faithful to the source text, however, he may be authorized to write valid and reliable interpretation at times.

All of factors mentioned above indicate that translator should have the following competences: language, culture, subject, text and transfer one.

Here it is proper to move on Edward FitzGerald and his approach to translation. He was born to a distinguished family of Irish heritage on March 37, 1809 at Bred Field, near Woodbridge, in the Suffolk area of England. In 1830, he was graduated from Trinity College, Cambridge. He was a prolific letter- writer, corresponding regularly with such close friends as William Makepeace Thackeray and Alfred, Lord Tennyson and Thomas Carlyle. Beginning in the 1830s, FitzGerald wrote numerous poems and essays, nearly all of which went unpublished. His *Euphranor*, a philosophical dialogue, was published in 1857, followed by *Polonius*, an anthology of quotations in 1852. FitzGerald began studying Spanish ballads and drama, and his translation of six dramas by Pedro Calderon de la Barca was published in 1853. At the encouragement of his friend Edward Byles Cowell, a multilingual scholar, FitzGerald began learning Persian. In 1856 FitzGerald's translation of Jami's allegory *Salaman and Absal* was published. That summer, Cowell, just before

moving with his wife to Calcutta, India, discovered a manuscript of Omar's *Rubaiyat* at the Bodleian library at Oxford. At the time, Omar was known in his native land as a brilliant scientist and, somewhat less, so, as a poet. Cowell copied the manuscript to show FitzGerald. FitzGerald's *Rubaiyat*, translated anonymously and published in 1859, went virtually unnoticed until discovered by Dante Gabriel Rossetti the following Year. As its success modestly grew, FitzGerald felt compelled to revise it three times; these editions were published in 1868, 1872, and 1879. By the third edition, he was known to be the anonymous translator. FitzGerald had begun to translate Greek drama; his *Agamemnon* was published in 1865 and his version of *Oedipus Rex* and *Oedipus at colonus* appeared in 1880-81. But he is known primarily for his *Rubaiyat*, which became immensely popular in the late nineteenth century, after FitzGerald's death in 1883.

## Results

**His overall approach to translation:** FitzGerald was attracted by the idea of genuine imitation being achieved by an accidental imitator, a writer who has not 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 in his translations and the liberties he took in translation served this ideal. He translated many literary works and he resorted essentially to the same approach in most of his translations, both eastern and western, preferring loose or very loose paraphrase to literal faithfulness. The approach is evident in his six Dramas of Caldron published six years before the first edition of the *Rubaiyat*. In recognition of the great liberties he took with *Aeschylus*, FitzGerald attached to his *Agamemnon* a preface justifying his translation practice, in which he argues that an extraordinary liberal approach offered the only hope he had of recreating the spirit of the Greek original. In the preface he refers to the scheme by which John Dryden classified translations according to degree of literal faithfulness: metaphrase (word-for-word translation), paraphrase (looser translation) and imitation; for him, loose rendering was the only rendering. He rejects to produce a more strictly faithful translation since he believes a literal version would scarce be intelligible. He wants a rendering congenial to readers, and, to create one, he has taken bold but necessary liberties. He believes that at all cost, a

thing must live; better a live sparrow than a stuffed eagle; a reader, not a scholar one, he aimed to please an interested but unscholarly reader. Totally he applied free and reader- oriented approach to all of his translated works. Now we are going to explore this approach and other possible strategies of translation in one of his translations: Khayyam Rubaiyat.

### **The tradition of translating the Rubaiyat of Khayyam**

Omar Khayyam (1053-1123) was a Persian poet, astronomer, and mathematician whose poems are more widely known to English readers through Edwards FitzGerald's brilliant nineteenth century translations (1859).

Depending on the sources of reference that one chooses, Omar Khayyam is believed to have composed somewhere between 200 and 600 Rubaiyat. Some are known to be authentic and are attributed to him, while others seem to be combinations or corruption of his poetry, and whose origins are more dubious. It has been translated into most languages including English, French, German, Italian, Russian, Chinese, Hindi, Arabic and Urdu. In the following we list some of its translations into European languages. The main point is that none of the following translations obtained the popularity of FitzGerald's translation among the public.

**Graf von Shack** Adolf Friedrich von Shack (1815-1894) published a German translation in 1878.

### **Friedrich von Bodenstedt**

Bodenstedt (1819-1892) published a German translation in 1881. The translation eventually consisted of 395 quatrains.

### **Edward Henry Winfield**

Two English editions by Winfield (1836-?) consisted of 253 quatrains in 1882 and 500 in 1883.

### **J.B. Nicolas**

The first French translation, of 464 quatrains in prose, was made by J.B. Nicolas, chief interpreter at the French Embassy in Persia in 1867.

### **John Leslie Garner**

An English translation of 152 quatrains, published in 1888.

### **Justin Huntley McCarthy**

McCarthy published prose translations of 466 quatrains in 1888

### **Richard Le Gallienne**

Gallienne produced a verse translation, subtitled "a paraphrase from several literal translations", in 1897. In his introductory note to the reader, Le Gallienne cites MacCarty's "charming prose" as the chief influence on his version.

### **Edward Heron-Allen**

Edward Heron-Allen (1861-1943) published a prose translation in 1898. He also wrote an introduction to an edition of Frederic Rolfe (Baron Corvo)'s translation into English of Nicolas's French translation.

### **Franz Toussaint**

The best-known version in French is the free verse edition by Franz Toussaint (1879-1955) published in 1924. This translation consisting of 170 quatrains was done from the original Persian text, while most of the other French translations were themselves translations of FitzGerald's work. The *Éditions d'art Henri Piazza* published the book almost unchanged between 1924 and 1979. Toussaint's translation has served as the basis of subsequent translations into other languages, but Toussaint did not live to witness the influence his translation has had.

### **A. J. Arberry**

In 1959, Professor A. J. Arberry, a distinguished scholar of Persian and Arabic, attempted to produce a scholarly edition of Khayyam, based on thirteenth-century manuscripts. However, his manuscripts were subsequently exposed as twentieth-century forgeries.

### **Robert Graves and Omar Ali-Shah**

While Arberry's work had been misguided, it was published in good faith. The 1967 translation of the Rubáiyat by Robert Graves and Omar-Ali Shah, however, created a scandal. The authors claimed it was based on a twelfth-century manuscript located in Afghanistan, where it was allegedly utilized as a Sufi teaching document. But the manuscript was never produced, and British experts in Persian literature were easily able to prove that the translation was in fact based on Edward Heron Allen's analysis of possible sources for FitzGerald's work.

### **Peter Avery and John Heath-Stubbs**

A modern version of 235 quatrains, claiming to be "As literal an English version of the Persian originals as readability and intelligibility permit", published in 1979.

### **Karim Emami**

In 1988, for the very first time the Rubaiyat were translated by a Persian translator. Karim Emami translated the Rubaiyat in his title "The Wine of Nishapour" which was published in Paris. The Wine of Nishapour is the collection of Khayyam's poetry by Shahrokh Golestan.



### **Ahmed Rami**

Ahmad Rami, a famous late Egyptian poet, translated the work into Arabic. His translation is considered to be a most fascinating work of modern Arabic literature.

Due to the great reception of FitzGerald's translation of Rubaiyat, now we want to explore his approach in its translation based on these factors: form , meaning ,interpretation of poem , and culture – specific terms.

In terms of stylistic and formal features like rhyme, alliteration or other kind of figures of speech, he reproduced a translated poem that seems to be an original one so that it is claimed that FitzGerald was better at rearranging the creations of others than he was at inventing his own. Success in translation meant, for FitzGerald, the re-creation of a poetic voice .Regarding this fact and his main career as poet, he is more successful in recreating stylistic features. From this point, English readers appreciate him and call his translation as Omar-Fitz poems. But there is a basic deficit in his translation; Khayyam's Rubaiyat are originally arranged according to alphabetical rhyme, a Persian tradition of arranging sonnets. But FitzGerald arrange them thematically in a way that Khayyam enters a Persian garden at dawn , conscious and alert, then sinks into contemplation, drinks during the days, gradually attains to a state of exhilaration, writes his poetry to celebrate the glory of the garden , and finally mourns at man's short life as night approaches .

### **Meaning and the way he interpreted Rubaiyat.**

In his translation, the sequence of a day acts as a metaphor for the passage of time. It extols the hedonistic pleasures of food, sex and wine, and the importance of living for today, because the future is uncertain and life is fleeting. Written during a time of religious upheaval its first edition was published the same year as Darwin's origin of species – the translated poems questioning of religion and traditional morality was both shocking and fascinating to its reader. So FitzGerald interpreted the Rubaiyat on his own taste and focused on the literal meaning. FitzGerald assigned an Epicurean interpretation to the Rubaiyat and interprets them in a way to fit his translation into

the western frame of thought and pain himself fame he would perhaps never achieve otherwise:  
the best example is this Rubai:

Ah! My Beloved, fill the cup that clears

To- day of past Regrets and Future Fears

اي دوست بيا تا غم فردا نخوريم  
وين يکدم عمر را غنيمت  
شمرم

### Culture- specific Terms

To translate these terms, he used different strategies. In some cases, he used borrowing strategy and imported that name. It is more significant in translating proper names like کيقباد و رستم و حاتم طاعی و کيخسرو و بهرام و جمشيد.

By using this strategy, he maintained the oriental flavor. Another strategy he used is domestication; this is obvious in this example:

The Rose as where some **buried Caesar** bled:

آن لاله ز خون شهرياری بودست

This is not full equivalent of Persian term. Their connotation is different. The point is that Caesar was killed by an Iranian and it is not appropriate to use as an equivalent. The equivalences such as beloved, Tavern, Heavenly Master, lovely houris are not the total and real equivalents of the terms کوزه و فلک و ميخانه و دوست of

Regarding the abovementioned aspects on the translation of Khayyam Rubaiyat, we can classify translation strategies in the following way:

1. Addition : According to Heron Allen , forty four of FitzGerald's quatrains are translated and composed of only one or two quatrains in Khayyam's : This means that these are not translation , but FitzGerald himself composed original English poems based on part of Khayyam Rubaiyat such as the following quatrain from FitzGerald's translation:

Then of the thee in Me who works behind

The veil , I lifted up my hands to find  
A lamp amid the darkness ; and I heard,  
As from without. (The Me within Thee blind)

For this Rubai, there is no equivalent in Persian original source.

2. Selection: FitzGerald prepared his own version based on Bodleian and Calcutta version consisting of 158 and 516 Rubai respectively. He made this selection probably due to these factors: how much he found them translatable, how much they fit into his Epicurean interpretation, etc.
3. Omission: he omitted some quatrains either because he found them difficult to translate or because they didn't conform to the Epicurean image he had constructed of Khayyam.

Example:

And this I know: whether the one True light,  
Kindle to Love, or Wrath consume me quite,  
One Glimpse of it within the Tavern  
Better than in the Temple lost outright

به زانکه بحراب کنم راز و	با تو به خرابات اگر گویم راز
	نیاز
خواهی تو مرا بسوز و خواهی	ای اول و ای آخر خلقان همه تو
	بنواز

4. Domestication: In some instances FitzGerald used domestication strategy proposed by Venuti and acculturates Persian terms.

Example:

I sometimes think that never blows so red  
The Rose as where some **burid Caesar** bled;  
That every Hyacinth the Garden wears  
Drop in its Lap From some one lovely Head

هر جا که گلی و لاله زاری می بودست آن لاله ز خون **شهریاری** بودست

هر برگ بنفشه کز زمین می روید خالیست که بر روی نگاری بودست

5. Foreignization: it is another term as a strategy in translation proposed by Venuti. Here FitzGerald imports the Persian terms into English by transliteration and foreignize his translation. This is more obvious in the case of culture – specific terms.

Example:

They say the lion and the lizard keep

The courts where **Jamshyd** gloried and drank deep:

And **Bahram**, that great Hunter-the wild Ass

Stamps Oer his Head- and he lies fast sleep.

آن قصر که جمشید در او جام گرفت آهو بچه کرد و رو به آرام گرفت  
بهرام که گور می گرفتش همه عمر دیدی که چگونه گور بهرام گرفت

Totally, he used all of possible strategies to produce a free translation of Khayyam Rubaiyat to be accepted greatly among the English public. In the following section we explore the possible reasons for these strategies.

## Discussion

The main purpose of this study was to find out and classify theories and strategies used in translation by FitzGerald especially in the translation of Khayyam Rubaiyat. The theory he used – he mentioned it in the preface of *Agamemnon*- was the scheme by which John Dryden classified translations according to degree of literal faithfulness: metaphor (word – for – word translation), paraphrase and imitation; he used paraphrase and sometimes imitation as a translation theory in translating. He held this attitude in all his translated works. In order to realize this theory, he used some strategies .In the case of Khayyam Rubaiyat, he used mainly these strategies; addition, selection, omission, domestication, foreignization. These strategies are found out based on the analysis of translation in terms of form, meaning, interpretation, and culture - specific terms. It seems that FitzGerald exercised this approach (free translation) and strategies mentioned above because of the following reasons:

- Limited knowledge of the Persian language.

- Ignorance of the tradition of Persian poetry.
- The marginal position he assigned to Persian literature.
- Using translation as a mode of writing and composing poems.
- Producing a very natural translation to be pleasant for all English readers.

FitzGerald's knowledge of the Persian language was extremely poor and his resources for the Persian language consisted of sir William Jones Grammar of the Persian language and a dictionary of Persian, Arabic and English and also his familiarity with Cowell who knew Persian. So Fitzgerald translated the Rubaiyat with such limited knowledge and resources; therefore he was not cognizant of the tradition of Persian poetry. Also, FitzGerald, as a result of the colonial attitude dominant in his time, considered Persian literature inferior as compared to the superior position he attributed to English literature. FitzGerald's disparagement of Persian literature involved prejudiced views that were common in Victorian Britain and that have a place in orientalism. He held 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. Fitzgerald did not confine his efforts to improve literature to Persian poetry alone. He liberally cut and revised the poems of George Crabbe. The liberties he took with verse of the Quaker poet Bernard Barton also resemble those he took with Khayyam. Fitzgerald believed that certainly he had bettered the original. It seems that having these ideas allowed him to exercise any kind of liberty in translation.

The main limitation in this study was that I as writer only know English and Persian. If I knew the Greek language, it would be possible to assemble some examples from the translation of the Greek texts by FitzGerald and certainly it would lead to better results about his overall approach. Whatever I mentioned here about his overall approach to translation was borrowed from the English researches on this topic. In this study I only focused on Khayyam Rubaiyat as an instance of FitzGerald translated works. It would be

useful to discuss and explore his overall approach in translation in other translated works of FitzGerald and to compare them to the translation of Khayyam Rubaiyat.

### **Conclusion**

As it was mentioned, translation plays a crucial role in the construction of history. In other words most of the world's past comes to us in translation and it is reasonable to say that the history of the world could be told through the history of translation. So, through translation, people have gained opportunity to become familiar with the other nations' literature. In order to translate a text, translators adhere to different approaches which subsequently affect its reception and popularity in the TL. In this paper we attempted to explore FitzGerald's approach to translation, especially his approach to the translation of Khayyam Rubaiyat and tried to find the reasons underlying his basic approach in translation. Through this examination, it become evident that there is a direct link between his theory and practice and also that Fitzgerald used appropriate methods including selection, omission, foreignization and domestication to realize his ideal translation. Since every research is incomplete and continuous process and this study only serves a partial part of this study, there are many intact areas to do more specific researches in this respect.

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