

A Contrastive Analysis of Two Translations

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چکیده

تاکنون ترجمه‌های فراوان و گوناگونی از رباعیات خیام به زبان انگلیسی در کشورهای انگلیسی زبان منتشر شده که مهمترینشان ترجمه منظوم ادوارد فیتزجرالد شاعر سده نوزده انگلیسی است که باعث گردیده متن انگلیسی رباعیات خیام بخشی از ادبیات انگلیسی سده نوزدهم به شمار آید. اما در سال ۱۹۶۷ میلادی رابرت گریوز، شاعر معروف انگلیسی دیگری با همکاری عمرعلیشاه، تبعه افغانستان، ترجمه منظوم دیگری از رباعیات خیام منتشر کرد که در پیشگفتار ترجمه خود مدعی شد ترجمه‌اش از روی متن اصلی رباعیات خیام بوده که نسخه خطی فارسی آن به مدت هشتصد سال در خانواده عمرعلیشاه افغانی دست‌به‌دست شده است. نویسنده این مقاله، پس از اثبات کاذب بودن ادعای گریوز و عمرعلیشاه به این نتیجه می‌رسد که نسخه مورد استفاده گریوز کپی منابع فارسی ترجمه ادوارد فیتزجرالد است، اما فرق اصلی این دو ترجمه در این است که فیتزجرالد توانسته است در برگردان خود، فلسفه اصلی خیام را حفظ کند، اگرچه ترجمه او کاملاً به صورت آزاد انجام گرفته و شاعر سده نوزده انگلیسی با الهام‌گرفتن از خیام به طور آزادانه یک شاهکار شعری در زبان انگلیسی بوجود آورده، در حالیکه ترجمه گریوز، اگرچه از لحاظ زبانی به متن فارسی رباعیات نزدیک‌تر است ولی به علت برداشت نادرست او از خیام، که او را صوفی پنداشته، از لحاظ فلسفی از متن فارسی رباعیات کاملاً به‌دور است.

Robert Graves's publication of his own translation of Omar Khayyam's *Rubaiyat* in November, 1967 triggered this study. Graves claims that Edward FitzGerald used spurious sources for his

translation, and that FitzGerald, furthermore, misinterpreted Khayyam's basic philosophy. According to Graves, Khayyam was a Sufi and his use of words like "wine", "cup", and "beloved" was fundamentally symbolic. As a result of the new translation and the claims made in it, the present writer had to turn back to Omar Khayyam and his Rubaiyat and examine the commentaries of his contemporaries and the sources of both translations.

Graves's claim that Khayyam was a Sufi generates from a manuscript that a retired Afghan army officer by the name of Omar Ali-Shah, who is a resident of London, gave him. According to Ali-Shah, his Persian text is an uncontradictably authentic manuscript of Khayyam's poetry which had been prepared in 1153 A.D., a bare thirty years after Khayyam's death. He also claims that this manuscript has been in his family for eight hundred years. Obviously, both Persian men of letters and foreign Khayyam scholars hope that such a manuscript would be authentic. Such a find would certainly provide the solution to the Omar Khayyam puzzle, which for centuries has interested scholars. However, the hope seems doomed to disappointment. The Mongol invasion of Iran, immediately after Khayyam's death, destroyed the eastern part of this country and in particular Khayyam's birthplace, Nishapur. The cultural decimation experienced at that time offers little promise that an authentic manuscript of Khayyam's Rubaiyat will be discovered.

It is highly probable that Khayyam recited his few quatrains only in friendly circles and that they were consequently passed down

orally from generation to generation. This can explain why there are so many different versions of his Rubaiyat. It is unlikely that he ever attempted to write an autograph copy of his own Rubaiyat, for we are not at all certain that an original manuscript ever did exist.

Since 1859 Khayyam has been known in the English speaking world as a wine-imbibing hedonist because of Edward FitzGerald's translation. In 1856 and 1857, Professor Edward Byles Cowell, FitzGerald's *fidus Achates* at Cambridge, presented him with two manuscripts of Khayyam's Rubaiyat, the Ouseley and Calcutta MSS. FitzGerald based his translation on these two sources, although he later adopted some suggestions from J.B. Nicolas, who published his French version of *The Rubaiyat* in Paris in 1867, representing Khayyam as a Sufi. FitzGerald issued four renditions of his translation, each somewhat different from the preceding one.

A comparison of the sources of both the FitzGerald and the Graves translations was not possible without having access to the Persian Rubaiyat that both translators used. Fortunately, FitzGerald's main source, the Ouseley manuscript, was available to the present writer in the form of facsimile in Edward Heron-Allen's book.¹ Edward Heron-Allen also cited quatrains from FitzGerald's other source, the Calcutta manuscript, in another book which he wrote, trying to collate FitzGerald's Persian sources.²

Robert Graves's Persian source was not available because he

1- Edward Heron-Allen, *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam Being a Facsimile of the Manuscript in the Bodleian Library* (London: H. S. Nichols Ltd., 1898).

2- Edward Heron-Allen, *Edward FitzGerald's Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam with their Original Persian Sources* (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1899).

has refused to disclose it. However, there was one possible way to arrive at the Persian stanzas he used and that was the order of the quatrains in his translation. Graves gives us a clue by giving the numbers of the quatrains in his Persian source. Turning to the FitzGerald translation, we notice that the numbers of Graves's Persian source follow those of FitzGerald's English stanzas, with some insignificant deviations. There is yet another collection, found in the translation made by Edward Heron-Allen in 1899. We find that the order of stanzas in this translation is followed almost exactly by the Graves translation. This similarity cannot be accidental for traditionally Persian scribes arrange the quatrains according to the last letter of the rhyming words. FitzGerald's arrangement is purely his own, because he tried to design his English stanzas in such a way that they would describe Khayyam's day from sunrise to sunset. It is strange that an eleventh-century Persian scribe could predict the order of the quatrains in two nineteenth-century collections. One must have been copied from the other and in this case Graves's source must be a copy of the Persian sources that FitzGerald used.

Heron-Allen in tracing these sources merely placed the stanzas in the same order that FitzGerald used in his translation. Thus we have the FitzGerald rendition, the Persian sources, and the Heron-Allen translation all following the same order. Now we find that Graves follows the very same order. It is probable, therefore, that someone, after 1899, copied the Persian stanzas from Heron-Allen's book and in this way produced the so-called "eleventh-century authentic manuscript".

To investigate the validity of Graves's assumption that Khayyam was a Sufi mystic, the present writer had to go back as far as possible to historical documents and study Khayyam's era, the commentaries of his contemporaries and critics. This study did not reveal any sound evidence that Khayyam was a Sufi. His name was not recorded in the hierarchy of Sufi elders.

Since no authentic manuscript of Khayyam's quatrains is extant, we had to seek his genuine stanzas in secondary sources. To be able to choose the most authoritative ones, we had to rely on the judgment of scholars. Both Persian and foreign Khayyam scholars have agreed upon the authenticity of fourteen stanzas discovered in *Mirsad ul Ibad* and *Munis ul Ahrar*. The fourteen key quatrains in these two books do not reveal Sufi symbolism and the compiler of the first book, himself a Sufi, denounces Khayyam and calls him a materialist.

In order to widen the scope of our study, we included additional stanzas that probably were written by Khayyam or at least were written basically in the spirit of the fourteen original stanzas. In other words, they are both philosophically and lexically close to these fourteen key quatrains. We have no proof that they had been written by other poets. No scholar has been able to find them in the collections of other poets' works. We have every other indication that they are genuine except an authoritative historical document to convince us that they are absolutely authentic. These quatrains, like the fourteen others, are written in a simple language and contain condensed philosophical speculations in concise phrases. We have

therefore called them "Khayyamian" quatrains and thus we have made a distinction between the fourteen genuine stanzas and other probably authentic quatrains. This allowed us to add thirty-six more quatrains to the corpus of our study.

In comparing the two translations, we discovered that FitzGerald also had misinterpreted Khayyam. His translation depicted Khayyam as a drinker who cared for nothing but merry-making. FitzGerald's translation, examination proves, departed from the original sources in many ways, for he added and subtracted; he combined stanzas; he invented stanzas; he took many liberties with his sources to create his own version. Further research reveals that the sources he used were not really authentic, and it is undoubtedly true that many of the stanzas he translated were not written by Omar Khayyam. Nevertheless, his translation established Omar Khayyam in the minds of the western reader as an epicurean who merely advocated a *carpe-diem* way of life.

Thus, FitzGerald's translation popularized Khayyam as a votary of the grape throughout the world. The westerner, especially, may see this eleventh-century Persian scholar as a sophisticated drinker. In Khayyam's authentic stanzas, wine is usually cited in reference to some philosophical issue. Only in the spurious quatrains do we notice a lavish praise of wine. This can be accounted for easily. After Khayyam's death and even up to the present, Persian dilettanti who drank and extemporized quatrains on the sly attributed to Khayyam rubaiyat which might have subjected them to religious persecution. In much the same manner, other quatrains crept into the collections

of so-called Khayyam's stanzas. Khayyam was a well-known astronomer, philosopher and mathematician, and it hardly seems probable that a mere drinker could have achieved such eminence. Therefore, Graves is right insofar as he says that FitzGerald has exaggerated Khayyam's hedonism. He seems to be wrong, however, in emphasizing Khayyam's Sufic philosophy.

Regarding the techniques of FitzGerald's and Graves's translation, it must be said that FitzGerald, because of his attempt to translate *The Rubaiyat* in a similar verse form, took liberties in translating his Persian sources. The language of FitzGerald's stanzas is certainly influenced by the stylistic modes of his age. There is a deliberate avoidance of ornate language in Khayyam's authentic stanzas. FitzGerald seems to deviate from the studied simplicity of his Persian sources. Therefore, he uses a more embellished language in his English stanzas. The best proof of his tampering with the Persian sources comes from his letter of March 20, 1857 to Professor Cowell in which he wrote:

*... It is an amusement to me to take what liberties I like with these Persians, who (as I think) are not Poets enough to frighten one from such excursions, and who really do want a little Art to shape them.*¹

Robert Graves seems to preserve the simplicity of the Persian stanzas in his English rendition. He uses musical devices moderately.

1- William Aldis Wright (ed.), **Letters of Edward FitzGerald** (2 vols.; London: Macmillan & Co., Ltd., 1907), I, 319.

His meter, like FitzGerald's, is iambic pentameter but he does not seem to be as regular as FitzGerald in his rhythm. Lack of rhyme and a less regular meter cause his stanzas to sound more like contemporary verse. FitzGerald's quatrains, on the other hand, have a pleasant melody that we miss in the Graves version. In other words, Robert Graves tries to give a contemporary tone to the language of *The Rubaiyat*. This befits the language of Khayyam's authentic stanzas, which is simple and direct.

A contrastive analysis of the two translations has shown that Edward FitzGerald's quatrains, in most cases, are philosophically close but lexically removed from the original Persian quatrains. Robert Graves's translation, on the other hand, is lexically close to the Persian source. While it is true that he finds Khayyam to be a Sufi mystic, his translation really does not exhibit this, except to note that words like "wine" and "beloved" must be interpreted symbolically. His stanzas are lexically so close to the original Persian quatrains that anyone familiar with the Persian language and the Rubaiyat can easily match each English stanza with its Persian source.

If FitzGerald's translation is lexically removed from its Persian sources, the poetic qualities of the original have certainly been reproduced in it. As the noted British orientalist Edward Browne indicated, "The beauty of 'Umar Khayyam's quatrains may be said to have been wholly rendered by the genius of FitzGerald."¹

1- Edward G. Browne, **A Literary History of Persia** (4 vols.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956), II, 142.

We can say, therefore, that both FitzGerald and Graves used spurious sources for their translation. We can say, further, that the FitzGerald version of Khayyam as a wine-imbibing hedonist is probably no more authentic than Graves's view of him as a Sufi mystic. We can say, finally, that both the FitzGerald and the Graves translations are approximations of the original, the FitzGerald emphasizing the musical elements, the Graves stressing the simplicity and the concreteness of the original language.

Perhaps one last thing needs to be said, and that has already been said by all critics who have examined translations. No translation can be perfect, for translation, because of its very nature, is an approximation. In poetry particularly, translation veers away from the original. In a sense, the best translations are the ones that are the freest, for in an attempt to catch the spirit of the original, the translator has to give up the exact rendition of every word and he learns to improvise and invent. We have seen how both Edward FitzGerald and Robert Graves have had to invent, transpose, add, and subtract to arrive at an English equivalent of a Persian stanza.

It would seem that any teacher introducing a translation into the classroom could very well use the original in conjunction with the translation, even when the students do not know the language of the original. They can thus see the form of the original and they can get an idea of the sound and the rhythm. Then they can see how the translator has had to shift ground because the language he used for translation is different from the language of the source. It well may be that a useful teaching device would allow the students to see two

or more translations of one passage or stanza so that they can understand how and why translations become approximations rather than exact renditions of the original.

In the final analysis, a translation of a poem becomes an original poem, and we are fortunate indeed in having two poets, Edward FitzGerald and Robert Graves, introduce us to the work of a third poet, Omar Khayyam. That their translations are different is perfectly understandable: they are different poets, who lived in different times.



An Abstract in the English Language

Robert Graves's publication of his own translation of Omar Khayyam's *Rubaiyat* in November, 1967 triggered this study. Graves claims that Edward FitzGerald used spurious sources for his translation and that FitzGerald misinterpreted Khayyam's basic philosophy. According to Graves, Khayyam was a mystic poet and therefore his quatrains must be interpreted in that fashion. Graves's claim generates from a manuscript that a retired Afghan army officer by the name of Omar Ali-Shah gave him. According to Ali-Shah, his Persian text is an uncontradictably authentic manuscript of Khayyam's poetry, which had been in his family for eight hundred years.

This article attempts to investigate the validity of Graves's assumptions by studying the sources that FitzGerald and Graves used, examining the authenticity of these sources, reviewing the commentaries on Omar Khayyam made by critics and scholars, studying the history of the period in which Omar Khayyam lived, and finally comparing the FitzGerald and the Graves translations of *The Rubaiyat*. The last task demanded that the language, rhythm, rhyme, and other poetic devices that these translators used be compared and, at the same time, matched with the actual source material.

On the basis of this investigation, the following conclusions can be made: (1) Graves's claim that FitzGerald used spurious sources is undoubtedly justified. As a matter of fact no authentic manuscript of Omar Khayyam's *Rubaiyat* has ever been discovered. All the manuscripts contain "wandering" stanzas that are spurious.

(2) Graves's claim that he used a more authentic source is not justified. His source probably is a copy of the sources FitzGerald used, and, therefore, he, too, used spurious stanzas. (3) Graves's claim that Omar Khayyam was a Sufi mystic does not seem to be justified by the evidence we have. (4) Graves's concept of Omar Khayyam as a Sufi mystic did not materially influence the language of his translation, although it undoubtedly would influence the reader's interpretation of his translation. (5) In translating *The Rubaiyat*, FitzGerald invented lines and stanzas and made extensive changes. (6) Graves's translation kept more closely to the text, but he left out all rhyme. (7) FitzGerald's translation departs, therefore, somewhat from the text but is much more musical than Graves's translation, for he kept the rhyme scheme of the original and used musical devices like alliteration. (8) Graves's translation is more exact, but his stanzas do not have the musicality of his source.