



پروفیسر شگاہ علوم انسانی و مطالعات فرہنگی
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survive as long as the *Rubaiyat* was remembered. He also wished "Omar to stand first, be never reprinted separate from Jâmi." Thus the *Rubaiyat* and *Salaman* can possibly be seen as representing two sides of FitzGerald's character. FitzGerald felt he had achieved a great triumph, moving from the nihilism and hedonism of his invented Omar to the spirituality of Jâmi's *Salaman* in order to indicate the progression in his own life from a carefree to a contemplative existence. His choice of epitaph shows the pinnacle of his spiritual journey: It is He that hath made us not we ourselves.



mostly of Epicurean Pathos of this kind - Drink - for - the Moon will often come round to look for us in this Garden and find us not.

This kind of approach made it possible for a new meaning to be culled from the text which perhaps never existed in the text before. Cowell, FitzGerald's Persian teacher, never agreed with FitzGerald's reading of Omar.

Hermeneutic critics such as E. D. Hirsch attribute this type of reading to the realm of "significance" distinguished from "meaning" which belongs solely to the author (*The Aims of Interpretation*, 1976); and for Hans-Georg Gadamer (*Truth and Method*, 1975) such interpretative reading is part of the very character of the work itself. There seems no longer to be any possibility of reading a text "as it is". Rûmi himself believed that

Everybody became my friend out of his own surmise, None sought to discover the secrets in my heart, My secret indeed is not remote from my lament. But Eye and Ear lack the light to perceive it.* In these lines, frequently quoted by Persian scholars, Rûmi postulates that everybody reads him from his own surmise or "angle of vision", or responds to him through his own lenses. A literary text functions as a mirror, to change the metaphor, and the reader sees his own reflection in it. Hence, a literary work may mean different things to different people in different situations. In other words, as a literary text passes from a historical or cultural context to a different context new meanings may be obtained by the reader, which were never be anticipated by its author or its own contemporary readers. Still, although different readings might bring new light to a text we can not entirely escape from its originally cultural context. Not every conceivable interpretation is valid, if it does violence to the text's own social and cultural context, which must have a shaping effect on all interpretation. It is, I believe, an error to read and appreciate Omar in complete isolation from the literary history of Persia, especially as convention is such a dominant feature in Persian poetry.

Later in his life, FitzGerald was determined not to print "his Omar" alone any more. He intended to print it with *Salaman*. In this way FitzGerald wished to stitch up the Saint [i.e. Salaman] & the Sinner [i.e. Omar] together. Moreover, he was certain that *Salaman* would

* A. Arberry, tr. *Tales from the Masnavi* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1961)

translation. . . . FitzGerald, by his superlative tact, has done us the favour of deceiving us, making either the East seem West. or the West seem East.⁷

FitzGerald felt and thought with Omar and thus read him as his own contemporary in such a way that Omar's voice became his own voice. He felt that he suffered from the same problems of dreary scepticism and desperate philosophy which had afflicted the mind of a man working in quite different fields of knowledge seven centuries ago in the remote east:

With them the seed of wisdom did I sow,
And with mine own hand wrought to make it grow;
And this was all the Harvest that I reap -
"I came like Water, and like Wind I go." (First edition, No. 28)

On the basis of his first and strongest impression of the verses attributed to Omar, FitzGerald particularly delighted in his impiety; that is, the religious scepticism. For FitzGerald, Omar without impiety was Hamlet without "the Prince". It was this aspect of Omar which FitzGerald tried to emphasize in his adaptation. Further, it was the pathos rather than the Epicureanism that FitzGerald wanted to emphasize; the invitation to wine-drinking is a response to the pathos of man's ignorance rather than to hedonism. FitzGerald believed that the philosophy of Omar never "fails in the world! Today is ours." He is attracted to Omar by what he sees as the latter's attitude to life: seize the day because death is certain, tomorrow is unsure, youth and beauty pass. Of course FitzGerald's interest in these things was connected to his personal circumstances when he was working on the *Rubaiyat*: his father died in 1852, his mother in 1855; his unhappy marriage and subsequent separation took place in 1856; and Browne's (his friend's) death was in 1859; the withdrawal of the "sea of faith" intensified all these misfortunes. Hence FitzGerald approached the Persian quatrains with a prior sense of the meaning of the whole obtained from his response to his first reading of Omar with Cowell expressed in a letter to Tennyson in July 1856:

We read some curious Infidel and Epicurean Tetrastichs by a Persian of the 11th century – as Savage against Destiny, etc., as Manfred but

⁷ I. Housman, *Introduction, Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*, E. FitzGerald (London: Collins, 1928) 9. The emphasis is mine.

adopted by FitzGerald in his own poem. Secondly, the *Rubdiycit* is in temper the product of the Victorian era. FitzGerald was not content with the current optimism and the complacent religion of his time. So he moved in a different direction, reluctant to offer any kind of moral instruction to his contemporaries; what he thought they needed was to follow the example of his "Omar", who lived in a happier world in a "Persian Garden" and was freed from the shackles of destiny. He interpreted "Omar", or rather a number of ancient poets whose work was attributed to an "Omar", in such a congenial way that an English readership felt it was discovering this ancient poet for the first time. FitzGerald's poem would have caused great controversy if it had not been presented as a translation, as its title suggests. If Tennyson's *In Memoriam* was an elegy or. it disintegrating form of faith which could not be held any longer by open-minded people, FitzGerald's poem was an elegy on all faiths since it belonged not only to the west of the nineteenth century, but also to the east: the cradle of ancient civilisations and religions. His *persona*, through his hedonistic philosophy, offered escape from a scientifically-minded world in which the religious authorities themselves were at odds with one another. To counter despair, he suggested withdrawal from "this sorry scheme of things" and offered "seize the day" as a kind of doctrine of the survival of the fittest. in addition, FitzGerald succeeded in teaching a higher lesson, which was to preach "knowledge of ignorance" and the "piety of blasphemy": to borrow the expressions from W. Cadbury.⁶ While the Epicurean aspects of the *Rubaiyat* resonated with a growing mood *fin-de-siècle*, exemplified in the writings of Swinburne and Pater, its melancholy also echoes the pessimism of Matthew Arnold and James Thomson (1834-82).

If we changed the title, or even omitted it, the first impression of the reader would be that apart from some Persian words or allusions, the poem was an original composition rather than a translation. Laurence Housman in his introduction to the Collins edition of the *Rubaiyat* (1928) remarked on how FitzGerald's

... fortunate paraphrase, so full of ease and grace, so supple in its diction and its imagery, makes us forget — as we never forget in reading a translation of Homer or Dante, however good - that it is a

⁶ Wil liam Cadbury. "FitzGerald's Rubaiyat as a Poem" *ELH* 34 (1967): 541-563

copy, but a reproduction, not a translation, but the redelivery of a poetic inspiration."⁵

As FitzGerald's editor, Aldis Wright, confessed it must be admitted that FitzGerald took great liberties with the original in his version of Omar Khayyam. FitzGerald did not want to or else could not translate literally; he considered that if he did so the result might not be "readable" to an English public. His motives were clarity of language and of theme. Therefore he deleted, added and suppressed, to gratify his fastidiousness, anything which he believed might interfere with the fluency of the English diction and the progress of its thought. Several faithful translations have appeared since FitzGerald's version, but none of them has succeeded in replacing FitzGerald's poem in the popular imagination. It was not the "true" Omar, which others translated, that fascinated the Victorians, but the Omar of FitzGerald who, in his Oriental guise, captured the Victorian imagination because of his unfamiliar exoticism and remote imagery on the one hand, and the familiar and universal theme of fatalism and seizing the day on the other. In other words, it was the English, rather than the Oriental, spirit and expression of thought that placed FitzGerald's poem in its position in world literature. The *Rubaiyat* was an expression of FitzGerald's own experience as well as his personal response to the misfortunes of his friends and his fellow-men in a world which he saw as fast surrendering to scientific determinism. FitzGerald, as a Victorian, read his own concerns and debates, and above all his anxiety about the future, into the rubaiyat; and sang his "Song" through the *Rubaiyat* in the voice of the *persona* of Omar, the *persona* he created in place of the Oriental mathematician and astronomer.

FitzGerald attempted to make use of the main themes of the quatrains and construct his poem according to his "prefabricated" pattern. There is not any particular structure in the original except in that the quatrains, despite being independent of each other, can be arranged under certain headings. It seems evident that the structure of Tennyson's *In Memoriam* influenced in "tesselating" his *Rubaiyat* in Tennyson's work each poem is self-contained but, at the same time, is related to the sequence of events and thoughts throughout the book; the same style, completely absent in the original manuscript, was

⁵. C. E. Norton. "Nicholas' Quatrains de Khayyam," *North American Review*. CIX (October, 1869): 575-57h; quoted by Terhune 209.

the notion that "at all costs a thing must live." So what FitzGerald did was to try to capture something of the essence or the spirit of the original Persian sources (Hâfz, Sa'di, Attâr, Ferdowsi, Jami, and above all Omar) and, reading his own concerns into them, "tessellate" them together into a "transmogrified" English version, to borrow the expression from Robert Graves. But FitzGerald missed much of the richness of the mystical essence of the Persian sources, so that despite some accurate translations the result must be called an -invention." Since his readers, in his view, were not "scholars" and not familiar with Persian literature they would not miss the symbolism and subtle meanings. The consequence of all this is that a detailed section-by-section comparison of the two versions, even it had not already been attempted by Heron-Allen, would be a futile attempt and would lead us nowhere. Not only did FitzGerald not convey and in some cases not comprehend the whole of Omar's philosophy; there are not even many comparable whole quatrains to discuss. It is the expression and spirit of the poem in English, not its fidelity to or divergence from the original, which has given FitzGerald his place in the literary history of England; but this expression and spirit are impossible to compare in detail with any Persian original or originals.

It is commonly believed that a word for word translation of poetry is impossible. because in the process of translation one must sacrifice either the form or the content. Or, looked at another way, one must sacrifice either the accuracy or the beauty. And in fact, FitzGerald's attempt, especially compared with other faithful translations, can be cited as a perfect illustration of this common belief. He sacrificed literalness or faithfulness in the interests of preserving the spirit, or what he saw as the spirit, of the original. If we compare FitzGerald's *Rubaiyat* with his other Persian translations, like *Salaman* and *Absal*, we see that FitzGerald put more of himself and less of the original into creating the *Rubaiyat*. Professor C. E. Norton was right when he said, after comparing FitzGerald's poem with Nicolas's French translation in 1869, that

He [the translator] is to be called "translator" only in default of a better word, one which should express the poetic spirit from one language to another, and the re-representation of the ideas and images of the original .. to the new condition of time, place, custom, and habit of mind.... It is the work of a poet inspired by the work of a poet; not a

FitzGerald's poem is less a product of its sources (i.e. a translation of a Persian poem preserving the feelings and interests of the original) than an independent poem which uses a persona and some exotic trappings to express a profound sense of peculiarly Victorian zeitgeist. Hence, FitzGerald's rendition of the Rubaiyat cannot be called a "translation" in the technical sense of the word, but an "adaptation". A translation seeks to retain the meaning of the source language text within its culture; whereas with an adaptation an author seeks to retain some of the meaning of the original text while using the source language text as a raw material to express a new idea within the framework of the author's culture. Thus an adaptation might create cultural distance between two languages, as FitzGerald's rendition did. In such an adaptation the author endeavours to remain faithful to his own culture or idea. FitzGerald's letters to his Persian teacher E. B. Cowell and his selection of the quatrains attributed to Omar Khayyâm prove that his knowledge of the Persian language and culture was not sufficient for an accurate translation; indeed he never intended to render a literal translation, as he himself called his translation "unliteral". FitzGerald in a letter to his teacher wrote:

My translation will interest you from its Form, and also in many respects in its Details: very unliteral as it is. Many Quatrains are Mashed together; and something lost, doubt, of Omar's Simplicity, Which is so much Virtue in him, But there it is, such as it is.

FitzGerald's aim was to be of service to something he had perceived in the original, and to express something deep in his own Victorian consciousness under the guise of an "Omar". He brought to these verses a set of beliefs and predispositions, and gave them the shape of an "Epicurean Eclogue in a Persian Garden" in order to enunciate the scepticism of the period. FitzGerald studied Persian mostly through translations of Persian literary texts, either in English or French, and he even studied Jami through a German translation. FitzGerald was not interested enough to delve deeply into the Persian language, nor did he believe in the need for a literal translation. This was not because of his inadequate knowledge of Persian but because he believed that he was a man of "taste", meaning that he had the faculty of making some things "readable" which others had left unreadable. FitzGerald succeeded in getting his message across through his own idiosyncratic methods of deleting, adding, and interpolating, following

movement toward High Church principles within the church of England, emphasising the "Catholic" side of the church and its authority as ordained by Christ. The Broad Church enjoyed the support of Coleridge, and was open to the recent advances in ideas, particularly in biblical criticism. In the nineteenth century the Higher Criticism examined the Bible as a historical and literary text, ignoring its spiritual value. The Low Church or Evangelical movement put less stress on church rituals and the sacraments and more emphasis on personal experience: "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."⁴

Apart from the clashes within the Church and its Roman tendency, the growth of "infidelity" or "agnosticism" was another element of the Victorian debate. The word "agnosticism", according to the OED, was later coined by T.H. Huxley, a follower and disciple of Darwin. This temper originated from different sources. The most significant element was the so-called "Higher Criticism", as practiced most famously by David Friedrich Strauss (1808-74), a German scholar and theologian, who denied the spiritual value and supernatural elements of the Bible in *Das Leben Jesu* (1835-60), translated into English by George Eliot in 1846.

Under these circumstances, the major Victorian writers could be expected to have a prophetic role and to be very earnest in their mission. The pattern of Victorian thought can be seen in the poetry of the period; its poets can be regarded as among the best interpreters of the age. FitzGerald's Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyām was itself a poetic product of the same age and is no exception to the general trend of thought of the period. Yet his Rubaiyat should also be read as a revolt against certain widely-held Victorian values: optimism, earnestness, Puritanism, and scientific development. So in a sense, FitzGerald is both Victorian and anti-Victorian. The initial neglect of his poem can partly be ascribed to this rebelliousness, and the progress of its reception corresponds to the gradual changes in the thought of the Victorians. The romantic melancholy of the Rubaiyat anticipated the pessimistic poetry of Arnold and James Thomson, and its Epicurean aspects suggested a growing mood of *fin-de-siècle*, exemplified in the writings of Swinburne and Pater.

⁴ W. Wilberforce, *A Practical View* (Glasgow: W. Collins, 1797) 441-44

uttered a few quatrains as a diversion when he became tired of his scientific activities. Edward Byles Cowell (1826-1903), FitzGerald's Persian teacher, to whom FitzGerald was indebted for his first acquaintance with the rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam, had a completely different view from FitzGerald's of Omar and his rubaiyat. Cowell was eventually convinced that the poem was mystical and that Omar Khayyam was a Sufi. In contrast, FitzGerald perceived Omar Khayyam as a hedonist and a "material Epicurean" as FitzGerald called him in his preface to the second edition.

The major Victorian writers - for example, Tennyson, Browning, Arnold, Dickens, Thackeray, Carlyle - lived in an age of profound spiritual unrest brought about mainly by the new discoveries of science and the "Higher Criticism" an age when the traditional institutions - religious, social, and political - were challenged from every corner. These writers were severe critics of their times and of life and all attempted, in one way or another, to establish new spiritual bases for their modern life. To begin with, the Victorian age might be regarded as an age of religion, since it took religious doubt so seriously. In other words, religion was present in every aspect of life, whether in social issues or in education. This age had to face sceptical controversy on an unprecedented scale, witnessing dramatic challenges to religious belief which led to internal theological controversy. The chief debates were generally between the Utilitarians, the followers of Jeremy Bentham (1772-1832), and the followers of Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834). Utilitarianism, developed by James and John Stuart Mill from Bentham's principle, stressed the idea that all reform, whether political or social, religious or secular, should be done with regard to this principle: "It is the greatest happiness of the greatest number that is the measure of right and wrong." This philosophy questioned the utility of "faith" and thus paved the way for the growth of scepticism and positivism. Set against this was the thought of Coleridge, which stressed the importance of "imagination" as the higher form of reason: as reason not only in the sense of intellectual reasoning, but in the sense of an activity of the whole soul of man, including intellect, understanding, and feelings. The religious debates started from the problem of the nature of the church. The Oxford movement of the 1830s, led by J. H. Newman, J. Keble, and E. B. Pusey, all fellows of Oxford colleges, was a

Khayyam. Others, however, have worked on the faithfulness of FitzGerald's translation and some of these again have tried to create a more authentic version.

Nevertheless, what was significant to FitzGerald was neither the authenticity of the quatrains nor their literal translation, but something that existed for him in those scattered quatrains: something out of which he wished to "tessellate"³ a beautiful eclogue which would "breathe a sort of consolation" to him. In those quatrains FitzGerald found certain doubts, fears, disillusionments and consolations which troubled a poet or poets centuries ago in Persia. He found in them a new voice for his age, the Victorian period: a convenient voice with which he intended to express the agnosticism and nihilism which he felt as the major threat to the human spirit in his own scientifically minded time. As a voice of this new age, FitzGerald tried, through Omar as his *persona*, to express the scepticism which was later admired by the Pre-Raphaelites, and since then has been both admired and condemned by so many others. In this respect, FitzGerald was the forerunner and almost the guide of those rebels who did not share the current optimism.

There is enough evidence, both in FitzGerald's letters and in Persian scholarship, to suggest that it was FitzGerald himself who constructed the Omar he "found" in the quatrains: the passionate sceptic who wakes up at dawn sober and contemplative, but who as he thinks and drinks grows savage and blasphemous, until finding himself unable to solve the riddle of his existence he finally sobers back into melancholy at nightfall. Such a subject as well as this structure is entirely FitzGerald's invention; it is absent from the quatrains attributed not only to Omar Khayyam but also to any other Persian poets. Omar owes the very nature of his reputation as a poet in both the west and the east to FitzGerald's new version. In other words, without FitzGerald's so-called Rubaiyat there would only have been Omar Khayyam, an astronomer and mathematician, who occasionally

3. According to the OED "tessellate" means "to make into a mosaic: to form a mosaic upon, adorn with mosaic to construct (esp. of pavement) by combing variously coloured blocks so as to form a pattern." Forming a pattern refers appropriately to what FitzGerald did with the Persian quatrains. Interestingly enough the OED cites FitzGerald's reference to his art thus: "it is most ingeniously tessellated into a sort of the Epicurean Eclogue in a Persian Garden (1858)."

many Victorians, including FitzGerald, felt, but they did not feel secure to express it directly, and neither did he. Perhaps it was not accidental that FitzGerald chose a scientist-poet from Persian literature to enunciate the doubts and fears raised by the findings of science as the major contemporary threat to the human spirit:

Myself when Young did eagerly frequent
Doctors and Saints, and heard great argument
About it and about: but evermore
Come out by the same door where in I went.
(No. 27)

The variety of form and theme in Victorian poetry reflects the new social and cultural variety following on industrialization and scientific progresses. But although Tennyson and Browning, for example, chose different paths, yet they had a good deal in common. Both were interested in the legends of the past and both were modern in thought and expression. FitzGerald too chose to set his poem in the past, the Middle East of the eleventh century. The consolation found (including by Queen Victoria) in *In Memoriam* was also found, in a different way, by FitzGerald in the verses he attributed to Omar; the Pre-Raphaelites and Thomas Hardy found it there too.

The third and final edition of FitzGerald's *Rubdiydt of Omar Khayyam* to be published in his life time appeared in 1879. Another edition, however, published posthumously in 1889, reflected revisions that FitzGerald had made before he died. Since the revised edition of 1879, various translators have translated FitzGerald's "Epicurean Eclogue" (as he himself described it) into different languages. A. G. Potter in his *Bibliography of the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* records some fifty different languages by 1929.² The extraordinary popularity of FitzGerald's rendering of the quatrains attributed to Omar Khayyam generated a significant academic interest in the works and renderings of quatrains ascribed to Omar Khayyam as well as in the relation between the quatrains and the works as a whole (about thirty editions in English before the end of the nineteenth century). Some scholars have attempted to challenge Omar's authorship of the rubaiyat and produce a more authentic version of the quatrains attributed to Omar

² A. G. Potter, *Bibliography of the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* (London: Ingpen and Grant, 1929) ix.

social and political life, philosophy, and religion led to the minimization of poetry and even a hostility toward it. It seemed that these new tendencies called all in doubt. The poet felt no security of cultural status. The variety of Tennyson's poetry seems to be partly the result of this sense of cultural insecurity. He tried different types of poetry to satisfy his readers and above all his critics. Browning was no exception to either; he also tried many different ways of securing his position. Arnold called the age an "unpoetical" age. Thomas B. Macaulay (1800-59, the cultivated spokesman of the middle class, believed that "as civilisation advances, poetry almost necessarily declines."¹

Paradoxically, alongside this devaluation of the poet and poetry, there is a growing emphasis on the prophetic nature of the poet. FitzGerald's criticism of Tennyson's poetry and his asking him to "guard territory they had won" shows that in his view poetry by the middle of the century was a marginal discourse which did not seem to suit the needs and wants of most people. This "territory" might refer partly to the inherited forms of either lyric or narrative after the experimentation of the Romantics, but FitzGerald particularly wanted Tennyson to consolidate prophetic ground by addressing the social and moral needs of the time. One of the main conflicts in the period is between public duty and personal sensibility. The poet vacillated between a commitment to social and moral needs and his personal sensibility. One highly characteristic Victorian solution to this problem was by creating an alternative voice to express difficult emotions by means of a persona, like FitzGerald's Omar, or one of Tennyson's or Browning's speakers. The great Victorian success in poetic form was the dramatic monologue, which enabled a poetic "I" or a poetic voice to express private feelings indirectly, through another speaker. The speaker gives the opportunity to the poet to speak out his private feelings. But unlike the Browning monologist, who is partly defined by his circumstances as revealed in the poem, the voice in the Rubaiyat has no character by which we can know him except in what he expresses of himself: he reveals his hidden self, "as Savage as Manfred" in its desire to shatter the sorry scheme of things and remould it closer to its own desire. The speaker in the Rubaiyat is able to voice what

¹ T.D. Macaulay, *Milton, Critical and Historical Essays*. 3 vol. (London: Longman, 1854) 1: 5.

FitzGerald's
Rubaiyat of Omar Kayydm:
A Victorian Product

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There are so many different varieties in Victorian poetry of subject-matter, imagery, tone and diction that it is difficult to find any overall common features. One might conclude that this multiplicity is in itself the chief characteristic of Victorian poetry. Public education and its extension to the middle classes, along with their new commercial, political and social attitudes, seemed to reduce the importance of the poet and produce this variety in response. Studying Victorian poetry requires the consideration of the position and function of the poet in that age. The writers were mostly isolated not only from the current and dominant movements of the period but from each other. With the exception of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood there is not any well-defined school of poetry in this era. Those poets who are traditionally grouped as "the Romantics" possess an altogether more definite identity than "the Victorians". There were certainly some defined groups and movements, such as the Utilitarians, the Evangelicals, and the Oxford Movement; yet G. M. Hopkins had no audience to read his poetry at all. The growth of the natural sciences and of tendencies in