



The Afterlife of Edward FitzGerald's Poem:

A Comparative Study of FitzGerald's *Rubáiyát* and Housman's *A Shropshire Lad*

Mostafa Hosseini,¹

Assistant Professor of English Literature, Bu-Ali Sina University, Hamedan, Iran

Article ID

CLS-1807-1007

Article Info

Received Date: 30 February 2019

Reviewed Date: 6 July 2019

Accepted Date: 28 August 2019

Suggested Citation

Hosseini, M. "The Afterlife of Edward FitzGerald's Poem: A Comparative Study of FitzGerald's *Rubáiyát* and Housman's *A Shropshire Lad*." *Critical Literary Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 2, 2019, pp. 207-225.

¹ hosseiny.mostafa1352@gmail.com



Abstract

The present paper seeks to address and examine Edward FitzGerald's globally-known poem afterlife, *The Rubáiyát*. Translation can serve as a force for literary renewal and innovation. For many years translation was regarded as a marginal area within comparative studies, now it is acknowledged that translation has played a vital role in literary history and great periods of literary innovation tend to be preceded by periods of intense translation activity. The significance of FitzGerald's *Rubáiyát* lies in how the poem was read when it appeared and in the precise historical moment when it was published. The impact of FitzGerald's *Rubáiyát* was such that on the one hand it served as a model for a new generation of poets struggling to make the skepticism and pessimism a proper subject for poetry, while on the other hand it established a benchmark for future translators because it set the parameters in the minds of English-language readers of what Persian poetry could do. The present chapter tries to show that FitzGerald's *Rubáiyát* had a role in forming pre-modern English poetry, notably Housman's poetry, in terms of form and content. Housman's *A Shropshire Lad* and FitzGerald's *Rubáiyát* have undeniable similarities.

Keywords

Khayyam, FitzGerald, Translation Studies, Housman, Carpe Diem

1. Introduction

FitzGerald selected from Omar Khayyam's scattered quatrains, regrouped them and thus gave a certain form to the whole. He "tessellated" a beautiful eclogue that breathed a sort of consolation to him. In fact, in those scattered and independent quatrains FitzGerald found spiritual fluctuations of his time. He found in them a new voice for his age, a convenient voice with which he intended to express the



agnosticism and skepticism of his own scientifically- minded time. As a voice of this new age, FitzGerald tried, through Omar as his persona, to express the skepticism 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 of the day (Zare-Behtash, 1999: 1).

At first sight, it may seem strange that a nineteenth-century European poet selected an Eastern poet as his model and persona. FitzGerald intentionally chose this neglected Persian poet and breathed into him a new life, because Omar Khayyams's philosophy appealed to FitzGerald. In other words, FitzGerald concerned himself little with theological or philosophical problems but found in the epigrammatic stanzas of the Persian poet some answers to his own feelings of doubt, to his questions concerning life after death, and to the complexities of modern life.

Omar Khayyam, in his poetry, continually questioned the doctrine of life after death. He felt that our only life was the one that we lived on earth and that we should live it to the fullest. His thoughts so paralleled FitzGerald's that it was natural that he should have devoted so much effort in regard to the translation and editing of Omar's *Rubáiyát* (Childrey, 1969: 35). It is noteworthy that while FitzGerald was at Cambridge and a member of the "Apostles" he began to have doubts concerning religion. In a letter to Thackeray in 1831, FitzGerald wrote :

Religious people are very angry with one for doubting: and say, "You come to the question determined to doubt, not to be convinced." Certainly we do: having seen how many follow and have followed false religions, and having our reason utterly against many of the principal points of the Bible, we require the most perfect evidence of facts, before we can believe. If you can prove to me that one miracle took place, I will believe that he is a just God who damned us all because a woman eat (sic) an apple; and you can't expect greater complaisance than that, to be sure (Terhune, 1947: 57)

Admittedly, FitzGerald's *Rubáiyát* is the most famous translation ever made from Persian poetry into English verse. FitzGerald's fame rests upon this work not his own poems or his other translations. This translation had a central role in the awakening of a much wider interest, in English-speaking countries and Europe in Persian



literature. In addition, it had a considerable influence, concerning form and content, on the development of late Victorian and Edwardian British poetry.

2. Theoretical Framework: The Poem's Afterlife

Most readers depend upon the translation if they are to know and appreciate the literature of the world. Most literature circulates in the world in translation. Even languages of global reach, such as English, Spanish, and Arabic, are spoken only by a minority of the world's readers. Translation gives rise to works written in widely and less widely spoken languages to be accessible to different readers. Damrosch takes world literature "to encompass all literary works that circulate beyond their culture of origin, either in translation or in their original language (Virgil was long read in Latin in Europe). In its most expansive sense, world literature could include any work that has ever reached beyond its home base, but Guillén's cautionary focus on actual readers makes good sense: a work only has an effective life as world literature whenever, and wherever, it is actively present within a literary system beyond that of its original culture" (Damrosch, 2003: 4).

An excellent translation, e.g. FitzGerald's *Rubáiyát*, could be observed as an expansive transformation of the original, a concrete manifestation of cultural exchange and a new stage in a work's life as it moves from its first home out into the world. That is to say, when a literary work is translated into another language, it starts a new life that is full of ups and downs. It may be subject to manipulation and even deformation in its foreign reception. Therefore, "Works of world literature take on a new life as they move into the world at large, and to understand this new life we need to look closely at the ways the work becomes reframed in its translations and in its new cultural contexts" (Damrosch, 2003: 24).

Damrosch defines his idea through a very deliberate and to-the-point metaphor: that of the afterlife. In this, Damrosch's view of the task of the translator connects with that of Walter Benjamin, who, in his famous introduction to the German translation of Baudelaire's *Tableaux Parisiens* (1923) also uses the metaphor of the translation as afterlife: "Just as expressions of life are connected most intimately with the living being without having any significance for the latter, a translation proceeds from the original. Indeed, not so much from its life as from its "afterlife" or "survival" (Venuti,



2012: 16). Therefore, Walter Benjamin had already proclaimed the life-enhancing role of translation as a transformative process: “a translation comes later than the original, and since the important works of world literature never find their chosen translators at the time of their origin, their translation marks their stage of continued life.” (Venuti, 2012: 16)

According to Damrosch, translation can give new life to a text, enabling it to reach a new readership and perhaps make it one day an original text. Susan Bassnett has the same opinion as Damrosch and holds that “translation is therefore a particularly special activity, since it enables a text to continue life in another context, and the translated text becomes an original by virtue of its continued existence in that new context” (Bassnett, 151). Interestingly, Benjamin's introduction, later entitled “The Task of Translator”, was rediscovered by translation theorists in the 1980s, and has become one of the most significant texts of post-modern translation theory.

FitzGerald's *Rubáiyát* — if one can call it a translation in the usual sense of the word — had a role in forming pre-modern English poetry in terms of form and content. The skepticism and pessimism in FitzGerald's *Rubáiyát* paved the way for writers like John Davidson (1857–1909), Ernest Dowson (1867–1900) and A. E. Housman (1859–1936). It should be noted that “FitzGerald was an undeniable influence on the late Victorian literature of pessimism mainly through his adaptation of the *Rubáiyát* of Omar Khayyam, a poem whose extraordinary popularity survives even into our own time” (Ousby, 1998: 332).

The significance of FitzGerald's *Rubáiyát* lies in how the poem was read when it appeared and in the precise historical moment when it was published. The impact of FitzGerald's *Rubáiyát* was such that on the one hand it served as a model for a new generation of poets struggling to make the skepticism and pessimism a proper subject for poetry, while on the other hand it established a benchmark for future translators because it set the parameters in the minds of English-language readers of what Persian poetry could do. The object of the comparative literature scholar is, therefore, to see FitzGerald's *Rubáiyát* in a context and to compare it with other kinds of pessimistic poetry being produced at the same time.

FitzGerald's *Rubáiyát* is considerably interesting in that it highlights the way in which translation can serve as a force for literary renewal and innovation. This is one



of the ways in which translation- studies research has served Comparative Literature. For many years translation was regarded as a marginal area within Comparative Literature, now it is acknowledged that translation has played a vital role in literary history and more often than not great periods of literary innovation tend to be preceded by periods of intense translation activity. Therefore, through translation come new ideas, new genres and new forms, so it is strange that for so long Comparative Literature as a field of study did not acknowledge the importance of research into the history of translation.

3. *A Shropshire Lad*: A Critical Reconsideration

Housman was not a prolific poet, and his entire corpus of works in verse was not really large in amount. He was not a full-time poet because he was mostly involved in scholarship and teaching. However, Housman found time to write some of the most quietly moving poems in the English language, and at his death he was acknowledged by landslide as the greatest English poet of the day. This distinction rests largely on the exquisite perfection of form to be found in the little volume of verse called *A Shropshire Lad*. His efforts resulted in four slim volumes of poetry, two of them were posthumously put in black and white. They include *A Shropshire Lad* (1896), *Last Poems* (1922), *More Poems* (1936), and *Additional Poems* (1937). His standards of poetic excellence were rigorous and perhaps account for the slightness of his output. However, among the poems he did publish are highly polished jewels celebrating the beauties of nature and lamenting the anguish of love.

His earliest poetry volume is titled *A Shropshire Lad*. Having been in print continuously since May 1896, this volume contains Housman's best poems and is regarded as the pinnacle of his poesy. The book is a cycle of sixty-three poems whose publication in 1896 added fine pieces to the treasury of English literature. The majority of these pessimistic, sorrowful poems are in four-line ballad stanzas and explore themes of love, nature, and war while their artful structures and their simplicity of expression captures our attention.

To everyone's surprise, several publishers turned *A Shropshire Lad* down, and Housman decided to publish the work at his own expense. *A Shropshire Lad* did not meet with a great reception, but during the Second Boer War (1899–1902), it struck



a chord with English readers and the book became a bestseller. Moreover, in the World War I the collection further increased its popularity among readers and Housman rose to yet more fame. In the later ages, he always had his readers, and he still does today.

Housman's second volume, after years of anticipation and during the poet's lifetime, was published in 1922 under the title of *Last Poems*. This work, which met with a warm reception from people, contained forty-three poems, all composed sporadically in a matter of over twenty years. Housman wrote that in 1920s, when his classmate was nearing his death, he had selected forty-three poems from among his already circulated works and published them separately in a volume titled *Last Poems*, so that his classmate read them. Additionally, he explains his rationale in the introduction to the volume:

I publish these poems, few though they are because it is not likely that I shall ever be impelled to write much more. I can no longer expect to be revisited by the continuous excitement under which in the early months of 1895 I wrote the greater part of my first book, nor indeed could I well sustain it if it came; and it is best that what I have written should be printed while I am here to see it through the press and control its spelling and punctuation. About a quarter of this matter belongs to the April of the present year, but most of it to dates between 1895 and 1910. (Saulters and Widger, 2013)

The two later volumes were released posthumously, in 1936 and 1937, by his brother Laurence, who was himself a man of letters. Unfortunately, these volumes, made up of pieces of different lengths, are not as rich as the two first ones regarding both form and structure. Not captivating, overall, they cannot live up to expectations or to Housman's reputation. Housman's poetry is limited both in quantity and in range, but it is stark, lucid, and elegant. It is highly terse, compact and moving. Among his most frequent favorite themes are *carpe diem*, doomed fate, fading beauty, brief youth, and unfaithful love:

His favorite theme is that of the doomed youth acting out the tragedy of his brief life; the context is agricultural activity in England, with the land bearing visual reminders of humanity's long history. Nature is beautiful but indifferent and is to be enjoyed while we are still able to enjoy it. Love, friendship, and conviviality cannot last and may well result in betrayal or death, but are likewise to be relished while there



is time. Wryly ironic in tone, stoic in temperament, Housman sounds a note of resigned wisdom with quiet poignancy. He avoids self-pity by projecting emotion through an imagined character, notably the “Shropshire lad”, so that even the first-person poems seem to be distanced in some degree. At the same time the poems are distinguished from the “gather ye rosebuds” (or *carpe diem*) tradition by the undertones of fatalism and even doom (Abrams, 2014.)

4. FitzGerald's *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám* and Housman's *A Shropshire Lad*

It is very clear that Greek and Roman lyrical poetry, traditional ballads, and the lyrics of Heinrich Heine, the 19th-century German poet, along with the songs of William Shakespeare, all influenced the works of Housman (Abrams, 2014). In addition, the present study tries to show that Housman's most famous volume, *A Shropshire Lad*, has undeniable similarities with the translation of FitzGerald's *Rubáiyát* regarding form and content, and it is influenced by FitzGerald's translation. “Another poet in the same tradition is A. E. Housman, whose 1896 work, *A Shropshire Lad*, embraced the pessimistic spirit of the *Rubáiyát* and became popular at Harvard University” (Aminrazavi, 2005). It is better to divide this section into two distinct areas: a) structural similarities and b) thematic similarities.

4.1. Structural Similarities

The formal influence of FitzGerald's *Rubáiyát* on *A Shropshire Lad* is small, and it can be divided into three small areas: the stanzaic form, the choice of a persona, and the brevity of language. Through FitzGerald's translation rubai, one of the oldest poetic forms of Persian literature (rhyming aaba), was introduced into English (and by extension European) poetry and was called Omar Stanza. Shortly after FitzGerald's translation some, major and minor, English poets tried their hands at imitating it.

Here, I will refer just to the earliest and latest imitators. The first one was Algernon Charles Swinburne (1837–1909), one of the great admirers of *Rubáiyát*. Swinburne's poem “*Laus Veneries*” (Praise of Venus), which was published in *Poems and Ballads* (1866) follows the metrical scheme of *Rubáiyát*. The last one is Dick Davis (1945), the contemporary English poet, translator and Persian scholar. He has written extensively



on FitzGerald's translation and counts himself as one of his imitators: "I started by saying that I admire FitzGerald's achievement and that I could count myself as an imitator of his. I have for example written a longish poem to him, in the stanza form that he naturalized into English, and I have written a couple of other poems too that gratefully invoke his example" (Davis, 1989: 9). It is noteworthy that all Housman's poems, except 47 ones, are written in quatrain form. Therefore, one can say that Housman's stanzaic form is influenced by both traditional ballad stanza and Omar Stanza.

Some of the great Victorian poets, notably Alfred Lord Tennyson and Robert Browning, used personas in their poems in order to express their ideas and emotions. To do so, they tried their hands at dramatic monologue, e.g. in "Ulysses" and "My Last Duchess". Also, Edward FitzGerald used a twelfth-century philosopher-astronomer- poet, Omar Khayyam, as his persona to express his thoughts and feelings freely. Strange to say, Browning used another twelfth-century philosopher-astronomer- poet, the Spanish Jew Ibn Ezra, as his spokesman in his poem "Rabbi Ben Ezra" (1864). According to J. D. Yohannan "Robert Browning wrote "Rabbi Ben Ezra" as a retort to the fool's philosophy of the *Rubáiyát*" (1952: 12). One can infer that Housman under the influence of this situation used a Shropshire lad as his persona in imitation of Browning, Tennyson, and FitzGerald.

FitzGerald's language is deceptively simple. His poem seems like highly polished jewels. This distinction rests largely on the exquisite perfection of form, the miraculous brevity of language, and fatal facility of rhyme. Some scholars have compared FitzGerald's poem with Thomas Gray's "Elegy written in Country Churchyard" (1751). The trace of Housman's brevity of language, the perfection of form, and the facility of rhyme can be found in Heine's poetry, traditional ballads, and FitzGerald's *Rubáiyát*.

4.2. Thematic Similarities

Undoubtedly, FitzGerald's *Rubáiyát* has much in common with *A Shropshire Lad*, another late Victorian volume. According to a critic "its [Rubáiyát] only rival as the most popular and widely read book of poetry of the last century and a half is Housman's (a work with which it has much in common) ... and the most obvious poetic



beneficiary of FitzGerald's poem (Davis, 1989: 39). The present researcher believes that these similarities are not a matter of accident, but a matter of influence. Moreover, there is one more point that is worth mentioning. The Housmans were familiar with Persian literature. Laurence Housman (1865 –1959), Alfred's junior brother, was fond of Persian literature, particularly *The Arabian Nights* and *Rubáiyát* of Omar Khayyám. Interestingly, he wrote a play based on Naser al-Din Shah's travels to Europe. Later he retold stories from *The Arabian Nights* (1907) and edited with an introduction *Rubáiyát* of Omar Khayyam (1928). In his "Introduction", Laurence Housman greatly praised FitzGerald's art of translation. He called it a 'fortunate paraphrase:'

So full of ease and grace, so supple in its diction and its imagery, make us forget— as we never forget in reading a translation of Homer or Dante, however good — that it is a translation, and that we are listening at a far remove, to a school of thought much more alien in its mood of expression than the skillful artifice of their version allows us to feel. FitzGerald, by his superlative tact, has done us the favor of deceiving us, making either the East seem West, or the West seem East, in a sympathy or thought and feeling which, at that time, had hardly begun to exist. (Housman, 2013: 19)

Therefore, brevity and transience of life, inevitable destiny, *carpe diem*, instability of love and happiness, and inescapability of death and sorrow are recurrent motifs in his poems and they are what Housman has inherited from FitzGerald's *Rubáiyát*, and the spirit of the age. Here we will discuss briefly some of the most outstanding ones. Edward FitzGerald's *Rubáiyát* and Housman's *A Shropshire Lad* communicate the poignant sadness of the pursuit of pleasures under the sentence of inevitable death. Let's go through the selected poems. The first poem is "Loveliest of trees, the cherry now."

Loveliest of trees, the cherry now
Is hung with bloom along the bough,
And stands about the woodland ride
Wearing white for Eastertide.
Now, of my threescore years and ten,
Twenty will not come again,
And take from seventy springs a score,
It only leaves me fifty more.
And since to look at things in bloom



Fifty springs are little room,
 About the woodlands I will go
 To see the cherry hung with snow. (Perrine and Arp, 1998: 582)

In “Loveliest of Trees, the Cherry Now”, the second poem in *A Shropshire Lad*, the passing of time and the brevity of life are emphasized. The pale horse is trailing you, and you can feel its breath, so seize the day and make merry! It is April and it is Easter, the boughs of cherry trees are covered in blossom and the nature is rejuvenated, bestowing new blooms upon the cherry trees. He has just passed the prime of his life, namely his twentieth year, and knows that according to the text of the Old Testament, he, at the very most, has only 70 years of age in hand. Moreover, there is no stop to the wheel of life, so he has to go to the nature and enjoy as much as possible the unblemished beauties on offer, such as cherry buds. However, in his unconscious, the passing of the years and the impending death ruin the bliss and spoils the merriment.

“Loveliest of Trees, the Cherry Now” is a carpe diem poem expressing the philosophy that life is short and that one should, therefore, enjoy it fully while one can, wasting no moment that might be filled with pleasure. The pleasure proposed in this poem is the enjoyment of beauty, especially of natural beauty, as symbolized by the blossoming cherry tree. As mentioned, it is a simple lyric poem in praise of the cherry blossom in spring time. Yet, behind this beautiful image the day of death is always hastening nearer, even at twenty there is little time left to go about the wood land. It reminds us of the beginning lines of the second half of Andrew Marvell’s “To His Coy Mistress”: at my back I always hear/ Time’s winged chariot hurrying near (Perrine and Arp, 1998: 580).

The same theme runs through Housman’s other poem “Reveille”, the fourth poem in *A Shropshire Lad*. He sternly warns us that it is high time we woke and left the arms of Morpheus. Rise from the drowse. Your hour is passing like scattering clouds, and time never waits for you. You must seize precious moments and joyful times:

Wake: the silver dusk returning
 Up the beach of darkness brims,
 And the ship of sunrise burning
 Strands upon the eastern rims .
 Wake: the vaulted shadow shatters,



Trampled to the floor it spanned,
And the tent of night in tatters
Straws the sky-pavilioned land .

Up, lad, up, 'tis late for lying:
Hear the drums of morning play;
Hark, the empty highways crying
'Who'll beyond the hills away '?

Towns and countries woo together,
Forelands beacon, belfries call;
Never lad that trod on leather
Lived to feast his heart with all .

Up, lad: thews that lie and cumber
Sunlit pallets never thrive;
Morns abed and daylight slumber
Were not meant for man alive .

Clay lies still, but blood's a rover;
Breath's a ware that will not keep.
Up, lad: when the journey's over
There'll be time enough to sleep. (Perrine and Arp, 1998: 577)

Now consider the 37th quatrain of the first edition of FitzGerald's *Rubáiyát*:

"Ah, fill this cup: - what boots it to repeat
How Time is slipping underneath our Feet:
Unborn, Tomorrow, and dead Yesterday,
Why fret about them if Today be sweet!"

The next poem is the 27th poem in *A Shropshire Lad*, "Is My Team Ploughing?" It is a conversation between a young farmer who has just been gathered to his fathers, and his live young friend. The deceased asks his friend questions about his properties and possessions and receives answers. It is interesting that all the answers are the same: life moves on, discounting people's deaths. Housman's poem has two separate speakers: a dead man and his living friend. The dead man speaks the all of the odd-numbered stanzas, which are punctuated with quotations marks. The friend speaks the even-numbered stanzas, which have no quotations marks.



“Is my team plowing,
That I was used to drive
And hear the harness jingle
When I was man alive”?

Ay, the horses trample,
The harness jingles now;
No change though you lie under
The land you used to plow.
“ Is football playing
Along the river shore,
With lads to chase the leather,
Now I stand up no more”?

Ay, the ball is flying,
The lads play heart and soul;
The goal stands up, the keeper
Stands up to keep the goal.

“Is my girl happy,
That I thought hard to leave,
And has she tired of weeping
As she lies down at eve”?

Ay, she lies down lightly,
She lies not down to weep:
Your girl is well contented.
Be still, my lad, and sleep.

“Is my friend hearty,
Now I am thin and pine,
And has he found to sleep in
A better bed than mine”?
Yes, lad, I lie easy,
I lie as lads would choose;
I cheer a dead man's sweetheart,
Never ask me whose. (Perrine and Arp, 1998: 527)



The purpose of Housman's poem is to communicate poignantly a certain truth about human life: life goes on after our deaths pretty much as it did before — our dying does not disturb the universe. This purpose is achieved by means of a fanciful dramatic framework in which a dead man converses with his still-living friend. Technically speaking, Housman has used a literary device named amoebian verse. It refers to a kind of poetry written in the form of a dialogue between two speakers. According to *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* amoebian verse means “a poetic form in which two characters chant alternate lines, couplets, or stanzas, in competition or debate with one another. This form is found in the pastoral poetry of Theocritus and Virgil, and was imitated by Spenser in his *Shepherd's Calendar* (1579). It is similar to the debate, and sometimes resembles stichomythia” (Baldick, 2004: 8).

The main point of the poem is that our death does not disrupt the natural course of events and that life will move on just like before. As the Bible puts it, “A generation goes and a generation comes, but the earth remains forever. Also, the sun rises and the sun sets; And hastening to its place it rises there again” (Sumral, 2010: 283). However, the secondary theme is that man's affection and fidelity always come short, or as the saying puts it, out of sight, out of mind. Another theme that emerges from the poem is that forgetting woes and afflictions, and moving on after the deaths of your loved ones, is the secret to survival.

Now examine the quatrains 8 and 47 of the third edition of FitzGerald's *Rubáiyát*:

Whether at Naishapur or Babylon,
Whether the Cup with sweet or bitter run,
The Wine of Life keeps oozing drop by drop,
The Leaves of Life keep falling one by one.
When You and I behind the Veil are past,
Oh but the long long while the World shall last,
Which of our Coming and Departure heeds
As the Sea's self should heed a pebble-cast.

The next poem is “To an Athlete Dying Young”. The speaker is a fellow townsman of the dead athlete, possibly though not necessarily one of the pallbearers carrying his coffin to the cemetery for burial. The athlete had died within months of winning the



annual race for his town. The poem is an extended apostrophe addressed by the speaker to the athlete .

The time you won your town the race
We chaired you through the market-place ;
Man and boy stood cheering by ,
And home we brought you shoulder-high .

To-day, the road all runners come ,
Shoulder-high we bring you home ,
And set you at your threshold down ,
Townsmen of a stiller town .

Smart lad, to slip betimes away
From fields where glory does not stay
And early though the laurel grows
It withers quicker than the rose .

Eyes the shady night has shut
Cannot see the record cut ,
And silence sounds no worse than cheers
After earth has stopped the ears :

Now you will not swell the rout
Of lads that wore their honours out ,
Runners whom renown outran
And the name died before the man .
So set, before its echoes fade ,
The fleet foot on the sill of shade ,
And hold to the low lintel up
The still-defended challenge-cup .

And round that early-laurelled head
Will flock to gaze the strengthless dead ,
And find unwithered on its curls
The garland briefer than a girl's. (Perrine and Arp, 1998: 779)

Housman's in "To an Athlete Dying Young" dwells on the transience and ephemerality of youth, fame, beauty, and on the desirability of dying while one still



has them rather than after they are lost. On the other hand, it implicitly emphasizes the inescapability and certainty of death and that it is a road that each and every man has to take, sooner or later, to meet the Grim Reaper. The death of Moses Jackson, Housman's friend, and classmate, acted as a stimulus to the writing of the poem, but the work is by extension about the brevity and instability of life, especially with a view to those who meet the pale horse while at the zenith of their fame and name. This theme appears elsewhere in his poetry (*A Shropshire Lad*), i.e. XXIII. "The Lads in Their Hundreds", XLIV. "Shot? So Quick, So Clean an Ending"? and LIV. "With Rue My Heart Is Laden." For the sake of saving space, we just mention the last poem which is short and sweet.

With rue my heart is laden
For golden friends I had,
For many a rose-lipt maiden
And many a lightfoot lad.

By brooks too broad for leaping
The lightfoot boys are laid;
The rose-lipt girls are sleeping
In fields where roses fade. (Perrine and Arp, 1998: 667)

Here too Housman speaks of young boys and girls who, in their prime, breathe their last and never become full of years, boys and girls who "depart on the way that they will not return". Now look at quatrains 22, 64, and 96 of the third edition of FitzGerald's *Rubáiyát* :

For some we loved, the loveliest and the best
That from his Vintage rolling Time has prest,
Have drunk their Cup a Round or two before,
And one by one crept silently to rest.
Strange, is it not? that of the myriads who
Before us pass'd the door of Darkness through,
Not one returns to tell us of the Road,
Which to discover we must travel too.

Yet Ah, that Spring should vanish with the Rose!
That Youth's sweet-scented manuscript should close!



The Nightingale that in the branches sang,
Ah whence, and whither flown again, who knows!

5. Conclusion

As mentioned before translation can bring about literary renewal and innovation. This is one of the services of translation- studies research to Comparative Literature. Strangely, not until recently translation was regarded as a marginal area within comparative studies. Happily, now it is agreed that translation has played a major role in literary history. Therefore, great periods of literary innovation somehow are preceded by periods of intense translation activity. FitzGerald's *Rubáiyát* in the way it was received was transformed into pessimistic poetry that spoke to the generation coping with the skepticism and fatalism of a scientifically-oriented time. Therefore, this translation was received both as a work from the East and as a literary discourse consistent with the zeitgeist. The influence of FitzGerald's poem was so powerful that it served both as a model for a new generation of poets struggling to make the skepticism and pessimism a suitable subject for poetry, and it founded a yardstick for future English translators because it presented the potentialities of Persian poetry. Also, it is showed that influence-studies, which is the most hotly disputed area in the whole realm of comparative studies, does not happen in a vacuum and the role of mediators like translations in studies of this kind is of prime importance.

پژوهشگاه علوم انسانی و مطالعات فرهنگی
پرتال جامع علوم انسانی



References

- Aminrazavi, M. *The Wine of Wisdom: the Life, Poetry and Philosophy of Omar Khayyam*. Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2005.
- Baldick, C. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*. 4th ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Bassnett, S. *Comparative Literature: A Critical Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1993.
- Bloom, H. ed. *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*. Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 2004.
- Childrey, F. W. *A Critical Study of the Seven Major Victorian Pessimistic Poets*. (Thesis), University of Richmond, 1969.
- Damrosch, D. *What Is World Literature?* New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2003.
- Davis, D. (Ed.) *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*. London: Penguin Press, 1989.
- Housman, L. (Ed.) *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam and Other Writings by Edward Fitzgerald*. London: Collins Clear-Type Press, 1959.
- Ousby, I. *Wordsworth Companion to Literature in English*. London: Wordsworth Editions Ltd, 1998.
- Perrine, L. and T. R. Arp. *Literature: Structure, Sound, and Sense*. 5th ed. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers, 1998.
- Sumral, P. *God's Word for You*. Indiana: Barbour Publishing, Inc, 2010.
- Saulters, A. P., & W, David. "Last Poems, by A. E. Housman." (2013) 15 June 2015 <<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/7848/7848-h/7848-h.htm>>. [Retrieved 23 December 2018]
- Terhune, A. M. *The Life of Edward FitzGerald, Translator of the Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1947.
- Venuti, L. *The Translation Studies Reader*. 3rd ed. New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2012.
- Yohannan, J. D. "The Persian Poetry Fad in England, 1770-1825." *Comparative Literature*, Vol. 4. 1952, pp. 137-160.



Zare-Behtash, E. *FitzGerald's Rubáiyát: A Victorian Invention*. Thesis, Australian National University, 1994.

